

The Doctrine of Tranquility

By John T. Correll, EDITOR IN CHIEF

IN 1910, Norman Angell of Great Britain proved on paper that war in Europe was impossible. The major powers had not been at war with each other for forty years. They had nothing to gain—and everything to lose—from a war on the continent, which would be ruinous to their interdependent economies. Modern weapons would reap a human carnage too terrible to contemplate.

No great issue impelled Europe toward war. Furthermore, the period was something of a heyday for diplomacy. There was logical reason to believe that the nations would work out their differences and preserve the long peace.

History, however, does not always follow logic. The circumstances that led to World War I defy simple or sensible explanation. Yet the war that couldn't happen did happen. It began spectacularly in August 1914, and when it finally ended four years later, the combatant forces had suffered more than 8,000,000 fatalities.

A new doctrine of tranquility is emerging in the 1980s. In many ways, it is reminiscent of the theories of 1910. Europe again has been at peace for more than forty years. Peace, according to popular logic, will surely continue if we take full advantage of our opportunities for economic and political cooperation. There can be no winners in a European war. For what conceivable purpose might any nation unleash the modern powers of destruction? The military threat to Europe, we are told, is rapidly diminishing to the point of insignificance. From there, it is an easy step to the conclusion that strong military defenses have become an unnecessary burden for nations or alliances to bear.

Among those who see shadows of 1914 in the political developments of today is Henry Kissinger. He warns against a euphoria in which we are swept up by the happy picture that Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev paints for us in his speeches. We are allowing impressions and enthusiasm to replace careful negotiation in the new world we seek to build.

"In the absence of a political dialogue, the two sides are working themselves—in the name of peace and arms control—into a classical European crisis of the kind that produced World War I," Dr. Kissinger believes.

The Doctrine of Tranquility can't be debunked completely, because it is not all wrong. Some of its points, taken independently, are valid enough. There is no sensible rationale for a war in Europe. There are new opportunities to promote peace and security by diplomatic and economic means, and the West must surely pursue them.

It would be prudent, however, to temper our optimism with caution. We still live in violent times. According to

a count published by Scripps-Howard News Service, twenty-two wars around the world in 1988 left 416,000 dead. It might be worth remembering that World War I was touched off by regional turmoil that spread with consequences that no one had foreseen. How sure can we be today that peace is at hand?

Before the arrival of Mr. Gorbachev, change in the relationship of the great powers occurred with excruciating slowness—when it occurred at all. Suddenly, Mr. Gorbachev was moving among us, urging that we proceed at a gallop. His style has been to conduct international affairs through statements on television rather than through dull diplomatic channels, where people tend to ask questions, read the fine print, and weigh proposals with picky deliberation.

Mr. Gorbachev has conducted a running seminar on how to win hearts and minds abroad, but we cannot yet see how his grand program of change will turn out. At home, he is fighting economic problems that may prove impossible for him to solve. He faces widespread dissatisfaction with reforms that have brought new hardships but few discernible benefits. In the Soviet client states, he has awakened strong political passions that could turn in directions that are difficult to control. The promised reductions in Soviet military power are still in the talking stages.

This editorial is not a prediction of war. More than anything, it is a prediction of unpredictability. We should not conduct our foreign affairs with hearts aflutter, and we should not be too quick to abandon the policies and provisions that have kept the peace for forty years. Most of all, we should remember that the course of human events is not always logical and that history does not always play out as we anticipate.

The *Time* Magazine cover story for August 22, 1938, observed, "This fiscal year, the U.S. Army is costing \$492,896,735, a record peace-time high. Since the U.S. is determined not to fight abroad and does not expect to have to fight at home, the public may well ask whether its half billion dollars is serving any purpose except to keep up with the Joneses of Europe and Asia. Where, how, and for what does the U.S. Army expect to fight?"

In the opinion of experts, *Time* reported, the most probable use of the Army would be in a civil disorder of some sort on the US mainland. The second likeliest employment would be a war in South America. "War in Europe or Asia for any reason" was ranked third on the list, exceeded in improbability only by a foreign invasion of the United States.

Optimism is wonderful stuff. So is logic. On the other hand, there's a lot to be said for keeping one's expectations flexible and one's powder dry. ■