The most widely respected analyst of American foreign policy, WALTER LIPPMANN has for the past two years been pounding home the truth that this country must not undertake commitments which we cannot back up. At the Atlantic’s urging in late December he set forth what he believes to be the fundamental program for our survival. Mr. Lippmann was the first to define the "Atlantic Community." He began writing about that constellation of nations in 1917, and he has never lost faith in its power and validity. In the face of our present perilous dilemma, here is what he recommends.

LESSONS FOR SURVIVAL

by WALTER LIPPMANN

As I write we find ourselves wondering whether we are facing the awful dilemma of appeasement or war — of default and surrender and the death of the soul, or of a war that would be as inconclusive as it was irremediably destructive. What, we say to one another, must we do, that the nation, and the Western society to which it belongs, may survive to fulfill their promise and to complete their destiny?

The answer that each of us makes to these questions will be determined by the conclusions he draws from his reading of the history of other societies which have risen and have flourished and have passed away. For myself, I hold with those who, like René Grousset, say that in general no civilization is destroyed from the outside unless it has already decayed from within, that no empire is conquered from abroad unless it has first destroyed itself. And so, I would say that the questions about our survival have no human and practical meaning unless we believe, as I do, that we are still the masters of our destiny and not the mere spectators of our own downfall.

If we believe that we are responsible for our own fate, and that we are still free to choose, then out of the experience of Korea, which is so bitter, we can learn the lessons for survival. The lessons deal with the elemental facts of our situation in the world. When we ignore the elemental facts, as we have done from the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine to its application in Korea, we are inviting certain defeat. But if we can learn from experience and will make the truth about ourselves and our friends and our adversaries the foundation of our policies, we shall be able surely — I have no doubt at all — to make ourselves invulnerable, be it in war or in the great struggle which is neither peace nor war.

Let us set down, then, the elemental and unalterable facts of the American situation.

In this century North America has become the citadel, the main arsenal, and the central workshop of the Atlantic Community — of the nations that are the bearers of the Western civilization.

North America is an island — a continental island, to be sure, but in relation to all the other nations of the world an island nonetheless. Canada, the United States, and Mexico are surrounded by the three oceans and by the air above them in the Pacific and the Atlantic and the Arctic. No enemy can conquer them unless he is master of the sea and air. And unless we in North America are the masters of this sea and air, we cannot support our allies or wage war against our enemies. The first rule of our diplomacy and of our strategical doctrine is therefore that we must never forget the limitations, and that always we must take the utmost advantage, of our island character.

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On this continental island of ours live fewer than one tenth of the inhabitants of the globe. We cannot prevail, or even in the end do more than survive ignominiously and miserably, unless, like all the seagoing people before us—unless, like the Athenians, the Venetians, and the English in the days of their greatness—we learn how to make up for our inferiority in numbers. Like David with Goliath, we have to learn to live by our wits and not to engage ourselves in wrestling matches with the Philistines.

We and our neighbors in North America are outnumbered. We must take this truth to heart. We must write it on the walls of our council chambers. We must never forget it. The Communist coalition can raise more soldiers than we or our allies can ever have. These soldiers have weapons which on any battlefield in Eurasia are quite deadly enough to kill. Any policy which compels us to fight them, as we are fighting them in Korea now—across an ocean, within walking distance of their own inexhaustible reserves, on terms of battle in which they are forever incalculably superior—cannot be anything but what it has turned out to be: a bloody entanglement.

Our superiority is in our technology and our productivity and in the science that has flourished and can flourish only in free societies, and in the magic of freedom to arouse the best in men. These are the sources of our strength. If they are drawn upon skillfully, we shall have forms of power, suitable to our island character, in which we excelled. With them we can defend the North American citadel and arsenal and workshop. Within it we can create an offensive power that will make the cost of military aggression against the Atlantic Community very nearly prohibitive, and in any event most certainly inconclusive.

But that will mean that we have fixed our military frontiers not along rivers or at mountain ranges, and certainly not on demarcation lines in the Eurasian continent, but in the oceans of sea and air. For the defense and for the offense, for our own security and for our power to protect our friends and to deal with our enemies, we must rely on the speed and the range, on the tactical and the strategical mobility, of sea and air power. Where, as the saying goes, the infantry is the queen of battles, there the American soldier and statesman must avoid the battle.

