CHAPTER SEVEN
ANOTHER WAY

SINCE WORLD War II, the earth has staggered through a gauntlet of crises over countries far too weak in themselves to threaten either of the major military powers, the United States or the Soviet Union. These current and former crisis points scatter the globe. The Congo—Zaire—is just one vivid case.

Each crisis claims the blood and relatively meager assets of the innocents who live at the scene, and risks anew the ultimate claim that nuclear war would make on American and Soviet citizens as well, and perhaps on all the world. Meanwhile, the lavish military and diplomatic (if that's exactly the word for people like Ambassador Timberlake) preparations for these crises impose enormous tax burdens on the earnings of almost everyone.

Some might argue that nothing new is going on here. Throughout history, powerful countries have marched their armies abroad to seize the wealth of those who can't resist, or to challenge rival powers on a neutral battleground in order to limit the stakes. But the U.S.-Soviet cold war *is* something new, at least in some respects. For one thing, jet engines, electronic cables, and satellite relays have shrunk today's world to where no country is so remote that we can ignore its humanity, or the conditions that breed these burdensome and threatening crises. Our economies interlock. We have news—accurate news, not the word of governments—which impels a reassessment of behavior. Other nations can't just be ciphers anymore. Moreover, these post–World War II crises are more dangerous than earlier military adventurism was. The global reach of the major powers has dissolved any concept of

forward lines or protected areas. No country or individual can choose to sit out the game, even without nuclear chips on the table. And they are always on the table.

There is also a dangerous hypocrisy at work. Unlike the great imperial powers of the past, today's two great powers mostly shun nationalist rhetoric. They baldly deny that they are building empire. One hears little talk of the ethnic superiority claimed by other conquering peoples, like Rome's, or Germany's, or England's. Usually, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. even deny that they are acting to try to protect themselves from each other. Almost in unison, they proclaim an ideological motivation—and justification—for what they do. They argue that by enabling the rule abroad of those who proclaim an ideology similar to theirs, they are performing a selfless favor for other countries.

This is an ideological fervor maybe unmatched in history except by the Crusades, or by an occasional Moslem jihad. Moreover, it is a *blind* fervor, because few of the overseas rulers supported by either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. actually follow the ideologies they purport to champion. Yet under the international ethic of the 1980s, the more a country aggrandizes, the more it claims to be sacrificing for the good of mankind.

Communism and capitalism are rarely at issue. Both sides say they are selling democracy, but looking out on their client states one sees mostly dictatorships—in Poland and the Philippines, Afghanistan and Zaire, Cuba and Indonesia. It is sad to note how similar are the tortured attempts of the State Department and the Kremlin each to justify its own brand of export tyranny.

One ought hardly to be stunned to learn that countries, now as always, don't plan their policies in a spirit of altruistic sacrifice, but from a perception of their own best interests. The question that needs asking is whether, out of ideological fervor or for some other reason, these perceptions have gone wildly astray of what any country's best interests really are.

THE U.S. won the war in the Congo. It took years of fighting, often in circumstances that would have been ludicrous had they not also been so tragic. It cost considerable American treasure, much of it hidden in the budget of the Central Intelligence Agency. Tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people were slain in a series of local wars and police actions conducted by various groups, some of whom we supported and some of whom we opposed, but all of whom sought to snuff out opposition.

A far greater number of people no doubt died from starvation and other conditions suffered by civilians because of the fighting. Some of this strife obviously would have occurred even had outsiders not interfered; how much, no one will ever know.

But we won. The Russians, to the extent they had been there, were chased

out, and all their surrogates and allies with them. What is left demolishes any ideological or sacrificial excuse for what we did.

One can encounter poverty and disease of the Zairian kind in other parts of Africa and the Third World. But there's a difference. In Upper Volta, the scrawny woman squatting before her bowl of gruel on a dusty crossroads, the baby with flies swarming around the open sores on his body clutching at her shriveled breast, seem more a part of the landscape—what nature produced, if not intended. That woman and her husband could hack all day at their barren crust of earth and extract little more.

Zaire, however, is the basket of nature's bounty. For such conditions to persist there after fifteen years of an American-French-Belgian-enforced peace, and after nearly a quarter century of U.S. domination, has required misfeasance and malfeasance of the worst sort. Untold billions of dollars roll in. The income is quite probably enough to meet the price of a better life not only for the people of Zaire but even for that poor woman and her baby in Upper Volta.

But the riches are quite literally untold—in the sense of unaccounted for. What figures are available for copper, cobalt, and diamond exports can't be trusted. The wealth is being stolen and squandered by a combination of American, European, and Zairian exploiters acting with neither the consent of the Zairian people nor their best interests in mind.

TO blame this tragic thievery on a particular economic ideology, such as capitalism, would be to miss the point. In many countries, capitalism produces increased bounty for all levels of society, while in many other countries working people are exploited under communist governments or governments largely independent of foreign influence. The point is that the government of Zaire is *not* communist or Soviet-influenced. Nor is it independent. It is one of ours. And the people who make U.S. foreign policy, and the people who elect them, cannot escape the moral or practical responsibility for what that policy does.

Since the basic tenet of our system is that government should be restrained to protect individual freedom, democracies lack the unbridled power of communist and other dictatorial governments to bully anyone at will. Western countries sometimes must commit their violence with a subterfuge that dictatorships can dispense with. But it is force nonetheless. Often this force is exercised by granting semimonopolies to private business interests, which can then act in collusion with local political factions without having to account to a democratic system. These business interests are greatly enriched completely outside the free market process, as a government-sanctioned reward for their corrupting influence on the leadership of such countries as Zaire.

