SOMETHING MUST BE DONE
by Leo Szilard

March 8, 1963

Something must be done because time is running out, but the odds are that ~~it~~ nothing will ~~not~~ be done unless a substantial number of us, ~~and~~ ~~at least~~ few hundred (perhaps twenty thousand) ~~I should say~~ could ~~can~~ unite on a set of attainable political objectives and then put in the time, the effort ~~and~~ or the money that is needed to accomplish these objectives. Even if ~~we do~~ this is done, I am at this point unable to guarantee the cure. Still, my request to you is that you read this article, read it twice if necessary, and then make up your mind whether you would want to be one of the ten thousand. If you would, please let me know and thereafter ~~we~~ we shall see.

ARTICLE 2/28/63

It is far from clear why a great ~~and prosperous~~ power should commit suicide yet ~~the fact is that~~ twice within this century this happened before our eyes. In 1914, the Austrian Empire was in no trouble and Imperial Germany was a rapidly developing and prosperous nation. Why, then, did they have to start a war that lead to the destruction of their empire? There was the argument, of course, ~~particularly~~ frequently heared in Germany that, war between the Central European powers and the Franco - Russian ~~alliance~~ entente was inevitable, that it would come sooner or later, that such a war could very well last for a year and that if it came in a year when the harvest was poor people in Germany might have to starve before the end of the war would be in sight. In 1914, there was a bumper crop in Central Europe and the general feeling was that if war had to come, 1914 was probably as good a year to fight it as any other. It was generally believed that England would remain neutral and on this basis Austria and Germany were more likely, than not, to win the war. The outcome of a world war is not predictable however, and even if the Germans took no more than one chance in ten of losing the war, why did they take this much of a chance? ~~The details of what happened and how it happened is a matter of record, but the record does not disclose the forces operating on the subsonscious level of the mind which impelled the Germans to take the risk involved in starting a war.~~

In 1939, Germany under Hitler was a powerful and prosperous nation which had just absorbed Austria and Czechoslavakia. The Germans had reason to believe that they would be able to knock France out of the war in short order. The assumption that they would be able to defeat Russia thereafter, was not unreasonable, and if Russia had been militarily as weak, as all governments, including the British and the United States governments thought she was, Germany should have been able to ~~knock out~~ defeat Russia within a few months. Had that happened, then probably there would have been no way for America and

England to ~~defeat~~ win the war against Germany and Germany would have emerged from the war more powerful than she was before it. On the basis of such considerations Germany was more likely than not to win the war, but even if the Germans thought the chances of losing the war were no more than one in ten, why take such a chance when the consequences are so disastrous? ~~The decision they made cannot be explained on the basis of Germany's real national interest and one must look for an explanation elsewhere.~~

Towards the end of the Eisenhower Administration there was a growing belief that since a war between Russia and America might escalate into an all-out atomic war and ~~that would~~ lead to the destruction of both nations, neither America nor Russia would take any steps that would involve the risk of such a war. Yet, when on October 22 of last year, the President proclaimed a partial blockade of Cuba, he took the risk that a Russian ship would run the blockade and be sunk by an American warship. With such an act of war as a start there could have been a step-by-step escalation. Since neither Russia nor America would want to have an all-out atomic war, it was likely that efforts would be made to stop the escalation at some point short of such a war. But, assuming that when the President proclaimed the partial blockade of Cuba, he took no more than once chance in ten of involving the U. S. in ~~a major war of uncertain outcome, why did he take this much of a chance?~~ And why did the Russians take the risk they took

~~Had~~ The Russian rockets on Cuba would not have enabled Russia to destroy, by a massive surprise attack against America's rocket bases and strategic air bases, America's capacity to strike a decisive counterblow. ~~than the risk of war that the President took would be understandable on the basis of the overriding considerations of national security. But, the Russian rockets on Cuba would not have given Russian any such capability and the President's action cannot be explained solely on the basis of America's real national interest.~~

In the course of 1962, there were numerous reports in American papers which created the impression that if there were a major war in Europe, America

a major war of uncertain outcome, why did he take this much of a chance? And why did the Russians take the ~~risk~~ chance they took?