The recognition of these elemental—though they are not self-evident—truths should lead, I contend, to a clarification of the assumptions and to a revision of the policies on which we have been acting. The cold war has been a struggle over the future of Germany and of the European continent which Hitler occupied, and over the future of Japan and of all that large part of the Asiatic continent which the Japanese occupied.

We have believed, rightly I am sure, that it is the purpose of the Soviet government to become the heir of all of Hitler's and of all of Japan's possessions, including and above all Germany and Japan. We have realized that if this expansion were successful, we should be confronted with an overwhelming combination of powers—by the Germans and the Japanese who nearly conquered the world themselves, allied with and not opposed by the Russians.

Our answer to this fearful menace has been an attempt to bring Germany and Japan, and as much as we could of the lands they once occupied, within the orbit of the Atlantic Community. Our thesis has been that whatever is not within the military orbit of the West must fall within the orbit of the Soviets, and vice versa. The policy we have founded upon this assumption has always and from the beginning been doomed to fail. For it could be enforced only if we had possessed, and had been able and willing to commit, ground forces capable of defeating the armed and armored hordes of the Soviet Union. We could never have found the infantry to contain the masses of the Communist orbit in Eurasia.

But if we cannot permit the Soviets to become the heirs of Hitler and of the Japanese war lords, if the Atlantic Community cannot, in defiance of the Soviets, bring Germany and Japan within its own military system, then there is only one tolerable course open to us. It is to base our military posture towards Germany and Japan on a decision not to make them our allies, but in all cases to deny them to the Soviets. We cannot, I believe, defend them on the ground while they rear. We cannot, I believe, defend them, as we could of the lands they once occupied, within the orbit of the Atlantic Community. Our thesis has been that whatever is not within the military orbit of the West must fall within the orbit of the Soviets, and vice versa. The policy we have founded upon this assumption has always and from the beginning been doomed to fail. For it could be enforced only if we had possessed, and had been able and willing to commit, ground forces capable of defeating the armed and armored hordes of the Soviet Union. We could never have found the infantry to contain the masses of the Communist orbit in Eurasia.

What we can do is to make it equally unprofitable and intolerable for the Soviets if they take Germany and Japan into their military system. There can be no question of our military power to neutralize Germany or Japan in case of war. The Russians are as little able to defend them as we are.

Whether the Germans or the Japanese would like to be incorporated within the Soviet rule, I seriously question. But leaving that point aside, it lies within our power—our power to bomb—to make sure that no military cell within them shall swing either country into the Soviet orbit. This initiative we have always held. We hold it still and should hold it in the future.

The best, indeed the only, military course effectively open to us in Germany and Japan is in fact the counterpart of the political course which most Germans and, I imagine, most Japanese believe in. That is a policy of neutrality like that of
Sweden and Switzerland, which rests not on pacifism and disarmament, but on the realization that any other course is suicidal.

The Russians must understand beyond doubt that we shall be certain to retaliate if they attempt to conquer Western Europe, and that we shall destroy the material assets which they might seek to gain by conquest.

I believe myself that we should revise our present policy — which is a corollary of the Truman Doctrine and is designed to make Germany and Japan our military allies. We should espouse the policy which corresponds to our own military capacity, and to our own military necessities, and to the real will of the German and the Japanese nations — which is to guarantee their independence, and to deny them to the Soviets.

I do not know whether we shall be at war with the Soviet Union when this paper is published. If we are not at war, the one course most likely to avert war is the acceptance by the Russians, the Germans, the British, the French, and ourselves of the conclusion that no one can now rearm the Germans and the Japanese and make them, and that is use them as, military allies or satellites. Were our diplomacy at all astute, we should make a virtue of what is in fact a necessity.

And if, God forbid, we are at war, there will not be on the Elbe that German army which some of our military dreamers dream about, and we shall be facing the hideous question of whether we must go back and once again destroy the Ruhr. We shall then be wondering whether it was indeed wise, even sensible, to suspend diplomacy while we sought to conjure up a theoretically desirable but an imaginary German army.