

June 1952 Issue

EXPLORE

# Senator Taft's Foreign Policy

*In the article which follows, W . REED WEST, Professor of Political Science at the George Washington University, takes up the cudgels for Senator Taft. whose foreign policy and voting record were brought under attack by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his article, " The New Isolationism ," in the May Ulan tie. Upon seeing the proofs, Senator Taft expressed appreciation to the Atlantic for bringing the following statement before its readers.*

By W. Reed West

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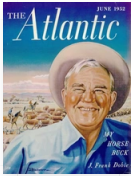
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**O**NE of the most controversial figures of our times is Senator Robert A. Taft. As the chief proponent of a moderate, conservative internal policy he has been subjected for years to attack from a number of quarters.

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It is a tribute to Taft that the criticism on the grounds of internal policy has diminished greatly. Even the labor leaders know that the Taft-Hartley Act is not a "slave labor" law.



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The criticism now centers on foreign policy. It is charged that Taft has a blind spot in regard to foreign relations. As one who believes that Taft has suffered both from the misconstructions of some of his friends and the distortions of his enemies, I suggest that the record shows that he has well-defined foreign policy — a positive program within a global philosophy.

The attack upon Taft usually follows the line that he is an isolationist. When confronted with evidence that the program he supports is not isolationist in character, his opponents reply that he is only a recent convert to international cooperation, or that his past actions belie the program he sets forth.

What is this current program as outlined in his recently published book?

1. The creation of powerful American armed forces.
2. Economic aid to countries where such aid will enable anti-Communist countries to resist the growth of Communism from within.
3. Arms aid to countries where such aid will enable anti-Communist governments to resist, aggression from without or armed Communist forces within.

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4. Warnings to Soviet Russia or its satellites that armed aggression beyond certain lines or against certain countries will be regarded by the United States as a cause for our going to war.

5. The sending of American troops to a country threatened by attack from Russia or its satellites (European army) or where the attack has already occurred (Korea).

6. An ideological war against Communism in the minds of men.

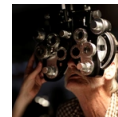
7. An underground war of infiltration in Iron Curtain countries.

If his opponents call this isolationism, one may ask just what in the way of internationalism or interventionism they have up their sleeves.

But what of the implementation of this program, particularly with reference to American military assistance in Europe?

Those who believe that we should send a large army to the Continent argue that it is necessary to encourage faltering peoples who fear that in the event of attack they will be left to bear the brunt of the blow.

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Taft would answer this by sending American troops in sufficient numbers to demonstrate our intentions, but he would not substitute American troops for those that the countries involved could themselves supply.

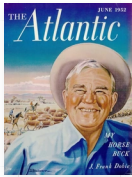
His proposal in respect to foreign support starts with the premise that, despite the abundance of American materials and our great, productive capacity, there are limits to what we can do. The question is how our capacity can be used most effectively. Taft believes that we should be prepared for war with Soviet Russia and proposes that we follow a policy rather parallel to that adopted by Britain in its long struggle with Napoleon. That policy was to control the seas, bottle Napoleon up on the Continent, commit only limited numbers of British troops to the land warfare, cooperate with such friends as Britain could find in Europe, and keep its main body of troops as a mobile reserve to be used in strategic spots.

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Taft would control the sea and the air. He would commit a minimum of American troops to the European continent. He would cooperate with such friends as we may have, particularly the British, with whom our help would be especially effective. Other peoples he would aid to the extent of our ability, especially in supplying their troops with the materials of war. But he would not pour supplies, and especially men, into a country that is lukewarm in its opposition to Communism. He does not believe that an unwilling people can be coaxed into opposition to Communism or that we should gamble our own safety on that hope, but he would not substitute American troops for those of

another country that is able, but not willing, to supply them for its own protection.



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He would follow in the East the same policy he proposes for Europe — giving aid to our friends, especially to those on islands, such as Japan and Formosa, where our naval and air power could be used most effectively. Meantime, he would build an American army for our own defense and for a mobile reserve in case of war.

This is a positive program, based on an estimate of our industrial and fiscal capacity and of the most effective way in which we can use that capacity in cooperation with our allies.

