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MAX LERNER

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World of the Great Powers

& GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT on the MILITARY STRENGTH of the BIG FIVE

Headline Series

FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

NUMBER 61

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WORLD OF THE GREAT POWERS

by Max Lerner



I. The World After Battle

We live in a twilight area today, caught between a world that is dying and one that has not yet come to birth. The dividing line is the atom bomb. The struggle for power in an atom-bomb world must, if unchecked, lead to world destruction.

The world of today is still a great-powers world, reluctant to risk war, but unable yet to rivet down the peace. The central fact of our world is the existence of great powers, each struggling for national imperial security, and all of them together carrying the burden of carving out a new world authority.

Thus the great powers bear within themselves both the seeds of war and the chances of peace. All the lesser nations and peoples, whether theoretically sovereign or openly dependent, form constellations around these central powers. To recognize this fact of power does not mean to put one's stamp of approval on it, any more than Machiavelli's recognition of the fact of power in his day meant that he brought it into being.

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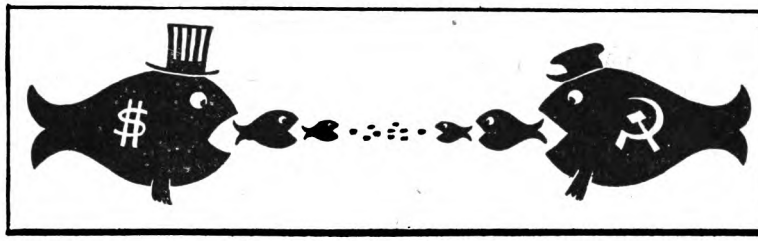

Inequality in strength among the great powers complicates the struggle. We are used to speaking of the Big Five, and of the Big Three, and now finally of the Big Two. The Big Two are, of course, the United States and the Soviet Union. Add the British Empire to make the Big Three. Add France and China to make the Big Five. If the Big Five are the *great* powers, then America and Russia must be called *super*-powers. It is a terrifying sort of hierarchy, and the logical conclusion to the whittling down process is a struggle for world domination that would leave one super-power to absorb the rest.

In short, the logic of a great-powers world may lead to a war for world domination and the emergence of a single world empire.

OR A NEW WORLD

This is not the only possible result. It may also lead to a concert of powers. Through common action the great powers may set up a world authority in which each nation can find two things: security for what it has already achieved, and an end to the fear that it will be destroyed by aggressive war in an atomic age.

Here then are the two lines of development that may be projected into the future. No fate dooms the world to follow the one course, or assures it success and happiness via the other. The choice exists. It is a choice to be made by statesmen, by scientists, by busi-

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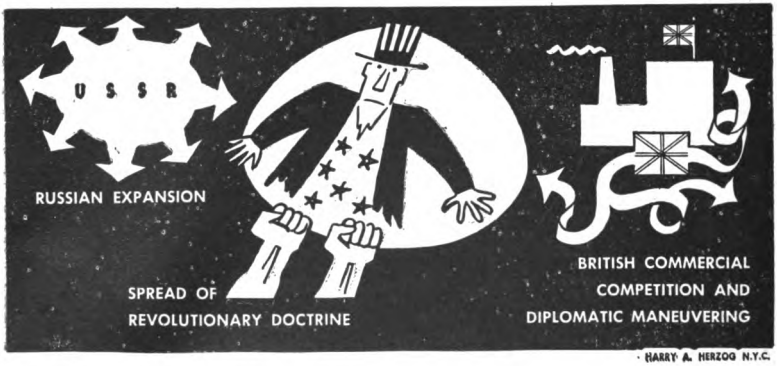
FEARS OF THE BIG THREE







