

# Correspondence

## Revising Revisionism

To the Editors: It is perhaps to be expected that revisionism is in a constant state of revision. Ronald Steel, who is commonly recognized as one of the chief architects of the revisionist history of the cold war ("The X Article—25 Years Later," September *Worldview*) seems to be stepping away from the doctrines of his own, direct or indirect, creation. "One need not accept the revisionist contention that U.S. foreign policy in the early postwar period sought to use the Marshall Plan to stave off a Depression at home, the atomic bomb to force the Soviets out of Eastern Europe, and the Truman Doctrine to achieve the 'break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.'" Agreed that such fantasies need not be accepted. But then Mr. Steel goes on to say: "Yet there is something inadequate in the conventional explanation that the postwar interventionist policies were designed solely to contain the Soviet military threat." Just what does Mr. Steel intend to say? It seems he wishes not to be considered so dull as to accept the "conventional explanation" nor so paranoid as to accept the revisionist conspiracy theories. The mere avoidance of dullness and paranoia, however, does not achieve lucidity.

Walter Lippmann, in whom, as I understand it, Mr. Steel has a vested interest as literary executor, is clearly the hero of the article. Steel's enthusiasm for Lippmann's critique of George Kennan would be more plausible if Mr. Steel indicated more clearly his own position with regard to, for example, Lippmann's enthusiasm for the Marshall Plan and other policies which, not so incidentally, were aimed at blocking Communist aspirations.

Mr. Steel's revising of cold war history (and now apparently also of revisionist cold war history) would be further enhanced were he more

candidly to confront some of his own monumental errors of judgment. One thinks, for example, of Mr. Steel's confidence, prior to 1968, that Eastern European Communist parties, such as that of Czechoslovakia, had nothing to fear from the Soviet Union, since they enjoyed a virtual equality with the Party of the Leninist motherland. As he picks and chooses among various "explanations of reality," one hopes that Mr. Steel will in the future nurture a healthier reverence for hard historical fact.

James Byron

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Ronald Steel Responds:

To clear the record it should be pointed out:

First, Lippmann's enthusiasm for the Marshall Plan rested precisely on the fact that it offered a way of restoring Western Europe to economic and political health without embarking on a costly and dangerous rearmament program. It was thus an alternative to the policy of military intervention inherent in Kennan's "X" article and in the Truman Doctrine. To imply that Lippmann's support of the Marshall Plan was tantamount to approval of the containment doctrine is to miss the whole point of the argument. Second, had Mr. Byron read my article on Czechoslovakia himself rather than paraphrasing another critic, as he has apparently done, he would have discovered that I never made the assertion for which he criticizes me. What I wrote at that time was that during the Dubcek period the Czechoslovakian Communist Party asserted its right to speak on matters of doctrine with equal authority to that

of the Soviet Union, which indeed it did enjoy until the Russian invasion. However I never said or implied that it had nothing to fear from the Soviet Union for taking this stand, and to say this is totally to distort what I wrote. Third, I never said that the revisionist contentions about the origins of the cold war were "fantasies." That is Mr. Byron's word. What I said was that even if one did not go all the way with the revisionists, the conventional arguments failed to explain the evidence, even as such a nonrevisionist as Lippmann pointed out in his columns at the time. The purpose of my article was simply to compare the positions of Lippmann and Kennan, not to provide an alternate theory for the origins of the cold war, as Mr. Byron so indignantly takes me to task for not doing. One can certainly disagree with my position or Lippmann's. But in his enthusiasm to make points against the revisionists, Mr. Byron ought not be so eager to distort the arguments, and he should know that gratuitous innuendos weaken rather than reinforce his critique.

## Re Taiwan Independence

To the Editors: William Bueler's "Taiwan Tangle" (September *Worldview*) raises an elementary moral question in a fascinating, and finally painful, way. Perhaps he is right that there is a widespread and deep longing among the Taiwanese for continued independence from China. Perhaps one can even make the case on purely moral grounds that the U.S. has a responsibility to follow

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