In the course of 1962, there appeared in American papers ~~numerous~~ reports in increasing numbers ~~which~~ to the effect that if war were to break out in Europe involving conventional forces ~~in a~~ on a major ~~war~~ scale America might carry out a massive strike against Russia's rocket and strategic air bases and destroy them to the point where Russia's residual capability for hitting back would be negligible. The Russian rockets in Cuba would ~~have~~ not have substantially increased Russia's residual capability for hitting back, but perhaps they would have created enough doubt in this regard to render the threat of a massive American strike against Russia's bases politically ineffective~~ness~~; this might then very well have been the reason why Russia moved rockets to Cuba. Transporting Russian rockets to Cuba could not have accomplished this purpose ~~except~~ ~~if~~ (unless) it became generally known that such rockets ~~are~~ (were) in Cuba, because the Russian rockets on Cuba would not have enabled Russia to destroy, by a massive attack against America's ~~rocket and strategic air~~ bases, America's ~~capacity to~~ ability to strike a decisive counterblow. The Russians apparently believe that America would not risk war over the issue. The official Russian reason that these rockets were brought to Cuba for the defense of Cuba makes, of course, no sense, but the Russians could claim perhaps with some justification that they did not transport rockets to Cuba in order to blackmail America over the issue of Berlin, but rather in order to keep America from blackmailing them over the issue of Berlin.

It ~~is being said that the arms race is merely a symptom of a political~~ has been said again and again that we may avoid conflict that might ~~lead to~~ cause a war but that the arms race itself would not be the cause of war. The Cuban incident shows that this thesis is not correct. This incident was the direct result of the arms race and it ~~might~~ could very well have lead to war.

It has been said over and over again that the arms race is merely the symptom of a political conflict and that no war wouldbreak out as the result of the arms race, itself. The Cuban incident ~~demonstrated~~ showed this thesis to be wrong, for this ~~event~~ incident was the direct result of the arms race and it lead to the proclamation of a blockade of Cuba that ~~could very~~ could automatically ~~instigated~~ ~~well~~ have ~~resulted in~~ brought forth an act of war.

Right now America's strategic striking forces are superior to those of the Russians, in terms of the ratio of bombs and rockets that America and Russia possess and America could presumably indefinitely maintain this kind of numerical superiority. But even though America may derive some political advantage of this kind of supepiority at present, this is a very temporary advantage. By building submarines capable of firing long-range rockets and by placing their long-range rockets in hardened bases, located in Russian territory, the Russians are now rapidly increasing the residual strategic striking power which would survive a massive American attack against their rocket bases and strategic air bases. Just as America would be in a position today to destroy all of Russia's cities in response to a massive Russian attack against America's rocket and strategic air bases, so within a few years Russia's residual striking power would be sufficient to destroy all of America's cities in a retaliatory blow. When America and Russia achieve this kind of "parity," the threat of a massive attack against Russian bases or cities becomes tantamount to a threat of murder and suicide. Such a threat would not be believeable, at least not in any of the contingencies which are relevant to our discussion here. It has been for sometime an official American tenet of faith that as long as the nations of Western Europe do not possess a sufficiently strong conventional forces to counter with the forces of Russia, Russia would Western Europe would be overrun by Russia if it were not protected by the superior strategic striking forces of America. When the threat of a massive attack against Russian bases and cities ceases to be believeable how will America then protect Western Europe? It is conceiveable that America could devise alternatives strategies which would reassure Western Europe but so far at least this has not been done. The suggestion that in response to some move in Europe by Russian troops, America would hit a few Russian rocket bases as a warning and that the danger of escalation would then restrain Russia from moving any further, might perhaps work today but there is no reason to believe that it would work in a few years

According to the official American tenet of faith, as long as the nations of Western Europe do not possess sufficiently strong conventional military forces to match the conventional forces of Russia, Western Europe would be in danger of being overrun by Russia if it were not protected by the superior strategic striking forces of America. How does America propose to protect Western Europe a few years hence, when the threat of a massive attack against Russian bases and cities will no longer be believeable? Conceivably American could devise alternative strategies to protect Western Europe which would be more believeable, but so far this has not been done. The suggestion that in response to a military move in Europe by Russia, America should hit a few Russian rocket bases, as a warning, and that the fear of escalation would then restrain the Russians from moving any further, might conceivably make sense today but it certainly would not make any

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sense a few years hence when Russia will have reached parity.

The Cuban crisis has demonstrated to the nations of Western Europe that as long as they are part of the American defense system they are in danger of getting involved in an atomic war over some issue which may be of concern to America only. As they become more and more keenly aware of this danger and as the protection extended to them by America's strategic striking forces appears more and more questionable to them, they might, one after the other, follow the example of France and want to have their own atomic deterrent. Nations outside of Western Europe are likely to come to the same conclusion. More and more nations are likely to rely for their ability to retaliate on submarines capable of firing rockets. The trajectory of rockets fired by a submarine can be traced back to its origin to the surface of the sea but this would not disclose the national identity of the submarine which fired the rocket. It is almost a foregone conclusion that if we don't have disarmament ten years hence a number of nations will have their own atomic deterrent and if such a situation is permitted to and no one today knows how long to cope with the problem which it would impose if such a situation were permitted to arise. Judging from where we are today, it is quite possible however that history will take a quite difference course. It is quite possible that America and Russia will be at war with each other a few years hence, that Western Europe by that time will have extricated itself from the American defense system to such a degree to be able to stay out and that with Russia and America destroyed to a greater or lesser extent, the rest of the world will take a fresh look at the problem posed by the bomb.

During the first two years of the Kennedy Administration the policies of the United States followed the same line of least resistance that they had followed since the end of the last war. In 1945, it was easier to drop the bomb on Hiroshima then to reach an agreement with our allies on the peace terms to be offered to Japan and, at present it is easier to keep on building solid fuel long range rockets as fast as available production facilities permit than to devise an agreement on arms control that Russia would be impelled to accept that would stop the arms race. But if we keep on following this line of least resistance we shall reach a point of no return in an all-out arms race before long.

Because I thought that the Kennedy Administration would take a fresh approach to the problems posed by the nomb, I moved to Washington in February, 1961. Ever since that time, peripheral issues have had the attention of the Administration. For a time, the Administration doubted that the Russians meant what they said when they declared themselves in favor of a neutral Laos. There was an unsuccessful attempt by the Cuban refugees to invade Cuba with U. S. support and there was an increasing military involvement, never fully explained, in Viet Nam. Troubled by all this, I decided to explore with ot hers what whether anything could be done to keep the Administration from following the line of least resistance. Starting at the Harvard Law School Forum and speaking each time before a large student audience , I spoke across the country at eight different colleges and universities. Here is in brief what I said to the students:

What would it take at this point to deflect the seemingly inexorable course of events?

Towards the end of the Eisenhower Administration, when Khrushchev had his wish and was invited to visit America, it looked that such an accomodation was around the corner. When he left the United States, he thought that he had reached an understanding with President Eisenhower to the effect that Russia would not press for a settlement of the Berlin issue and the United States would not procrastinate over the settlement of that issue. A summit meeting was supposed to take place in Paris and was supposed to be followed by a visit of Eisenhower to Russia. ~~When Khrushchev returned to Moscow the Soviet Government started to prepare for Eisenhower's visit.~~ During Khrushchev's visit films were taken in America, and a member of the Austrian Government delegation who saw some of these films in the Kremlin. He told me that they showed, in a most favorable light, how the American people lived; the pictures showed well-dressed Americans living in surburban homes, at work and at play; they showed white and colored people in friendly conversation with each other and playing golf together on public courses. The Russians were about to release these films for general circulation in the Soviet Union in order to prepare the ground for President Eisenhower's forthcoming visit and to secure a friendly reception for him by the Russian people.

Soon after Khrushchev's return from America there was a speech given by Dillon, then Undersecretary of State to the effect that America is not going to yield an inch on Berlin. This was followed by a speech to the same effect by the Secretary of State Christian Herter, and when President Eisenhower was asked at his press conference whether these speeches expressed his views, he said that they did. Soon thereafter, President Eisenhower said that he would probably not stay at the summit meeting in Paris for longer than perhaps a week and that thereafter Vice President Nixon might take his place. Then came the U-2 incident and the summit meeting was called off. I have always wondered whether Khrushchev would have called off the Paris meeting because of the U-2 incident if by that time he hadn't already lost all hope that the summit meeting, for which he had labored long and hard, would accomplish something of value.