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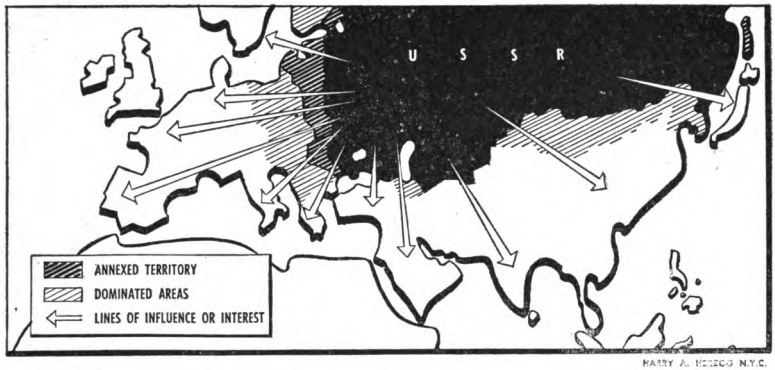
RUSSIA—A WORLD POWER



physically, it has during the past decade made striking gains in territory and resources. Its annexation of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on the eve of the war—presumably to achieve more defensible military boundaries—was made permanent as a result of the war. Out of the two wars between Russia and Finland, in the first of which Russia was the aggressor and in the second Finland was an ally of Hitler, came also substantial territorial gains—the Karelian Isthmus and the Petsamo area—that have been made permanent.

Russia received German territory in East Prussia as a result of World War II. In Poland it won back the territory up to the Curzon Line, which it had lost after World War I. By a treaty with Romania in 1944, ratified by the Council of Foreign Ministers at Paris in 1946, it has also won back Bessarabia.

In the Far East, its agreement to join the war against Japan yielded a Big-Three commitment giving Russia the Kurile Islands and the southern half of Sakhalin. It also—as confirmed by the Sino-Russian treaty of 1945—got a share in the control of Darien and Port Arthur, and railway rights through Manchuria.

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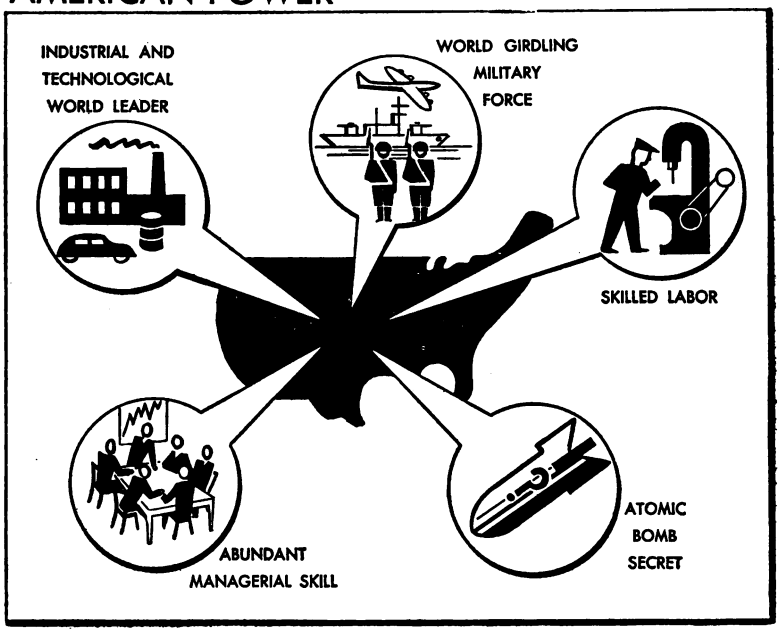

in the current civil strife, although both fear it for different reasons. The Russians, more fearful of direct clash with America than with Britain, are at once determined to show us that America is not the only great power, and apprehensive of pushing us too far.

The Vatican, with an eye to its own future political power, has been steadily shifting its emphasis to America, as evidenced by the creation of a substantial number of new American cardinals and their influential place in the hierarchy. And the small nations all over the world regard America either as their principal champion or principal threat, depending on their political complexion and their economic composition.

