

# THE FORUM FORUM

## The Global Strategic Mind

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A few weeks ago in Washington, there was a small though interesting explosion over the effort by an old Harvard colleague of mine, Samuel P. Huntington, currently on assignment to the White House, to get Daniel Patrick Moynihan, also recently of Harvard, to make a public assault on a presidential decision involving trade with the Russians. I was sorry to read about this. I've repeatedly urged my Harvard colleagues, when they go to Washington, not to practice the kind of politics which is commonplace in Cambridge. Washington is not ready for it. But I was much more alarmed by an earlier communication from Sam Huntington in which he defended a briefing on strategic balance that he had given to the Chinese. It involved, he said, no secrets; it was one of many such briefings he had been giving recently. This was an indication that global strategic thought, sometimes called relentless strategic thought, was again rampant in Washington. There is nothing over which the country should be more concerned. President Carter can shrug off the odd professorial attack. But all recent experience shows that Presidents cannot survive the strategic mind. If life on this planet dissolves one day in an intense sheet of flame with great overpressure, the guidance to our demise will have been given by a relentless strategic mind, a particularly tough exponent of global balance.

I'm a longtime student of this higher strategic thought and of its authors, but my interest, as also my alarm, has been further heightened in recent weeks by three books from men who have been serving as the practical instruments, the sword arms as it were, of our strategic thought. Two of these books, not quite licit, are by ordinary field-grade officers of the CIA. The third is by William Colby, a career head of the agency. All three are important, and

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Colby's, perhaps unwittingly, is especially informative and alarming. But before getting on to these books, I must say something in general about the strategic or global mind.

It is readily identified and, on the whole, rather simple as well as straightforward. It is not, in the manifestation of which I here speak, much concerned with weapons and weaponry. Rather, it is drawn uncontrollably to any map of the world, and this it immediately divides into spheres of present or potential influence. The nature of the influence is never specified. Nor are the consequences of its exercise, if any, except as there may be vague references to essential raw materials, naval bases or the control of adjacent waters by local aircraft — threats that, in the end, do not materialize, perhaps because they rarely have anything to do with modern military need or technology.

A hostile sphere of influence always requires a prompt and lethal reaction. That is partly because nothing else will be understood and partly because it must be shown that we are capable of such a reaction. Those who question the need and ask consideration of the consequences show by their insistence on thought that they are indecisive. The man of relentless strategic mind substitutes bravery for thought, action for reflection.

Above all, it is an essential of strategic thought that it ignore experience. That is an intensely practical matter. Once the strategic mind starts reflecting on experience, as I will presently urge, it is down the drain. That is the one thing it cannot, under any circumstances, afford.

The strategic mind manifests itself among the scholarly classroom warriors at Harvard and its neighbors far and very near; rather harmlessly in onetime summer soldiers and diplomats in the New York corporations and law firms who meet nostalgically at the Council on Foreign Relations to recall their days of glory; in the Pentagon, the CIA and, though more fugitively, in the State Department; in the National Security Council, alas; and it flourishes among the housecarls of Senator Henry Jackson. It is disastrously represented in other countries, the disaster being, as usual, for the governments it guides. But let me recur to the experience that, professionally, it is required to ignore.

The most vital recent effort was, of course, in Vietnam. For a little while after the war, it must be said, the strategists were a trifle subdued. Hundreds of thousands of ethnically diverse lives and many billions of dollars were spent to keep Saigon out of the Chinese sphere of influence. There was concern also about the Russians, but the Chinese were the nearer and more dominant force. In the absence of our effort, the dominoes would fall. Chinese Communist influence would extend across Thailand to Malaysia, Singapore and beyond. Now, however, the Vietnamese and the Chinese have fallen out. Chinese assistance to Hanoi has been stopped. Chinese long resident in Saigon are being expelled. As for the Russians, they are kept at their distance by a bitterly hostile China, which increasingly we befriend. The men of strategic mind do concede that there is a lesson from Vietnam: We must not allow it to weaken our will to intervene the next time.

These global strategists also complain that Vietnam still dominates our thoughts to an excessive degree, and in this I concur. There should be much more thought about Africa, for that has long been a positive addiction of the strategic mind. It is there, above all, that we need to reflect on the experience.

Thus, in 1961, when the Kennedy Administration arrived, there was a deep strategic concern over Tanganyika *cum* Tanzania, where the Chinese were building a railroad; there was even greater worry over Guinea, which had been all but written off to the Communists; and in the early days of the new administration there was a near frenzy over the Congo, now Zaire. The latter, we were all told, we simply could not afford to lose. In time, strategic intervention having been resisted or kept ineffective, the Tanganyikan railroad was forgotten; the Soviet ambassador got kicked out of Guinea, where we are now mining the bauxite; and Zaire lapsed into a system of eclectic, universal but not especially innovative corruption. As a personal footnote, in 1961, when as Ambassador I first called on Jawaharlal Nehru, he expressed concern about one Clare Hayes Timberlake, then our Ambassador in the Congo. He thought him to have an unduly sanguinary strategic mind. Timberlake had served previously in India where so great was his strategic commitment that he had gone all out to keep Nehru out of the hands of the Communists. Nehru had not thought this necessary. Timberlake was replaced in the Congo by Ambassador Edmund Gullion; then a strong non-strategic thinker.

