

The Dodo Of The Potomac

The Insurgent Dagger

Speech to Communications Commission Banquet
by Peter K. Briet, Associate Professor of Political Science

My remarks will consider the possibility that America will internalize her foreign policy frustrations and will discover, for the first time in thirty years, what it means to have politics stripped of pretense and deception. I can assure you at the outset that I do not look forward to the spectacle before us as a nation; I merely anticipate; I do not urge.

Recently, and quite by accident, I discovered that there once existed a man named Dodo of Bethlehem. Not much is known about him, and I must admit that I was captivated more by his name than by anything he might have done. Assuming that Dodo might have meant approximately what it means now, this hapless fellow was probably a self-fulfilling prophecy who had to live up to his name, and by now a Dodo by any other name would also be extinct. I propose to you that there exists in contemporary America a homunculus or manikin whom we might call Dodo of the Potomac. His characteristics? First of all, he is totally lacking in imagination. It is, for example, not imaginative but simply stupid for an ambassador to recommend that the best way in which to teach the peoples of Eastern Europe the greatness of the American system is to sell them alphabet soup with Cyrillic letters. Second, he is confused. Brought up to regard the world as corrigible ALONG American lines, he now finds himself being compelled to withdraw BEHIND American lines. The play-dough American globe has begun to crumble. It has been brought to his attention that American foreign policy is, much like Macbeth, "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound into saucy doubts and fears." A fruitless conflict in Vietnam and Cambodia, the continuing ambiguous relationship with the Soviet Union, a possible spill-over confrontation in Laos or the Middle East, and a nicely revived and competitive Western Europe, all have given the United States reason to doubt in herself and to fear that the post-war world is finished. Why FEAR? Because we were in part responsible for it, because we were able to sublimate internal stresses by acting them out abroad, and because an international policy based on power, as ours was, is an easier one to pursue than is one based on ideas. Further, we have come to realize that even with all of the power at our disposal, we have been unable to wrest any nation from the hands of our only major competitor for power and unimaginative and sterile policy, the Soviet Union. We have accumulated frustration, anger, and shame. We have no place in which to demonstrate these tensions—unless it is at home. We are living internationally in the twilight years of a three-pronged negative commitment: against Communism; against power politics; and against an acceptance of the consequences stemming from the disparity between our allegedly implacable opposition to Communism and power politics, and the fact that we have had to make both of them a part of our perspective. In a word, our blunted opposition to power politics and deflected anti-Communism have accumulated and threaten to turn into power politics of the oldest sort: that which is rationalized in terms of "defense," "national interest," or "civilization." In short, in terms of a crusade. CRUSADERS DO NOT COMPROMISE. Nothing frustrates power-wielders more than having no

situation in which to wield their power. And, yet, internationally, this is the situation that confronts us.

All the failures abroad are now being internalized. Dodo is home again to soil his own nest. Mind you, I am not suggesting that we regard the world beyond our shores as a dumping ground for our political refuse or as an arena in which to play out our failures, disillusionments, and frustrations. This, as a matter of fact, is the policy followed, with variations, since 1946. What I am suggesting is quite the opposite: that we neither allow ourselves the psychic imperialism of venting our frustrations abroad nor permit ourselves to institutionalize them at home. It may be unfair to link the unknown, luckless Dodo of Bethlehem with the angry Dodo of the Potomac. My apologies to the former.

America's foreign policy difficulties stem in large measure from the lack of a model to follow while at the same time having, or believing herself to have, to act as a model for others—including, characteristically, paradoxically, and dangerously, her alleged adversary in a life-death struggle, the Soviet Union. We really had no example before us on how to behave as a victorious, global power. We were not only colossal, but colossally unprepared for the role expected of us, and had no example to follow. The two times that come most immediately to mind, the confrontation between Rome and Cathage and the period after the Napoleonic wars were not models. And the only previous time that the US had entered an international war, in 1917, was clearly a negative example at best. Since 1945, we have had to make our own way while at the same time attempting to convince the USSR that our way was an appropriate one and one that would satisfy both sides. The novelties clearly outweighed the

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traditional issues and approaches. In the past one could expect to settle one issue at a time, and as they were less interrelated than they seem now to be, a mistake in one did not necessarily mean disaster in another situation. These halcyon times are past. Dodo of the Potomac is but the last to recognize this fact. And, anyway, he often believes that the changes have only been foreign—and are therefore in large measure due to the strangeness, if not outright perversity of foreigners. He continues to deceive himself that there were more successes internationally during the past two and a half decades than the most optimistic political scientist could name. The failure of American foreign policy, he argues, lay in the FOREIGN and not in the POLICY aspect of it.