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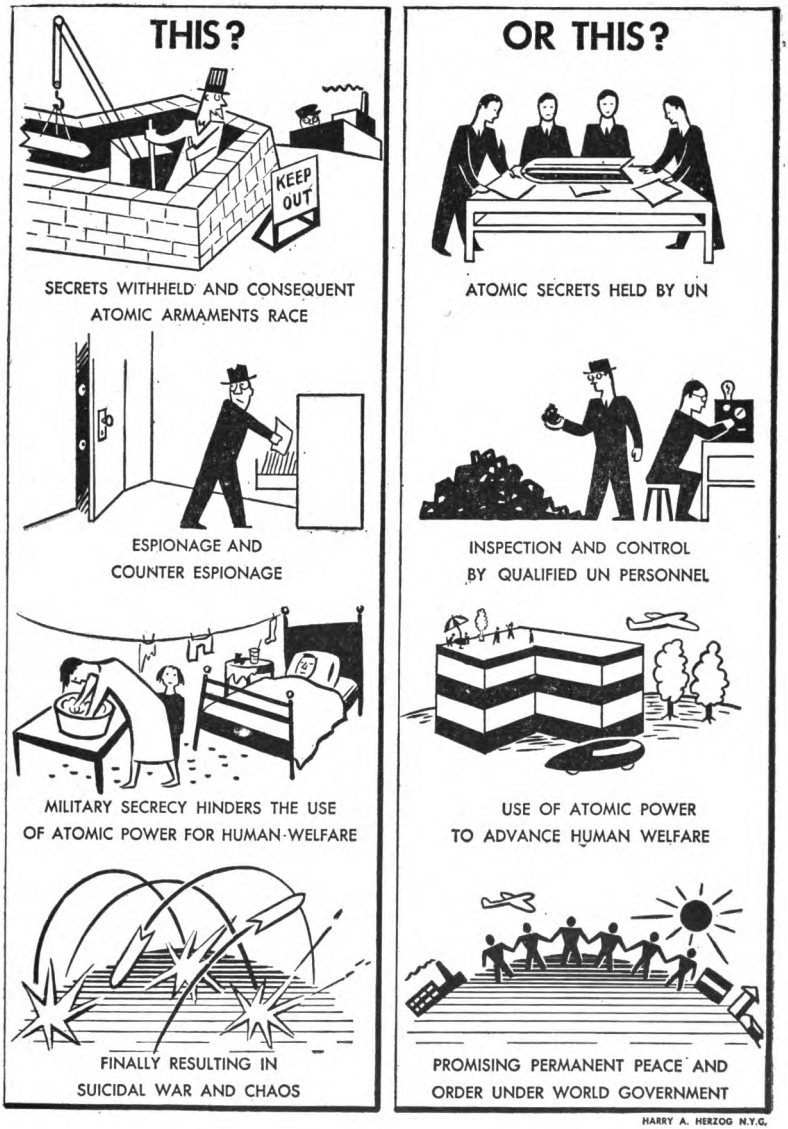

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VI. World Society or World Suicide

BEFORE THE atom bomb fell, men and women of good will had said (and meant) that world organization was necessary to prevent a future war, so that our millions of dead would not have died in vain. After the atom bomb, all men and women capable of thought saw that world organization was not a debt owed to the dead but the only hope for the living—the only chance of insuring that life on our planet might not be wiped out overnight.

This is the simple and clear vision, and in moments of clarity any man can see it. But the moments of clarity have been beclouded by hours and days and months of so-called "political realism," with newspaper headlines highlighting the struggles for power and the clash of imperialisms. The whipping up of hysteria has been easy for the professional Russia-haters; the emotional drive against an American loan to Britain was equally easy for the professional Britain baiters; and the persistent fear of American "capitalist imperialism" is an easy bogeyman for the Russians.

