CHAPTER VI
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CONCLUSIONS

The refugees who at a given point in history, decide to break away entirely from all that they have known and lived with, tend to imagine that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. With a decisive stroke they cut off their roots and begin the search for a place to belong. They are unaware of the constraints and complexities operating in the country where they seek admission. They seek the sympathy and understanding of the rest of the world on the strength of the suffering they have undergone and the momentous decision that they have taken. But nations tackling the problem of such a mass movement of people from another country, cannot look at it from a purely humanitarian point of view. A variety of considerations operate in evolving a policy towards refugees.

Of decisive importance is the consideration of national interest. A government will hesitate to take any action that will be hurtful to its national interests. The humanitarian angle will be highlighted but while the focus will be on the generosity of the nation motivated by "humanitarian" considerations, efforts would be taken to ensure that the nation's self-interest is promoted. While taking a decision on a refugee problem the policy-makers would also try to gauge the balance of domestic political advantages accruing to the Administration in power. From the foreign policy angle careful analysis would
be made of the impact the action would have on an identified opponent and others. Two others factors to be reckoned with are the ideological posture of the government and the rhetoric the government has been given to both internationally and nationally, and the strength of public opinion. Although the former is not a very decisive factor it is still a factor that cannot easily be ignored. Public opinion, on the other hand, is one of the major factors capable of pressurizing the policymakers.

In the case of the United States, the refugees were taken in in the earlier phases of its history when there was sufficient need for them. Requirement of man power and the geographical factor of an expanding frontier allowed the entry of enough aliens to build an image of a haven of refuge. This image continued for a sufficiently long time to give it an appearance of truth. It has been shown in this study how, despite the projection of such an image and belief in such an image, opposition to the coming in of aliens was voiced right from the beginning. The opposition depended on who a particular group of aliens helped or hurt socially, politically and economically. Socially, the deep-rooted racial and ethnic prejudices and fears have been an influential factor in raising the protests against the admission of aliens. The antipathy for East Europeans and Asians found sufficient expression in the Congress and in the immigration laws of the country. Of equal importance is the economic factor. While business interests looking for cheap labour supported the admission of
aliens organized labour, it resented the competition in the labour market and opposed the entry of aliens. Political considerations also came into the calculations to keep out or welcome aliens. Fear of alien subversives was a constant fear operating in the country. Many felt that the security of the United States had to be safeguarded against the suspected presence of espionage agents planted by an enemy country. This could be done only if the "golden door" was not kept so widely open. The restrictionists made clever use of the underlying racial prejudices and fears in the American society and played up the fear of subversives to their best advantage. Some politicians with an eye on the votes of the foreign-born emphasized the traditional-haven image of the United States and were for welcoming foreigners. Elements advocating humanitarian considerations were vocal and did attract attention. However, their effectiveness was limited.

In the late thirties and particularly after the Second World War, new elements were introduced in the approach to the admission of immigrants and refugees, with foreign policy requirements occupying a significant place. Despite worsening relations with Germany in the years before the war, the foreign policy needs and domestic social and political constraints led American policy makers to set their face against opening the doors wide to the Jews. With the onset and intensification of the Cold War a totally new dimension was added to the problem. This involved wide variation between the propaganda rhetoric
and actual policy in which the constraints described continued to be operative.

As the self-styled leader of the Free World the United States almost immediately after the war came to an end continued and sustained an enormous propaganda barrage against what was described as "international Communist conspiracy directed and controlled by Moscow". The argument was that in those countries where Communist regimes were established the process had come about as a result of "fraud and deceit" against the wills of the people concerned. Hope was held out to these people that the totalitarian control over them may soon be removed at an indefinite point. The United States stood ready to support those struggling against Communist "tyranny". The enunciation of the Truman doctrine appeared to draw the line globally for the existence of two blocs—the United States and the Communist bloc. This seemed to signify that the United States was committed to a course to contain Communism, safeguarding "free" peoples and by implication holding hope, sympathy and support for those "struggling" behind the Iron Curtain.

This approach was elevated to the status of a crusade by the Eisenhower Administration. The preamble of the Republican platform in the elections of 1952 is ample proof of the importance given to weaning over countries then in alliance with the Soviet Union. "The Government of the United States under Republican leadership", a part of the preamble read, "will repudiate all commitments contained in secret understandings such as Yalta
which aid Communist enslavements. It will be made clear, on
the highest authority of the President and the Congress, that
United States policy, as one of its peaceful purposes, looks
happily forward to the genuine independence of those captive
peoples.