When I saw Khrushchev in October, 1960, he was in New York attending the General Assembly of the United Nations. The conversation was scheduled to last for fifteen minutes but it went on for over two hours. It started out by my saying that I was convinced that no matter whether Kennedy or Nixon were elected a new apprpoach would be made by the United States to try to reach an understanding with Russia on the issue of stopping the arms race. Khrushchev replied and he spoke in all seriousness, that he believed this also.

It is very easy to have friendly and cordial conversations with individual Russians if one avoids talking about the currently controversial issues, but, the conversation, while pleasant, will then not in any way be constructive. One can talk about the controversial issues which separate the America and Russia in a constructive fashion if one recognizes at the outset of the conversation the overriding interests that we have in common. The advent of the Bomb has placed America and Russia in the same premises predicament. Neither country can achieve the security that it needs if the arms race continues. In a reasonably reconstructed world, Russia could achieve and America could maintain an adequate level of propperity without having to compete with each other for markets or getting into a conflict with each other over any other vital issue. Thus, there is a common goal towards which Russia and America ought to move and this makes it possible for those who are aware of this goal to seek on the basis of reasoned arguments what would need to be done about the currently controversial issues in order to make it possible to make progress towards this common goal.

Because the conversations which I had with Khrushchev was of this general character, it moved smoothly and fast and covered a varied area including some of the controversial issues such as the problem of Berlin. This conversation taught me if one wants to make protress one must first of all discover what the objectives are the Russians regarded as desireable from their point of view, and having done so, one may then begin to talk about the price they may have to pay for attaining these objectives. The acceptance of inspection, and some political settlements may not be too palatable is the price which the Russians may have to pay and which they may be perfectly willing to pay provided only that they get in return something that they really need. Having talked about the kind of disarmed world that would solve Russia' real problems I raised with Khrushchev the issue of whether Russia would be willing, for the sake of having such a world, to create conditions in which the rest of the world could rely on Russian citizens reporting to an international authority any violation of a disarmament agreement that they mightdiscover. I might report at

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~~another place the conversation which ensued.~~ I said to Khrushchev ~~that even if Russia were willing to admit foreign inspectors in unlimited numbers~~ that I did not believe that even if Russia were willing to admit foreign inspectors in unlimited numbers there would be adequate assurance that such foreign inspectors could discover equipment that the Soviet Government might want to hide. To me, Khrushchev's response was very reassuring and it went far beyond anything that has ever been officially conceeded by the Russians. It is perhaps that it should ~~and which is~~ not surprising for in this instance the Russians ~~we~~ were talking about theprice ~~they~~ would be willing to pay for something that they really want. Two months later ~~When~~ I ~~got~~ went to Moscow to attend a Pugwash meeting, I discovered that those of our collegues ~~af~~ the Soviet Academy of Sciences who were scheduled to ~~attended the Pugwash~~ this meeting ~~had~~ were given a detailed ~~transcript~~ report of my conversation with Khrushchev ~~and~~ in it ~~KH~~ Khrushchev was quoted to have said that for the sake of making a general disarmament agreement operative, the Soviet Government would give serious consideration to the possibility of creating conditions in which a Russian citizen would feel free to report to an international authority violations of the disarmament agreement. Much of my conversations in Moscow were devoted to this ~~same~~ same topic and I found that these conversations were greatly facilitated by the fact that I had raised the issue with Khrushchev, and by the nature of his response. rather than for something ~~and to them~~ that appeared to them to be of uncertain value.

Because ~~It~~ has been my experience that private conversations with our R. colleagues are much more productive than discussions at a meeting, I stayed on in Moscow for several weeks after the end of the Pugwash conference. Many of my private conversations were devoted to the topic mentioned above and I found that these conversations were greatly facilitated by the fact that I ~~at~~ raised the issue with Khrushchev and that he responded the way he did and that his response was a matter of record. The same is true of the conversations which I had in Moscow on the issue of how the peace might be secured in a disarmed world. Another issue which I ~~raised with Khrushchev and with Khrushchev recognized as being~~ discussed with Khrushchev and ~~which~~ to which his response ~~has~~ to which become a mtter of record.