

problems from the developed. What we are witnessing is not a transformation scene but something more like the jerky rotation of a kaleidoscope. And, in this situation of major but not as yet fundamental change, one should first ask what is occurring in the central balance of power. Is it shifting against the West, or is its focus moving from Europe to East Asia?

Balance of power

The first point to make, I think, is that a balance of power is a very difficult thing to measure; its reality does not derive from comparative statistics of strategic hardware and is only clearly revealed when a crisis like Cuba or Suez throws a flash of illumination upon the relative strength, determination and will-power of the contestants. It is true that the Soviet Union has in the past five years achieved a position of numerical superiority in land-based ICBMs over the United States of the order of three to two, even though it remains inferior in missile-firing submarines and long-range bombers. It is true that it has a modern fleet of oceanic range, something quite new in Soviet, though not in Russian, history. It is true that it has 20 more divisional formations, 160 as against 140, than it had five years ago. It is true that Western governments are finding considerable difficulty in sustaining their existing level of deployed military strength in the face of competing demands for public resources and the increasing domestic preoccupation of their electorates.

The consequence is that the ordinary man, including the ordinary politician, is beginning to carry at the back of his mind a stereotype of a West that is retreating, however dynamic and creative its component societies may continue to be, and of a Soviet Union that is steadily gaining power and influence. The sense of a growing disparity between Soviet assurance and Western disarray has been accentuated, first by the monetary difficulties of 1971 and second by a sense in Western Europe and in Japan that the United States is now pursuing a form of national *realpolitik* rather than continuing to underpin the security and interests of the free world as a whole.

Such generalizations need, in my view, very considerable qualification. For one thing, the Soviet Union has in no real sense acquired a position of strategic superiority over the United States, in the sense of a capability to disarm it in a nuclear exchange. The U.S. still has a larger armoury of deliverable nuclear warheads, launched by land, sea or air, than its rival, and has a much broader technological base than the Soviet Union. Moreover, what provides stability in a crisis is the existence of an assured destruction capability on each side and this the Soviet Union has had for some time. Parity in the effective sense of the word has existed throughout most of the 1960s. Despite the existence of the SS-9, which might be able to knock out large sections of the American *Minuteman* force, the existence of *Polaris* and *Poseidon* makes a first-strike strategy a suicidal option for the U.S.S.R. and this the Soviet leaders know.

It may well be that the large Soviet investment in land-based missiles is a very poor use of its limited resources, like its investment during the 1950s in a large fleet of diesel submarines. It might also be the case that this build-up is not directly concerned with Soviet confrontation of the United States, but is related to the fact that, with the gradual development of Chinese strategic power, it now has

more than one potential adversary to deter, as well as new allies over whom it must cast a nuclear umbrella of deterrence.

No universal retreat

In the second place, the United States is by no means in a situation of universal retreat. The Nixon policy of disengagement has been applied only to the Pacific littoral, and I have no doubt whatever — and I speak as one who happened to know the present incumbent of the White House and his staff quite well — that the present Administration will fight a stiff rearguard action against a weakening of the American military position in Europe and the Atlantic area, even though some adjustments may be inevitable in the middle of this decade. For one thing, many of the social difficulties that have weakened the international position of the United States have begun to ameliorate in the last year.

The policy or strategy of containment is not dead; the United States has simply become more specific about the places where Communist power can and must be contained, and Europe is certainly still one of them. It is not, however, correct, and never was, to speak of an American “guarantee”, nuclear or otherwise, of Western Europe: there is no such thing as a cast-iron guarantee in international relations; but the likelihood of effective American action in a European crisis remains high because its own survival is involved with that of Western Europe.

Nevertheless, there is a new degree of assurance in Soviet policy. It may be simply the outward reflex of an internally decadent society, as Richard Lowenthal has asserted. It may be that there is a streak of adventurism in the Russian temperament, particularly exemplified in the personality of Leonid Brezhnev. It may be that there is a growing conflict between the desire of the republics for 20 years of peace in which to put their economic and social affairs in order and the enjoyment of the technocrats, the bureaucrats and the politicians at the centre of their new position of global acceptance and influence. One thing is certain. This new note of ambition has little to do with ideology or with any desire to expand the frontiers of Communism, except so far as Marxism provides an assurance that history is on their side.

I shall return shortly to the implications of this for Britain and continental Europe. But first it is necessary to examine the other half of my question. The fulcrum of the old bipolar balance was Europe; as it ceases to be bipolar, as China begins to exert increasing ideological and political influence in the world, as Japanese economic power grows, will the new centre of political rivalry, the new focus of world politics, be in the eastern rather than the western half of the northern hemisphere?

There has been a great deal of speculation on this subject, but I think it is too early to return a clear answer. On the one hand, it is true that the four powers which consider that they have vital or important interests in East Asia — the Soviet Union, China, Japan and the United States — are powerful, independent countries and have no great trust or affection for each other. The way in which the United States handled the recent change in Sino-American relations and the Western monetary problems has seriously diminished Japan's confidence in the United States and has undone much of the good achieved by the agreement,