

27 April 1960

Thoughts on the Role of Cassandra

An historian who is used to contemplating millennia cannot but be amazed by the extraordinary fluctuations of mood which a single day in the modern world can generate. On Monday, April 25, 1960, the Christian Science Monitor devotes its lead article to the "Surge of Hope in Washington." It speaks of the beautiful weather, the resplendent dogwood and azaleas, the brilliant French tricolore, the mellow, thoughtful, genial presence of de Gaulle, the good behavior of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the "ease and familiarity with which Vice President Nixon deals with foreign policy," the activity of Adlai Stevenson who "did his unstated candidacy a lot of good," the "special frosting on the Washington cake" presented by Gaitskell, Pearson and Stevenson discussing the role of the "loyal opposition in a democracy." It heralds the "more hopeful pre-Summit mood" generated by the "quiet optimism" of de Gaulle and the "timeless calming sense" which he brought to "Washington-in-a-hurry."

It was indeed a heady weekend and our gardens have never been lovelier. The genial impact even lasted into Tuesday morning, when Walter Lippmann's column, obviously prepared under the bland influence of the season, assured us that de Gaulle has the ultimate insight into Russian "national interests" which will make a measure of real détente a possibility at the Summit.

After this benign moment, the impact of Tuesday morning's papers is sorely discordant. American election politics fade into the hinterland of the New York Times. Even Truman, and Stevenson - whose proposals on regional development were perhaps the most forward looking item of the day - are relegated to inside page obscurity. The world smog has crept in again. Syngman Rhee's structure is tottering, and the headlines say "Capital pleased!" The Chou-Nehru talks end in deadlock with the anticipated statement that if any concessions were to be made they would have to come from India. Khrushchev in Baku sternly repeats his warnings on West Berlin and the threat of a separate peace treaty with East Germany.

The dignity of de Gaulle's speech, in the matchless French of the original, indeed inspires us with pride in our alliance with his country, so rich in traditions of humanity. It should also inspire us to face the grim pall of danger which hangs over the entire world, to face and not try to evade it.

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The tragic events in Korea have been felt with especial poignancy by SRS, which for several years has been predicting them and suggesting preventive action. We have often felt that we were "crying in the wilderness" on this and such other issues as the deceptiveness of "peaceful coexistence" and détente, the dialectical dynamism of Sino-Soviet foreign policy, and the generally implacable hostility and resourcefulness with which International Communism confronts us.

On a day of such tragic irony, inevitably we ask ourselves "What has been the role of SRS in the intelligence process which is designed as a whole to provide the policy engine with substantive fuel?" At various times in the past it has seemed as though our role were a combination of enfant terrible, gadfly, and Geist der stets verneint. This has been a lively mixture and has certainly kept us from being bored, but it is hardly in itself enough to have justified our existence. As [redacted] remarked today, "I am getting embarrassed at being a Cassandra for years on end!" Perhaps we all feel that way. We may recall that the curse of Cassandra - that her prophecies would be true, but would not be believed - was the revenge which Apollo visited upon her for failure to requite his love. It brought down Troy.

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Inevitably our minds run back over a long series of propositions, some original, others merely a synthesis of ideas which were taking shape among fertile thinkers elsewhere. We recall a whole series of warnings on the danger of US policies - or lack thereof - in the face of Communist encroachment. There was the "Stabilization" paper, calling attention to the purely temporary nature of the 1956 crisis. This was followed by the "Commonwealth" paper, analyzing the largely unnoticed potential of the concept of sodruzhestvo in the dialectic of International Communism. After the 24 May 1957 riots in Taipei and before the demonstrations against Nixon in Latin America we warned against the ominous rise of anti-Americanism and urged that State and Agency field posts be charged with a major effort of objective reporting on this trend. We repeatedly called attention to the need for intelligence studies to support positive policies within the UN framework, the development of sound regional organization including political federation, the cultivation of stable economies and polities in the newly liberated countries, the creation of international development Agencies for power and for fuel, the coordination of planning and investment through great river basin authorities, the establishment of technological institutions on a regional basis, and others. We called attention to the illusory expectations

generated by the atoms-for-peace propaganda and to the danger into which it was heading unless nuclear testing were halted and a realistic approach made to the competitive economics of atomic energy and the disposal of nuclear waste. These problems are still largely under the rug.

We have demonstrated accurate political judgment and foresight in important individual cases, notably Indonesia, where we forecast the uprising and rebellion of 1956-57, and Japan where we stressed the need for enlightened revision of the Security Treaty. With respect to Italian politics our four year series of memoranda urging the establishment of contact with Pietro Nenni and the Italian Socialists was prophetic of today's crisis. Our forebodings on South Vietnam and Taiwan are still on the agenda of trouble.

Above all we have crusaded, often against sharp opposition, for a sound evaluation of the role of ideology in politics and of the tremendous dynamism resulting from the combination of Marxism-Leninism and the organizational power of the Communist parties. We have presented an accurate image of the leadership of Communism in the persons of Mao and Khrushchev - warning against over-attention to "collective leadership" and under-emphasis on the "cult of personality." We have conducted our own "struggle" against wishful thinking and complacency. We have analyzed the principles of political action as applied to the exploitation of "vulnerabilities," with marked realism and constructive intent. We have warned and continue to warn that existing estimates of the prospects of the Sino-Soviet Bloc economies, despite upward rectifications, are too conservative by a factor approximating that of the military estimates of the mid-50's. We have cautioned against facile assumptions such as the likelihood of a military takeover in the Soviet Union, the "erosion of revolutionary fervor" and the alleged humanizing effect of education and the "critical" approach to science in the USSR. We have sketched the outlines for the necessary program of research on the "transition to Communism," and have helped OSI limn the "new Communist man." We have called attention to the growing list of Communist piracies of Free World concepts, Peace, Democracy, "Commonwealth," and latterly, even Freedom, Justice and "humanism."

Moreover, we have been a spearhead of the small group of government experts who are dedicated to the study of the Sino-Soviet relation. We have built a modest but firm bridge to the equally small but hopeful group of academic scholars in this field and have contributed to the organization of the necessary language and area programs.

There are other items which could be pulled out from our files, and still others which never were set down in writing because of apprehension that we might be exceeding our charter.

Wandering over our memory of these efforts, nearly all of which in a certain sense may be said to have been either abortive or premature, we may perhaps feel that the role of SRS has indeed been that of "crying wolf." This is, of course, traditionally thankless, and yet we know that the wolf is there, lurking around the peaceable flock.

The thought that always seems to come back to us is that we are really speculating as much about ourselves as about our enemy. We recall the innumerable times when we have said "This should be done, but it is not what the American people are ready to do." As students of political science, we have been struck with the thought that the "American way of life" appears to be testing the proposition that material affluence grafted on democratic traditions is indeed the acme, "the good life." But we have also asked ourselves, in the words of Lincoln, whether a nation "so conceived and so dedicated can long endure." One thinks of a paraphrase of Lord Acton's dictum: "Affluence corrupts; absolute affluence corrupts absolutely."

Thus the wheel of our thought completes its revolution and returns to the starting point, the definition of our national goals. SRS has never written on this subject and indeed within our charter there is no reason why we should, even though our contribution might be welcome to the Commission.

Perhaps it is best for us to accept the curse of Cassandra, embracing it and consoling ourselves with the thought that this is not an ignoble role; it is the assignment of an angry but loving god. We were told when we were established that we would become a sort of "conscience." We have tried to do this, and the awareness of being often right when others were wrong has perhaps been our main source of satisfaction. We have developed other more buoyant qualities, gusto, sophistication, a sense of humor, and an ironic and compassionate perception of the tragi-comic nature of human striving and conflict. We have sought to be scholars and thinkers, and we need not be ashamed of our stature in these capacities. We have at times been obsessed with the problem of stimulating action in policy and leadership. We

have often felt frustrated by bureaucracy, and the deficiencies of imagination and energy which we have encountered. These we can not remedy in others, though we have learned in some measure how to circumvent them, even deriving some pleasure in the game. We can only continue to resist such tendencies in ourselves, cultivating, so far as we are able, the virtues of intellectual honesty and humility. Meantime we may count among our blessings the satisfaction of having survived.

We should perhaps be content with this satisfaction: Primum vivere . . . But our zest for speculating would be stimulated if we could look forward to more frequent reactions from above, to "feedbacks," even if negative or critical. Perhaps we can hope for this in the course of our second platiletka!

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Chief, SRS/DDI

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