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September 13, 1968

The Hon. Mike Mansfield
United States Senator
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Mansfield:

I have been meaning for some time to write to you about your proposals for the withdrawal of American troops from Europe. Events of recent months have overtaken most of the arguments on the subject, but things may change again, and I wished to offer you some arguments that go beyond the expediencies of the moment.

As you may see from the first of the articles that I enclose, I was until recently an enthusiastic supporter of your proposal for a pull-back. The arguments that relate to the deterrent value vis a vis the U.S.S.R. of an American presence in Germany seemed to me quite spurious, as they do to you, and they still seem so. What has changed my mind has been a further consideration of the events that would probably follow upon an American withdrawal. It hardly needs to be pointed out that Germany is still highly vulnerable to ultra-nationalistic impulses which drive a campaign for reunification that can have only the most disastrous consequences in view of Russian fears about her boundary with Germany. We may regard these fears as paranoid, but we have to recall that the official policy of Germany, and one to which the United States adheres to some extent, denies the recognition of the partition of Germany, and this is very vehemently expressed in such symbolic acts as the failure to recognize the German Democratic Republic. Certainly the normalization of this situation ought to command a very high priority, but it seems to me that it would be very foolish for us to withdraw American troops in any abrupt fashion until other assurances for the security of the area have been developed and perceived by the affected parties. A sudden American withdrawal now could have no other consequence but to encourage the most right-wing elements in Germany to create intolerable pressure on the German government for an ever more militant policy with respect to reunification.

In a sense then, our army in Europe is still an army of occupation, although few people would find it very palatable to describe it in these terms. There is one aspect of foreign policy of Germany that it is in our vital interest to continue to influence, and we dare not remove our troops until other methods of assuring the peace of the area have been verified.

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I might even go so far as to speculate that one of the motives underlying the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was to provoke the renewal of a unified NATO response. This may seem paradoxical, but I think there is little doubt that world stability is furthered much more by the maintenance of an effective and responsible alliance than it would be by the re-emergence of independent and conflicting national powers.

It takes some optimism to believe that the climate can be softened against the point where the question of an American pullback can even be seriously discussed, but I hope that time will come, and when it does, you will give some weight to the considerations I have just summarized.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics