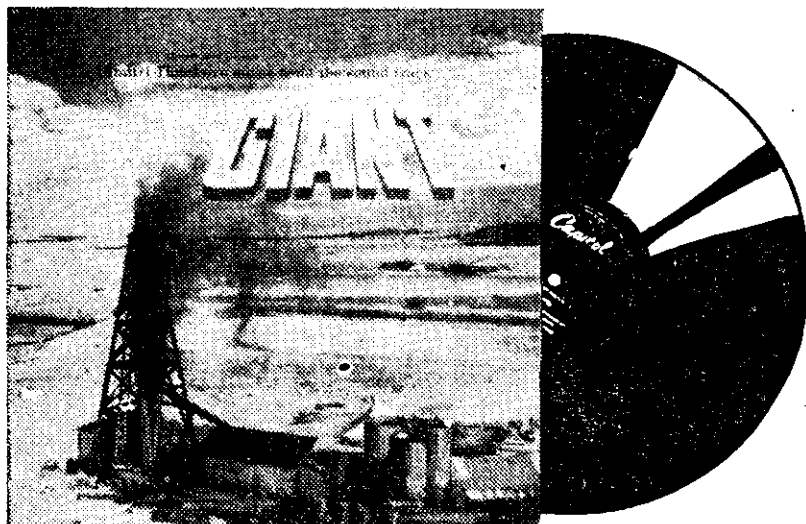


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Back to the Cold War

THE launching of the Sputnik seemed for a time to open a window through which (it was hoped) the more noxious gases of this world might escape into outer space. These hopes are now seen to have been baseless. The Russians have had much to say about their plans for new and better satellites and for bolder experiments in space travel; but in foreign policy they have shown that their attitude remains strictly worldly. They have added greatly to their own prestige, and evidence is accumulating that they intend to make full use of it. The possibility must be faced that world politics will presently enter a new phase of anxiety.

The central fact in this new situation is that Russia has out-paced the United States in the development of guided missiles. Experts have said reassuringly that intercontinental missiles are still a long way from the stage where they could be used with precision, and that American bombers—and the Bomb itself—will insure the West against Soviet aggression while the newer weapons are being perfected. This may well be true; but if the great deterrent continues to save us from the ultimate crime, it seems unlikely to prevent assaults with intent to cause bodily harm. The Russians may be only too ready to subscribe to the theory of "limited war" with which tacticians throughout the world are now dangerously preoccupied. And if they do not make friends more quickly than in the past, they may at least be helped by a wider desire for neutrality. "Uncommitted" nations will remain impressed by what Russia has done in the most advanced fields of technology. The satellite is evidence that cannot be taken away, and the whole world has seen or heard it. Soviet leaders, perhaps, will have no illusions about America's capacity to draw level in the race, and even to move ahead. But they have a temporary

advantage, and if they are true to their past policies they will press it to the limits of safety.

Negotiation from strength has been the fixed principle of Western policy in recent years. The Russians also can act now in the knowledge that their strength will be respected. Events in the Middle East have shown already that they intend to exploit their advantage. Although they seem in our view to act like wanton boys, delighting in mischief for its own sake, they are in fact responding to pressures from within their vast and shambling empire. There is no need to fall back on Marxist jargon to explain what is happening. Russia's position in the world today is much the same as that of any Power which, from Rome onwards, has extended its frontiers. Subject nations can be gradually absorbed within an empire, but only while the frontiers are moving away from them; the problem of a Continental Power is to keep what it has gained by pushing beyond its present borders, or by maintaining debatable lands, or zones of friction, in areas where it is most likely to be vulnerable. To stand still is inevitably to draw back. The Middle East is a convenient trouble spot: it contains oil regions of special interest to the United States and Britain; its Semitic peoples are in a state of chronic unrest and contention; its place on the edge of Asia leaves it open to interference from the East and makes it hard to defend from the West. Strategic prizes of great value are within reach of the troublemaker, and the opportunities for trouble are almost unlimited. Russia's true intentions will, as always, remain uncertain. There are two principal dangers: (1) that Russia will overestimate the psychological effect of her success with the satellite, and (2) that she will under-estimate the stiffening effect of this success on American policy. After a brief interlude for star-gazing, the cold war is on again, and the age of anxiety continues. —M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 1, 1957.