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 Invitation to Disaster

The fact that Secretary Acheson has seen fit to call upon the National Security Council as a rebuttal witness is a measure of the seriousness with which the Administration views Herbert Hoover's call for a retreat from Western Europe. (The Security Council says such a retreat could lead only to surrender or defeat.)

Mr. Acheson and the others have good reason to be deeply concerned with the Hoover speech. For it was an appealing statement—a speech which was bound to evoke a warm and enthusiastic response from millions of Americans. But it was also a speech which may well have contained within it the seeds of our own destruction, and it is proper, therefore, to examine and re-examine it.

When Mr. Hoover said that he spoke "with a sense of deep responsibility," he was wholly sincere. He has passed that point in life when men may be tempted by some hope of personal advantage, when partisanship seems worthwhile merely for the sake of partisanship. In The Star's opinion, Mr. Hoover spoke as an American citizen whose sole concern in these dark times is to serve the best interests of his country. Nevertheless, this newspaper believes that the course which the former President has advocated is a course which, if followed at this time, can lead us only to disaster.

When the speech is boiled down to its essence, Mr. Hoover is saying that we should pull back from Europe unless the Western Europeans build for themselves a defense capable of turning back a Russian attack. If anything is certain, it is that Europe, without our vigorous assistance and support, will never erect such a defense. And the alternative, in Mr. Hoover's opinion, is to arm ourselves to the teeth and maintain our own defense, with the Atlantic and the Pacific as our outward bastions.

The first trouble with the advocacy of such a point of view is that it tends to frighten the Europeans into doing nothing. Without our help, they cannot and will not fight in any effective manner. If they do not fight, if they do not erect what Mr. Hoover calls a "sure dam" against Communist aggression, the overwhelming probability is that Russia will take over Western Europe. What then?

Mr. Hoover does not advocate that we fight in such an eventuality, but rather that, while pursuing our own rearmament, we adopt a wait-and-see policy.

What we should expect to see is a Russian exploitation and development of the skilled manpower and the industrial resources of Western Europe. Instead of having 160 million people aligned with us, they would be working for the Russians. Mr. Hoover says there is no more danger that the Russians could invade Washington than that we, with land armies, could reach Moscow. That is quite true. But what about the ability of Russia, once the resources of Western Europe are at her disposal, to launch an all-out, devastating atomic attack on this country? All that Mr. Hoover says on this point is that the atomic bomb is a far less dominant weapon than it was once thought to be. Maybe so. But the prospect of living for an indefinite future under the constant dread of an overpowering atomic attack is not an attractive one. At best, it leaves with the enemy the initiative, the choice of the time and means of attack. And at worst, it invites the prospect that this country might be destroyed without any effective chance to fight back.

Mr. Hoover seems to think that his proposal offers hope, after the initial preparation, of reduced expenditures, a balanced budget, and freedom from the dangers of inflation and economic degradation. The Star fears that this is the sheerest wishful thinking. We would be faced, for one thing, with a loss of our foreign trade. That might not be too important. What is important is that, as the Russians increased their military strength after the conquest of Western Europe, we would have to increase ours. We would never reach the point where we could sit back and say that we are strong enough, that we do not need more and newer weapons. Instead we would have to live indefinitely in an odd camp, and that, even without actual war and sap our resources, cancel out our degradation finally, bring on the economic

against which Mr. Hoover warns. Mr. Hoover cautions in eloquent terms against appeasement. But that which he proposes actually would be the greatest of appeasement of all. It is true that if Western Europe does not take every possible step to insure its own defense we probably will have to fall back to the line which Mr. Hoover wants us to occupy. But it would be a ghastly mistake to beat such retreat unless and until it becomes clearly necessary. The sensible thing for us to do is to try by every feasible means to encourage and help the Europeans to stand up to the common enemy. If they refuse to do that, then we must fall back. But let us not abandon this battle until we have really tried to fight it.

Many of the people who respond favorably to Mr. Hoover's counsel are also admirers of General MacArthur. Perhaps this is a good time to recall some advice that he has given.

More than a decade ago, when another ruthless enemy threatened the civilized world, General MacArthur wrote to a friend: "The history of failure in war can almost be summed up in two words: Too Late. Too late in comprehending the deadly purpose of a potential enemy; too late in realizing the mortal danger; too late in preparedness; too late in uniting all possible forces for resistance; too late in standing with one's friends."

That is the advice of one of our ablest military commanders. So let us not be too quick to abandon our friends and prospective allies in favor of standing alone.