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State of the Alliance

PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S purposes may be blunted by GENERAL DE GAULLE but they seem unlikely to be deflected. His State of the Union message shows him still confident of the main direction in which he is heading while acutely aware of the difficulties that stand in the way. Both at home and abroad he must struggle for a consensus of opinion while recognizing that the strength of the free world must rest on its acceptance of diversity. Abroad he is trying to lead "an alliance of proud and sovereign nations" and at home he contends with a proud and almost sovereign Congress.

His State of the Union message is therefore not only an account of his stewardship of the past two years but a redefinition of his aims for the future and an attempt to show that they are right. In spite of all that has happened in two years, it shows a firm continuity of thought. The rock on which foreign policy is to be based remains the alliance with Europe, "a welcome partner . . . in supporting the common defence, in expanding world trade, in aligning our balance of payments, in aiding the emergent nations, in concerting political and economic policies, and in welcoming to our common effort, other industrialized nations. . . ." While the PRESIDENT is now more confident about acting alone when necessary his main concern is clearly to spread rather than concentrate the burden that comes of world leadership.

He appears confident that if he can do this the tide of the cold war will flow in his favour and that the emerging nations will realize that the real threat to their independence comes from "the neo-colonialism of the communist powers". His faith rests on the conviction that given real choice, free from extreme economic or political pressure, most people will reject communism. His concern is to promote that freedom of choice rather than to exert pressure on the choosers. This enables him, without contradiction, to speak at one moment of the need for a bigger defence effort and with equal conviction of the possibility of "a clear understanding about Berlin, stability in south-east Asia, an end to nuclear testing, new checks on surprise or accidental attack and, ultimately, general and complete disarmament".

He is, of course, well aware that the power of the United States to lead the western alliance, to attract the emerging countries, and to prevent the expansion of communism will depend on its own material prosperity and spiritual health. His deep concern about both is as conspicuous as ever in last night's speech. The tax cuts and reforms are, as he said, a beginning.