After having been belabored so long as an isolationist for insisting that the bulk of the ground troops for its own defense be supplied by Europe itself, Senator Taft recently has received new support. General Eisenhower, on April 2, made this statement: “Fundamentally, and on a long-term basis, each important geographical area must be defended primarily by the people of that region.”

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BUT even though his fundamental approach is accepted, there remains the question of Senator Taft's record on other matters. Certain principles emerge clearly from that record: —

1. One is his belief that our aim should be primarily to protect American freedom and interests, and only secondarily to aid the rest of the world.
2. Another is his hatred of war. He recognizes that even a successful war may bring ruin to the victor as well as to the vanquished.
3. Related to his hatred of war is his devotion to the idea of an association of nations based on law previously established. Throughout the Second World War, despite his opposition to the tyrannies of Hitler and Mussolini, he never lost sight of the evidence that Soviet Russia, although our ally, was equally tyrannous and hateful to free men.

Once a principle that Taft opposed has been established, he may join in its support by voting for appropriations to make it effective. Sometimes his idea of the amount of taxation that our economy can stand has differed from that of the Administration and he has advocated a reduction in the proposed appropriation, but not reductions that would starve the program. He would carry out our pledges faithfully once they are made.

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Taft voted for repeal of the arms embargo. He voted against lend-lease, but he proposed a substitute in the form of a two-billion-dollar loan to Great Britain, Canada, and Greece, to accomplish the same general purpose. This was no paltry sum, and it was more than a year before the equivalent in goods was shipped under lend-lease. He opposed the repeal of neutrality because he believed that repeal would accomplish little good, as Great Britain and other countries had sufficient vessels to carry their own goods, while American entry into the transport of materials would provoke war. No one in this country was advocating war at that time. Of course, he voted for war after Pearl Harbor and supported the appropriations necessary for its prosecution.

In 1939, he supported a proposed increase of planes for war purposes to 6000 — of which few were ordered by the Administration and none had been delivered a year later when Hitler invaded France. He supported the National Defense Bill of 1939, in which Congress granted more for various matters than the President requested, and an act to increase the supply of strategic materials. He supported the measure of 1940 to establish a two-ocean navy, the act of 1940 to increase the size of the army to 375,000 while the President was recommending only 225,000, and other war measures. He opposed the Selective Service Act of 1940.

After the war, Taft worked earnestly for an association of nations based on laws agreed upon in advance. He objected strenuously to the failure to base the Fluted Nations on an ascertainable law, and to the veto of the big powers.



He believed the veto provisions rendered the organization helpless to prevent war except perhaps among little nations. He opposed NATO because he believed it inconsistent with the United Nations, because its terms were broader than a pledge to protect the signatory nations against Russia, and because he believed it committed us to the type of land warfare in Europe that he considers unwise. He opposed the Nuremberg trials. He has opposed any efforts to abandon Formosa to the Communists and sees no reason why we should have refused to use troops from Nationalist China to aid Americans fighting in Korea. He was dubious about the Marshall Plan while it included aid to Russia, but supported it after the Russian menace became clear and aid to the Soviet was eliminated.

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He would supply aid to backward countries in emergencies and would encourage private American enterprise in taking part in sound economic projects in countries that are in need of capital, but he does not believe that we should pour money into countries that do not have the initiative or desire to help themselves.

Taft's record is vulnerable on three grounds, of which two are the inevitable consequence of his position in the Senate.

In the first place, as a Senator since 1939, he has had to take a position on the great issues of the day as they arose. Since most political actions are the result of compromise between different goals or between what is attainable and what

is not, there will always be room for criticism of any legislator.

Second, as a member of the party not in control of the Administration, Taft has necessarily been in the position of a critic. His role as chairman of the policy committee of the Senate minority has been the difficult one of maintaining a balance between merely captious criticism on the one side and the surrender of independence of thought and action on the other. In the process he has opposed, completely or partly, various proposals of the Administration. The effect has been to emphasize the negative aspects of his policy and to obscure the fact that he has a positive program in which the United States is assigned a definite and active place in world affairs.