I do not propose to discuss our foreign policy beyond warning that to internalize the thought patterns and behavior that have governed our international relations during the last quarter century will be to invite domestic disaster. We have never

acknowledged (perhaps recognized) that, contrary to the usual complaints, we did have a policy. We had a highly aggressive, active policy, albeit one without a model. Lacking a standard, we were forced to temporize and extemporize. Let's have enough of the most sterile and conservative defense that we lacked a policy. What we mean is that we lacked a policy which realistically balanced means and ends, and a policy with which large segments of the populace could agree. Numbers were swung to agreement with parts of the policy because an occasional moment of imagination and candor did appear. We might say that the demands of an uninformed public stretched the capacity of the policy, but policy it was. Even when it is not possible to agree with the broad objectives of the policy, it is possible to admit that there were brief flickers of imagination: the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Air Lift, and means by which the Cuban crisis, through the use of reason on both sides, was defused. But, really, nothing much has changed. The world remains essentially beyond our ability to tame. The upshot of it all is, I am afraid, that we are in for hard times at home. Oh, they are not the hard times hoped for by those of the left who want to change the system. They are the hard times created by those who wish at best to stabilize and at worst to fossilize the system by linking it to a frustrated international involvement. I want to emphasize that the internalization of foreign policy does not mean only turning inward all the hopes, demands, and tools by which policy, successful or not, was pursued. It means also, and more frighteningly, that we must expect an **inwards turning of the hostility which we as a nation felt for but could not make felt upon or by other nations.** In a word, frustrated abroad, we may well turn our frustration upon ourselves. Many of us are aliens on native shores at this moment. The first group adversely to be affected are the momentary beneficiaries of the withdrawal from objectless international involvement. I mean that the unexpended power of the US can and may well be turned on those who have influence but lack power themselves, namely history's conventional scape-goats: intellectuals, students, and minority groups. I am very much afraid that the de-Americanization of Vietnam and the consequent reappraisal of America's foreign policy objectives and commitments will be a political Cannae for those who have achieved it. I remind you that Hannibal defeated the Romans at Cannae but was then brought down at Zama by Scipio Africanus. We of the universities have influence without power. I must warn of the consequences of influence without power. This is where Dodo of the Potomac enters. He is frustrated at having no arena in which to exercise his power and blames not so much the inappropriateness of the power to the situation in which he proposes to employ it, as he blames those who would deny him the opportunity to use it. Dodo has power but, at the moment, lacks influence—or at least the influence to achieve his ends without threatening to use his power. Success is easy to live up to; failure, so long as one has power, is not. Dodo is the failed American. The nature of Dodo's response to his foreign frustrations may be predicted to be, if my psychologist friends will permit me, an over-reactive displacement. That is, his actual annoyance will be with foreign nations. vis-a-vis whom he is unable to



exercise his power; against these he will be murderously angry; however, he will display this anger against members of his own society because they have embarrassed him. They have made his life intolerable; powerless though they be, they have been sufficiently influential to bring him to a halt. It would have been bad enough, he argues, had he actually been stopped by his foreign adversaries. If, however, members of his own society can stop him at home, then not only are they the adversaries' hirelings, but are to be stopped at home. It ought not to be forgotten that the powerless influencers at home are a motley sort, transcending the traditional class, color, occupational, age, and educational differences. It may be no wonder that to some of Dodo's cohorts they seem more like a mob than a mass. Dodo will dismiss them as selfish, subversive, and sick. When encountering them, his lack of a model will be important. He has repeatedly during the last decades spoken of "unprecedented danger," and of "the nature of the threat," as though it were by nature different from anything every encountered. If the dangers and threats are unprecedented, then there can be no models to follow. Lacking these might have been serious internationally; it will be catastrophic at home. We will begin to shop around for foreign models. We are quite capable of importing foreign repressive political models, just as we could once import liberal and responsive models. The repressive regimes abroad were symptoms and effects, not causes of popular unrest, disaffection, anxiety, and confusion. We have these now in America. We have come to doubt in ourselves. This I would applaud, were it merely doubt. However, doubt never remains merely doubt. To be effectively exercised, it must be challenged and overcome. Because the doubt refers to

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