The Zaire experience is in no way a test of our own domestic economic or political systems. In our handling of Zaire, great effort was made to

suppress both democracy and free enterprise—in fact, to suppress almost everything we say we believe in. But the Zaire experience certainly *is* a fair test of our *foreign* policy. The measure of that policy is not alone, nor even primarily, in the condition of the Zairian people, poignant and compelling as their plight is. The test is in America's *own* plight. Nations do not operate as charities, and a nation unsuccessful in providing for its own people cannot be charitable at all.

At base, the test of our foreign policy in Zaire is this: after twenty-four years of manipulation, at great cost to the Zairian people and considerable cost to ourselves (not the least of which has been the jettisoning of constitutional standards), it can safely be reported that our future lifeline to the copper, cobalt, diamonds, and other potential resources that we need is less secure than it was in 1960. In fact, it has never been less secure than it is right now. The Zairian people are developing an urban class of students, low-paid workers, and unemployed who are bent on revolution.

It is hard to make a fair argument that they don't *need* a revolution. Even in the Zairian power structure, all but the most generously rewarded insiders tend to be discontented with the system. If Samuel Adams had been born thirty-five years ago in the Congo, he would today be in northern Angola with 5,000 loyal followers, trying to buy arms from anyone who would sell them to him.

The Zairian people are angry. Whether anything could have been done over the past twenty-four years to create a life that would not leave them angry is debatable. But things certainly could have been done that would not leave them angry at *us*.

So tenuous is our indirect line, through Mobutu Sese Seko, to Zaire's mineral wealth that it could snap at any time. Similar situations confront us around the globe. We have sought to accomplish so much that is beyond our ability to accomplish, that we have threatened our ability to accomplish the one thing we *need* to accomplish. Peaceful commerce is so natural, so universally beneficial, that real effort is required to sabotage it. Inadvertently, we have applied that effort.

The U.S. electorate seemed to sense such danger. The 1980 presidential election was influenced to an extraordinary degree by a foreign policy issue in peacetime. It was a legitimate issue, involving the loss of access to a vital resource, Iran's oil. As the electorate cast about for improved security, however, the only alternative was another administration dedicated to political confrontation and forceful intervention, the same tactics it unfairly accused its predecessors of shrinking from. They are the very tactics that cost the U.S. Iran's oil to begin with.*

The excuse for intervention, of course, is the notion that if we don't fight, Moscow will win by default. Yet as one travels the globe, from Indochina

*See chapters 10 through 12.

to Cuba to Angola, one finds that the Third World countries where the Soviets are alleged to hold the strongest influence are precisely those countries where we *have* fought. Meanwhile, in countries that weren't militarily threatened by the United States, where Soviet influence had a chance to flunk on its own merits, it has. In Egypt, in Ghana, in Algeria, in Somalia, in Nigeria, in Indonesia—except in occupied countries along the Soviets' own border, the Russians have been kicked out.

In fact, Indonesia, more recently a victim of U.S. intervention, has seen so much bad of both policies that it may become the first country to swing back to Soviet partisanship a second time after getting burned even worse by our side. The Soviet-backed nationalist movement of Sukarno merely screwed up the Indonesian economy. The United States helped his replacements plan a military repression that cost hundreds of thousands of civilian lives and still left the economy a mess.

Meanwhile, Japan, which avoids the hostile relationships and military expense engendered by confrontational policies, lures away our markets.

SOME lessons can be drawn from all this:

1. The legitimate international interests of any country are first, to be secure from external attack, and second, to be free to engage in peaceful commerce—to buy what it needs and sell what it makes at a fair price.

2. Each country and region has peculiar problems and sources of conflict to which cold war considerations are irrelevant.

3. Intervention by major outside powers in the affairs of smaller countries is usually based on a misunderstanding of what's going on.

4. Forceful intervention by a big power in a Third World country, no matter how well intentioned, is almost always dramatically harmful to the people who live in the country being intervened in.

5. Intervention by either major power, regardless of what the other is doing, usually tends to be counterproductive for the intervener.

6. Most of the world is in flux, current governments or economic models can't be assumed to be enduring, and stability in a bad situation is not only elusive but not particularly desirable.

7. Even when a big power marries a charismatic leader seemingly as strong as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana or the shah of Iran, the marriage, as often as not, ends in divorce.

8. Force creates enmity. If it creates respect as well, that is less enduring.

9. Most countries not threatened by attack will tend to gravitate over time toward systems that by example provide the best lives for their people, and toward countries that make the best trading partners.

10. While forceful intervention tends to be wasteful and futile, real advantage lies in the peaceful intervention of good example, and in looking for ways to reduce the use of force in international relations in general.

11. So long as each big power can deliver nuclear weapons to the other, no significant military edge will be gained or lost through local conflicts, except as it might directly halt commerce in vital goods.

12. For purposes of foreign policy, all people share two basic traits: first, resistance to foreigners who try to apply a cosmic solution to local problems, and second, a desire for peaceful commerce, both in their personal lives and in the lives of their nations—a desire that develops a momentum of its own if let be.

13. The best way the United States can insure access to vital resources is to make itself a trading partner that any country seeking peaceful commerce would naturally want to deal with. This can be achieved in two ways: first, by maintaining a strong domestic economy, and second, by making sure that any leader who comes to power over foreign resources has never been shot at by an American gun.

14. A focus on peaceful commerce as the objective of foreign policy could save enough money from military expenditures, and divert it into the private market for goods and services, to strengthen the U.S. significantly as a commercial entity—and thus to *strengthen* it as an international power, while providing a substantially better life for the American people at the same time.

15. In short, while the U.S. needs an armed force capable of rebuffing attacks on our territory or our commerce, the loose application of that force only puts our truly vital interests more at risk.