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The third liability of Senator Taft is his belief that the public is entitled to know his mind. His frankness is a refreshing quality, but at times it leaves him open to attack.

A method of criticism not uncommonly applied to Taft is to pull sonic specific utterance out of its context, or even to single out a vote or other action that seems to be more moderate than that proposed by the Administration, and thereby tag him an "isolationist." An example is the frequent reference to a minor address of his, made in 1939, in which he is alleged to have said that we had nothing to fear from either Hitler or Stalin. The Roosevelt Administration had recognized the Communist government, but Taft could not have anticipated that Communist Russia would be built up

by ourselves as it was at Yalta, Teheran, and Potsdam. In fact, we can give Taft credit for being one of the first to see the danger in the direction of Russia. At that time the two dictators seemed to balance each other. He suggested that we would do well to let the two wear themselves out on each other. In view of what all of us know now, the strategy seems to have had merit. At least it must be confessed that, we made a mistake in aiding Stalin, after the war, to crush to earth a Germany that we are trying now frantically to rebuild. It should be added, too, that whatever Taft may have thought in 1939 of any immediate danger from Hitler or Stalin, it was in this same year that he was advocating a larger air force and voting for military funds that the Administration had not requested.

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Another approach that is used to discredit Taft is to take his votes and actions out of their perspective. We applaud the desire to reduce taxes, but if Taft votes for a reduction of the appropriations asked for by the Administration for foreign purposes, he is said to be sabotaging the program. Yet it is not argued that every vote for a reduction in internal expenditures is sabotaging the entire United States government. We may even applaud such reductions. Why should foreign aid be so sacrosanct ?

In the May issue of the *Atlantic*, Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., follows a variation on this approach. After quoting Senator McMahon in evidence that Taft's record is not in accord with his expressed policies, he makes a distinction between the Old and New Isolationists which permits him to place

George Norris, Hiram Johnson, and the two Robert La Toillettes with the Old Isolationists and on the side of the angels, while Senator Taft and General MacArthur are with the devil. The evil nature of these New Isolationists is evidenced particularly by the fact that "McCarthyism is an indispensable part of the New Isolationism." Strangely, Harold Stassen is placed in the same company since he now "opposes association with any nation which declines to swear eternal loyalty to the capitalistic system." Thus, the New Isolationists are tainted with unilateralism, McCarthyism, and capitalism.

The central thought in Taft's conception of an effective international organization is that the nations concerned should start from laws previously agreed upon and enforced through recognized machinery. The unhappy history of the United Nations is witness to the ineffectiveness of a jurisdiction so loosely defined that the Great Powers must retain a veto on its decisions. Taft's suggestion of a less grandiose goal, but one that is within reach of actual attainment, may well offer more hope for a world that is tired of conflict.

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Foreign policy cannot be divorced from internal policy. The two are interdependent. This is especially true at the present time, when American aid, based on American taxes, occupies such a large place in our polity. Taft's program starts with our internal economy and the amount of taxation it will stand, and from this proposes that we arm ourselves in the way that our resources, capacities, and geographic position can make most effective. The plan includes aid to our friends proportioned to the need and based on their

desire to cooperate. In offering ibis aid, he also believes that the hope of democracy lies in keeping the American bastion strong against attack.

If the first sweep of a Communist attack from the east should not only destroy the defenses of Europe but carry before it the bulk of the effective American army, the last hope, not only of America, but of Europe, would be imperiled. To me, the proposal for American concentration on air and naval power and an American mobile reserve, while leaving to Europe the maintenance of the bulk of the European defense forces, appears not to be isolationism but internationalism translated into practical statesmanship.

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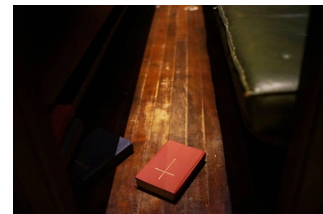
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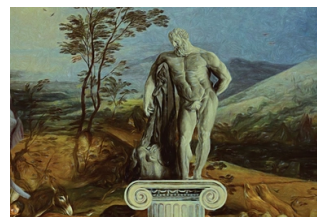
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