



BENSON

A TALE OF TWO SUPERPOWERS

by Frank Giese

TEFLON IMAGE:

Practically all of us born and raised in the USA have deeply imbedded within us a kind of idealized vision of our country. Our nation was the first to be founded on the principles of freedom, on the love of liberty. Our Constitution, the first to be enshrined in written form, is the model for all people striving for democracy. Our own democratic system, guaranteed by the Constitution itself, is regularly renewed by our inviolable electoral process, which insures that we are governed by the most idealistic and trustworthy officials any people could wish.

Thanks to the genius of our institutions and our own self-evident moral virtues, we are blessed with a unique material prosperity: the wealthiest nation on earth, with a super abundance of material goods. It is only natural that we are the envy of the rest of humanity. No wonder that we set the standards for all other nations, most of which are eager to follow in our footsteps, to find the path that has led us to this pinnacle of human achievement. We are uniquely a civilized people.

But our superiority has its responsibilities, and these are often heavy. First among them is the duty to make sure that others do not stray from the standards we have set. We live by international laws that we alone are competent to interpret, and it is our task to assure that all other peoples and nations conform to the model we have created: the incomparable American Way of Life.

Et cetera!

... AND ITS OPPOSITE:

But the superiority of the civilization we have created is also beset by dangers. Out of nowhere, as if from a misty and mysteriously impenetrable past, a rival power has appeared. Despite our vigilance and self-sacrifice it has grown, is still growing in size and force. To our individualism and self-reliance, our democracy, it opposes a collectivist, conformist totalitarianism. To our model of peaceful and

constructive activity it counterposes violent conquest and destruction. It defies our model of Christian virtuousness with Satanic malevolence. Bred to peace and tranquility, we are obliged to take up arms against the all pervasive threat of the Evil Empire.

BUT...

Of course, we are all of us inconsistent. In fact, nobody, with a few notable exceptions, thinks exclusively in such simplistic terms. We have multi-track minds, which can be triggered to react differently to diverse stimuli. In our rational moments, we recognize the silliness of such timeless simplicities.

The only sensible way to understand today's "One World" is in its historical context. Every society is irrevocably united with every other society. Further, every society is in a constant process of change, and its relationships with all the others change constantly as a consequence.

... THERE'S A HARSHER REALITY:

Let us examine briefly the U.S. reality from the standpoint of its historical development. Whatever the complex motives of the first white settlers on this continent, they did not include humanitarianism. Almost immediately they began stealing land and restricting the rights of the local inhabitants. When the Indians tried to resist, they were slaughtered. In the Southern sector, Black slaves were kidnapped and shipped from Africa to do the heavy work. By 1846, with the native Americans virtually annihilated, our forefathers cooked up a war with Mexico and annexed the northern half of that country. In an odd way we can say that the U.S. border with Mexico was drawn right through the middle of that hapless country. Thus the three pillars on which our society is built are genocide, slavery and theft of the immense Southwest. It hardly needs saying that all three have powerful racist overtones.

1987 is an appropriate year to think about the foundations of our government. Having won independence from Britain, our founding fathers proceeded in 1787 to draw up the Constitution. Written by a small group of wealthy white male lawyers, businessmen and landowners, it carefully protected their property interests against uncontrolled popular democracy.

Nonetheless, in 1791, at popular insistence they added the Bill of Rights, extending political, legal, civil and human rights to the less wealthy and potentially turbulent white males not originally included. Despite amendments specifically adopted to assure full citizenship and equality for Blacks (1866) and women (1919), these sectors of the population, a clear majority have never attained their full rights. As for minor children, they have none, and the less said about the few remaining native Americans the better.

By the end of the nineteenth century, having settled the country from Atlantic to Pacific, our leaders found it timely to seek new conquests elsewhere. In the cooked-up war with Spain in 1898, they seized Puerto Rico outright and Cuba as a permanent "protectorate". They then invaded the newly independent Philippines and after several years of bloody warfare reduced that country to colonial status, annexing the Hawaiian Islands in passing.

Armed with their twin principles of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine, they success-

fully brought under U.S. economic control the entire western hemisphere, and effectively subjected the Caribbean basin and Central America to military control as well. In the last one hundred years we have made more than thirty armed incursions, invasions and occupations to maintain that control. There is nothing unique or even unusual about our current efforts to enforce our domination in Central America. The new element this time is that the republics have never been so feisty nor the U.S. position so weak. Our capacity to slaughter is undiminished, even enhanced; but effective control is no longer possible. No part of the world is free from the danger of our heavyhanded destabilization programs. We recognize no international law but our own jungle law. Is it any wonder we are considered their bitterest enemy by all peoples that would liberate themselves to develop in freedom and justice?

And what of the superiority of our "way of life" at home? We are the richest in material consumer goods; but we cannot find the funds for health care for all, nor welfare for the down-and-out, nor homes for the growing army of homeless. Millions in this country are now living far below the so-called poverty line.

Of all self-styled civilized nations we are by far the highest violent crime rate: more homicides in New York City in one year than in all of Europe in a decade; unbridled violence against women and children; almost universal racism in the white community, nowhere more evident than in the frightening percentage of Blacks in our prisons, and awaiting execution.

To top it all off, our economy is tottering on the brink of bankruptcy, while the super rich get richer, and we the people docilely go on paying the bills.

... AND A HISTORICAL LOOK AT SUPER-POWER NO. II:

Until the Revolution of 1917, imperial Russia was one of the poorest nations in Europe. The last to renounce feudal relations — it freed its

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