Foreign ministers and international conferences have met and debated and disagreed. Often the subjects of their debates and disagreements have been irrelevant in an atomic age. Charges and counter-charges of political pressure, boundary disputes, efforts to carve out spheres of influence, complicated balance-of-power alignments—all these jigsaw bits were an integral part of world politics in the pre-atomic days. Now suddenly reduced to mean-

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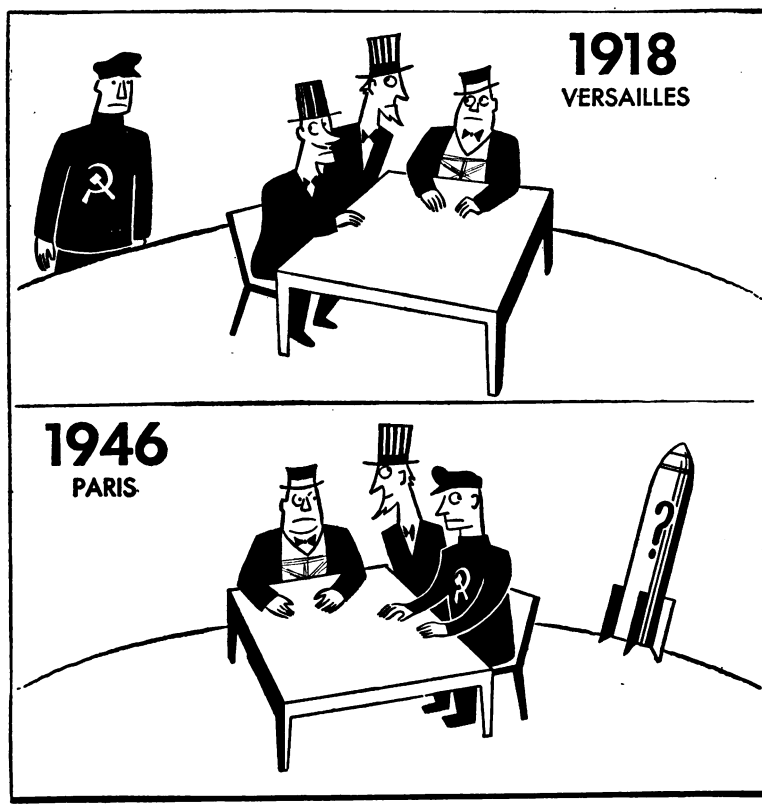
inglessness, they seem like a shadow-play—behind which a real suicide may be taking place.

THE FALTERING FIRST STEP

In this framework the peoples of the world have had to work toward fashioning a world authority strong enough to insure that we will not all die in war—even if not strong enough to determine how we will live in peace. The basic idea for such an authority—the banding together of nations which retained their sovereignty



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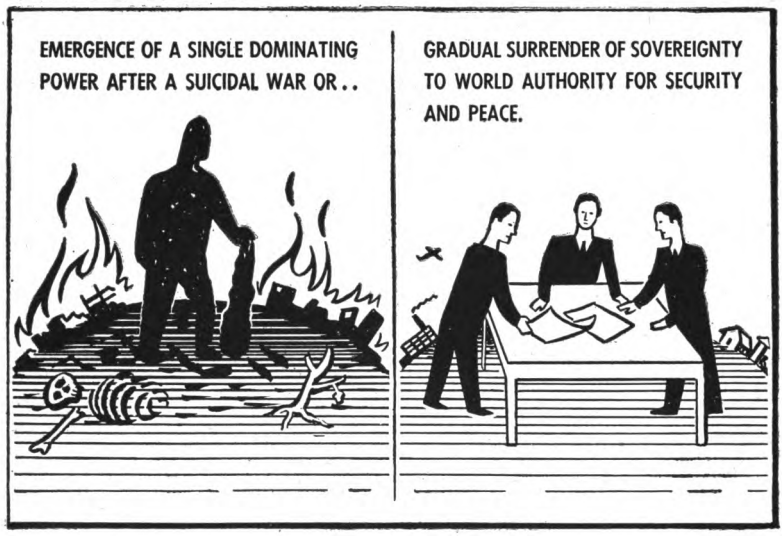
WHICH PATH?



The United States has three choices ahead. It can use its immediate strength to make a bid for world empire. It can drift along toward an armed conflict and world chaos. Or it can move with other nations, through the UN and through a policy of democratic helpfulness and understanding, to a world society and world government. Empire, chaos, or law—those will be our choices.

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