We shall again make liberty into a beacon light of
hope that will penetrate the dark places. The programme will
give Voice of America a real function. It will mark the end
of the negative, futile, immoral policy of "containment" which
abandons countless human beings to a despotism and godless
terrorism, which in turn enables the rulers to forge the captives
into a weapon for our destruction.¹

In a speech before the American Legion Convention,
on 25 August 1972, Eisenhower listed a number of "captive"
countries and queried, "All these people are blood kin to us...
Dare we rest while these millions of our kinsmen remain in
slavery?"²

It was assumed that the people in the areas under
Communist influence were aspiring to be "free" and the general
purpose underlying programmes like the Mutual Security Programme
was to "build up their ability for self-determination". Dulles
pointed out in the Senate Committee hearings held in 1955 that

¹ Berton J. Bernstein, "Election of 1952", in Arthur M.
Schlesinger Jr., ed., History of American Presidential
² Ibid., p. 3298.
"in these matters we are not finally governed solely by their own judgment of what they need from us. We have to screen what we think they need and to exercise some measure of independent judgment of our own as to what, in fact, will serve the purposes in mind." The entire foreign policy apparatus seemed geared to the need to "liberate" the "captive" nations for the "general peace of the world" as professed but in reality, for the security of the United States. When this found expression it led to the inevitable connotation that the United States would actively work for the liberation of "captive" nations. And in the meantime those struggling against the infidels would receive every consideration and assistance. The most expensive and widespread propaganda apparatus ever erected in history--the Radio Free Europe--carried this message virtually to every "captive" country in Europe around the clock.

At no point as far as the present investigator has seen, was any clear policy worked out in a contingency where an insurrection might take place in a Communist country resulting in a substantial outflow of refugees and the possible admission of these refugees in the United States. The efforts of the policy-makers were geared to covert and overt operations through its intelligence arms or through other organizations to exfiltrate carefully screened and selected individuals who might serve American interests. This process which had been

initiated in the pre-war years in regard to the Fascist countries continued after the war with regard to the Communist countries.

That the policy-makers had no idea whatsoever of providing a haven in the United States for any sizeable exodus from Communist countries could be seen in the approach to immigration legislation during this period. A very strong element in the Congress was opposed to any large scale admission of even refugees who were outside the territorial limits of the Communist countries in the immediate aftermath of the war. This same element in the Congress was in favour of further tightening immigration laws and introducing a variety of tests that would govern the admission of even ordinary immigrants. An effort has been made in the dissertation to trace the ad hoc measures initiated by the Truman Administration to deal on a partial basis with the problem of displaced persons in Western Europe.

Neither during Truman years nor under Eisenhower Administration was there any sustained effort made to tell the American public that if the exhortation to the "captive" nations were to result in insurrections and that if such insurrections were to prove abortive the United States owed a duty to provide haven for the "freedom fighters". This failure to mould public opinion and prepare the public for possible consequences proved to be a great drawback later when the public was not very enthusiastic in supporting the admission of Hungarian refugees into the United States. The efforts to keep the public informed was not made because apparently the policy-makers did not
such contingency and, further, did not expect that it would be politically feasible to implement any such course. While the restrictionists like McCarran and Walter and a significant body of supporters in the Congress and outside were of course, clearly and politically opposed to any such course even in the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations there were few among the policy-makers who appear to have believed in the policy of the open door. To them also the refugee problem was an issue the extent of response to which was to be determined by considerations of short and longer term foreign policy and domestic political implications.

During this period, however, the enormous propaganda apparatus referred to earlier, continued to put forth the same old line. Reference has been made in an earlier chapter to the role of RFE supposedly maintained by voluntary contribution of large numbers of American citizens for spreading the message of "truth and hope" to the victims of totalitarianism, but in reality funded by the CIA and controlled almost entirely by it. Richard Helms, a very senior official of the Agency during the Hungarian uprising and subsequently Director of CIA recently gave an insight into the actual functioning of RFE in response to probing questions put by Senator J. William Fulbright. He said that the RFE provided people "in the countries around the Soviet Union, particularly those other Communist countries which are associated in the Warsaw Pact with the Soviet Union, with the type of straight information and the discussion of events
not only inside their country but on the outside that they get in no other way". Answers to further questions by the Senator revealed that the "information" given were not all that "straight". The original purpose of the RFE was to stir up trouble in these countries hoping they would throw out their Communist Governments.4

It was in such a context that the abortive Hungarian uprising took place and the United States confronted the problem of dealing with the exodus from Hungary. While the public posture of the policy-makers was one of expressing sympathy and support to the refugees the actual steps to help them was based on an evaluation of both foreign policy and domestic constraints. The American public even in the past, had been none too enthusiastic about opening the door too wide. But the Hungarian refugees who tramped across the marshes in the nights with "escape-baskets" slung over their shoulders hoping to be delivered into the land of "freedom" were different from the populace that was displaced during the Second World War. The displaced persons were shattered victims of total war whereas the Hungarian refugees were victims who were lured into seeking "freedom" by implied promises of help. The American public was not educated on this difference and on the responsibility of the United States in creating such a situation.

