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COMMENTS ON AN ARTICLE BY CHAS. E. OSGOOD
"A PSYCHOLOGIST'S CURE FOR THE ARMS RACE"

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November 1961

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FOREWORD

As should be more generally known and appreciated, the field of world affairs, arms control and U.S. foreign policy has been infiltrated recently by psychologists and psychiatrists. Prominent among these groups are Charles Osgood, Erich Fromm and Jerome Frank.

Both Osgood and I have joined the Board of Sponsors of a relatively new monthly magazine -- War/Peace Report, the November 1961 issue of which carried an article by him entitled "A Psychologist's Cure for the Arms Race."

The editor solicited my comments on Osgood's piece. My comments form the text of this paper, and are being submitted to that magazine for publication.

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This paper will be printed as a letter in the magazine War/Peace Report.

Because a full discussion and critique of Charles Osgood's paper in the November issue of War/Peace Report is impossible within the confines of a short letter, I will barely make some unelaborated points. His drive and sense of urgency are based on some assumptions which require brief discussion.

His suggestion that increases in arms don't yield security is plainly and simply not obvious and perhaps even untrue. What is important in analyzing the question of security is the character of the arms, their disposition, their vulnerability, their reaction time, their mode of use -- all the characteristics of a military structure -- in addition to the simple census implied by "increases." Between Osgood's black and white extremes -- "the stable poised balance of deterrence" which he says we don't have and "a highly unstable teetering imbalance" -- which he says is the actual situation -- is plenty of room to further develop a meta-stable balance, which I have discussed at greater length elsewhere, and which, to my taste, better describes the current situation.

The listing of ways in which a nuclear war could start is well done. What has escaped Osgood's notice (and C. P. Snow's as well) is that all these ways have been available for the last 10 years, and we have had no war. It is naive to assert, without analysis, that probabilities are cumulative, etc. My own analysis suggests that these quasi-mathematical ideas are more quasi than mathematical. It is a naive formulation of the problem that assumes we don't learn anything from analysis and experience. It is for this reason that full discussion and an understanding of (perhaps) improbable (but dangerous) routes to war -- such as catalytic war -- may

serve to modify the probabilities. We must decouple accidents -- which may happen -- from the alleged automatic inexorable consequences -- war. By doing so, and providing forces which are large enough and protected enough so as to reduce the nervousness and insecurity instilled by having small, unprotected forces, we can and will greatly affect the probabilities -- and in a favorable direction. Accidents may happen, but if we think this through ahead of time, they don't have to lead to war.

What's good about Osgood's contribution is that it opens up another researchable field. The requirement to explore means of increasing national security via disarmament or arms control is so important that we must be receptive to positive ideas from whatever quarter.

The drive for and an interest in some form of unilateral action on the part of the United States in the field of disarmament stems principally from the historic difficulty of arriving at a negotiated treaty of any consequence. It is suggested that overt explicit negotiation may not work -- hence implicit, tacit, stepwise moves may be feasible. It is psychologically important to convince ourselves and to demonstrate that suggestions for unilateral step-down activities are not motivated only by frustration, disappointment, anxiety, and desperation.

Unilateralism includes a variety of measures. For example, we could decrease our arms as a unilateral step, but, on the other hand, we could increase our arms, also unilaterally. We could slow down our part of the arms race or we could speed up our contribution to the arms race. We could ground SAC or we could put SAC on airborne alert. What is even more to the point, we could and, in fact, we are doing a whole set of things which are both plus and minus. We are, in fact, simultaneously increasing

missile bases and decreasing air bases. We are, in fact, reducing R and D projects on advanced aircraft while increasing R and D projects on advanced missiles.

These straightforward (and obviously expansible) considerations are simple enough background to begin to consider the sub-category of proposals now described as unilateral moves toward disarmament. The proposal is this, as I see it. We will make a single step to decrease our military potential or to file off the raw edges of our military posture in such a way that invites response (hopefully of a similar character) by the Soviets. If the Soviets look on our good works and find them to their liking, and they respond by performing good works of their own, then we make the next move, etc., etc. Thus, by some form of tacit or mutual understanding, arms are decreased, tensions reduced and a small measure of probability is added to the chances for peace.

To all this I say that this idea cannot and should not be dismissed without detailed analysis, even though what I mean by that term has not been a highly conspicuous or sometimes even discernible part of the presentation of the idea. (I may be wrong, for I have been neither immersed in nor submerged by unilateral literature.)

Let's look at a simple proposition -- one of scrapping air bases. It can and will be argued by Americans as well as by Soviets that such moves are for economy or as a political response forced on us (see, for example, our unscheduled, undesired, and inconvenient forthcoming evacuation of the Moroccan air bases). Even if the above two points could not be made with vigor or rigor, someone might argue that aircraft are obsolete anyway, and

their scrapping is sound progressive military policy. (This is far from my view and is given as an example only.) It is possible to invent 100 more examples covering a great variety of possible moves, and each could be discussed in great and agonizing detail.

One of the points never discussed in the unilateralist's literature (again subject to the caveat: to the best of my knowledge) is the simple notion of the cycling time of a pair of such moves. Again, take the case of air bases. Suppose we were to announce we are closing 50 air bases; for human, political, logistic and bureaucratic reasons it could take us two years to do so. The Soviets, looking us over during this entire period, come to the conclusion at the end of this period that, indeed, this move was made to slow down the arms race. They decide to close down some of their air bases. It may not take them two years, but it may take one year. Intersprinkled in this (now) three-year event are debates, arguments, hearings about the event. Out of all this, it is unlikely that a crystal clear virginal contribution to decreasing the arms race will emerge.

Remember, we are not attempting to match announcements, which can be reciprocated in short order, but significant deeds, which take a much longer time to carry out than the time required to make an announcement.

We have not only the problem of the exasperatingly long cycling time, but problems of evaluating the military significance of each other's moves or continuously balancing the military equations, of persuasion that these moves are what we say they are, and many other problems besides.

There is, implicit in Osgood's work, some set of assumptions about the character of the Soviets, their interest in disarmament, their goals and their methods, for some such image must lie behind Osgood's evaluation of the probable utility and efficacy of his approach to the problem. It is likely that I would disagree in most parts with the accuracy and relevance of that image. Years ago, when I was young and problems were simple (or vice-versa), I used to think that the lack of understanding between the U.S. and the Soviets was the big stumbling block that needed overcoming. I don't think so now. Better understanding of the Soviets, their goals, their methods, and their style will not necessarily guarantee progress toward trust and disarmament. It may guarantee the opposite. It was not until delusions were washed away by understanding and the cover of pseudo-tranquility was stripped off the underlying real and seething tensions that we took Hitler seriously.