4. US, Congress 93, session 1, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, 5 February 1973, Nomination of Richard Helms To Be Ambassador To Iran and CIA International and Domestic Activities (Washington, D.C., 1974), pp. 11-12.
Hence, even though efforts were made to present the Hungarian refugees as "freedom fighters" to enlist public sympathy, the American public was not greatly moved by the plight of the refugees. The number of refugees involved was not as immense, as, for instance, the East Pakistan refugees into India. Even if every single one of the refugees had been admitted into the United States it could not have been beyond the capacity of the United States to manage the problem. However, in view of its evaluation of the constraints referred to, American policy-makers strove hard to internationalize the issue and to enlist the co-operation of a number of countries to take in the refugees. In terms of population, space and resources the United States came forward to do much less for the refugees than certain other countries and actually subjected them to much more intensive screening.

In terms of foreign policy the United States had apparently no intention whatsoever to use the Hungarian insurrection or the exodus of refugees from Hungary as issues for a frontal challenge to the Soviet Union. It has been pointed out that at no point did the Eisenhower Administration contemplate direct military intervention in the event of an insurrection in any of the East European Communist countries. The so-called crusade against Communism had very definite limits to it and was strictly related to an evaluation by the American policy-makers of American interests. Even at the time when the propaganda apparatus of the United States tried
to focus world attention on the events in Hungary and the sufferings of the "freedom fighters" and their escape to "freedom", the policy-makers weighed the prospect of the opportunities offered by the availability of the refugees and their own eventual objective of some sort of negotiated arrangement with the Soviet Union that would safeguard American interests and maintain American prominence in world politics. The latter considerations were regarded as decisively more important and they had their own repercussions on the manner in which the problem was actually dealt with.

Given the overall approach of the policy-makers the steps that were taken to work out a policy that took note of the domestic political constraints have been described. Here again the effort was to maximize political advantages and minimize the disadvantages. Having built up a tremendous tempo of opinion domestically and abroad concerning the heroic exploits of the "freedom fighters" the Administration had to show that it was playing an appropriate role. With considerable amount of fanfare the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief was set up. The functioning of the Committee and the reactions to its limited emergency assignment have been described. It has also been shown that the Administration did not put up more than token opposition to the complicated screening and security requirements stipulated in the immigration legislation. The philosophy of McCarran and Walter was never openly challenged. On the other hand, the screening procedures enabled American
agencies to ensure that the overwhelming majority of persons permitted to enter the United States were those who belonged to a satisfactory age group with the necessary modicum of skills. The sick, the aged and the infirm found that they had much less chance of reaching the "Promised Land" than the young, the healthy and the skilled.

The humanitarians and the "do-gooders" in the United States kept up during this entire period their plaintive appeals for a liberal and generous approach. But their efforts, as often, had only marginal effect on the policy that was actually worked out. The reaction of the refugees themselves to the low-keyed approach of the United States has been surprisingly devoid of any great resentment. Barring the one incident of protest by declaring a hunger strike, the refugees seemed to realize the limitations of the situation and view with satisfaction their journey to "freedom". The non-intervention, the delay in procedures, the meagre number taken in, life in Camp Kilmer in the initial stages, the obvious discrimination shown in the Austrian camps, were totally brushed aside. One of them put it philosophically to the present investigator: "We didn't mind anything. Those closer to the fire are always warmer."

The policy-makers were understandably anxious to bring about as early as possible, an end to the public discussions and debates on the problem. It was yet another issue on which they had to work out a policy that would promote American national
interest as they saw it and advance or at least not damage the domestic political position of the Administration. The one lesson that they drew was the need for the exercise of greater caution in regard to the propaganda that they put out to the people of the "captive" nations. Another lesson to be remembered in future was that crusades have calamitous consequences especially if the crusaders happened to carry a mock cross.

"Roll back the aggressors" became a dying phase. Given the slow evolution of American policy towards the Soviet Union they no longer were interested in any open insurrection in East European countries. They certainly did not have any interest in opening America's doors to assorted refugees from Eastern Europe, Hungarian or other. As CIA Director Helms mentioned cryptically, the original purpose of the RFE to incite uprisings in Eastern Europe "has been changed rather dramatically in recent years, and it was not the purpose, at least since 1956...." 5

5. Ibid., p. 12.