All of this was overture. In the next years the strategic minds became alarmed over Algeria, a major bridgehead into Africa, where Ahmed Ben Bella was being advised and supplied by the Soviets. Then one day in 1965, Colonel Houari Boumedienne took the Soviet tanks into Algiers and arrested Ben Bella who, having spent the Algerian war in jail, was now put permanently back into confinement. A very restricted life. A member of the Soviet Embassy in Washington whom I asked about this development said, "At least they didn't use our advisors."

In these years the exponents of global balance also expressed great concern over Soviet influence on Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. The Soviets were training his praetorian guard, were influencing his economic policy and were thus a threat, although this was not stressed, to our chocolate supply. In 1966, Nkrumah was thrown out; the worry had been to no purpose.

Concern then shifted to Egypt, where earlier John Foster Dulles, the modern prophet of all strategic minds, had paved the way for the Russians by trying to accommodate Gamal Abdel Nasser to our sphere of influence in the matter of the Aswan Dam. Soviet aircraft, anti-aircraftmen, advisers, some thought even pilots, had thereafter swarmed in. The strategic minds were at the point of paranoia; at a minimum we should encourage the Israelis to put an end to it all. Then the Russians were all sent home.

Of late, in that general part of Africa, attention has been on Ethiopia. This was once a bastion of the free world; now military men we trained have come dangerously under Soviet influence as they fight against Somalia, once a Soviet

enclave but now itself a bastion of the free world. In one powerful strategic view, Somalia must not be defeated because Ethiopia, and thus Russia, would then dominate the oil routes into the Red Sea. This is where long-range guns come in, one gathers.

To the south and west in Angola, the strategists, earlier on had translated their alarm into actual intervention. The former Portuguese colony was by way of becoming a Cuban and Soviet colony — to the strategic mind a quite plausible exchange. This colony would dominate the supertanker routes to Europe — more of those long-range guns. However, our goal was not to keep out the Cubans and Soviets but to make that imperial effort as costly as possible and to prove that, after Vietnam, we were still capable of response, however insane. This story has now been told in impressive and convincing detail by John Stockwell (*In Search of Enemies*, W.W. Norton and Co., 1978). It should not be missed. Since strategic thought survives by ignoring experience, it has a highly professional interest in avoiding accounts such as this. By the same token, all who are alarmed about the tendency toward such strategic thinking should welcome Mr. Stockwell's book, which is also both well-written and interesting.

The usual final word is now emerging on strategic thought on Angola. Evidently that country wasn't lost either. Its government and economy are being sustained all but exclusively by money from Gulf Oil. That sort of thing takes the edge off a Communist victory. And we are moving to establish friendly relations. One sees again why the global strategists must ignore experience. We have won only when we have resisted the impulse to intervene.

In the old witch-hunting days, on uncovering American overseas aberrations, it was a routine precaution to come up with some counterpart Soviet mischief or misbehavior. That is no longer essential, but there is no escaping the fact that the relentless strategic mind, pervasive and omnipotent, functions in the Soviet Union as the mirror image of American error. And then vice versa again.

Thus it was once central to the Soviet strategic mind that China was part of a wonderfully expansive sphere of Soviet influence. To this end technicians and money were dispatched in quantity. And our strategists saw eye to eye with the Russians. Dean Rusk called China a "Soviet Manchukuo," lacking in even the barest essentials of sovereignty. From this position he retreated to argue that any division between the Soviets and the Chinese was only over the tactics for destroying the free world. For many years James Angleton presided with what seems to have been clinically acute paranoia over counter-intelligence activities. William Colby, in the second of the books that illuminate our strategic operations (*Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA*), Simon and Schuster, 1978), says that Angleton never accepted the Sino-Soviet split as genuine, "at least until a few years ago." It was, Angleton avowed, an artful Communist way of misleading the nonstrategic minds.

Returning to the Soviet strategists, were it professionally permissible for them to reflect on their experience, they would have to concede that Indonesia

and Sukarno were an investment gone sour. And likewise, of course, Ben Bella. And similarly Nkrumah. And in an especially costly way also Egypt. And similarly Somalia. And now possibly Angola. Nor is this all. A few months ago India under Indira Gandhi was held by the best American strategists to be moving dangerously into the Soviet orbit. The Soviet strategists must have been as pleased as ours were worried. Now India is back again in the free world.

The Russian strategists have also, over the years, seen the defection of Albania (which has now again defected, this time from China) and, of course, of Yugoslavia and to some extent of Rumania. Only Poland, Bulgaria and East Germany are imagined to be absolutely firm, and, in the case of the Poles, it is hard to suppose that only Zbig Brzezinski is ethnically at odds with the old Russian rulers. A friend of mine holds that our best strategic minds are merely generous men. Seeing the Russian disaster in the Third World, they seek to intervene in a kindly way to forestall the error and save the Soviets from further trouble. This I doubt.

All joking aside, though it is hard not to have fun, the interventionist records of the United States and the U.S.S.R. in the former colonial world have been, literally, an unmitigated disaster.

The international strategic fraternity has failed or refused to see that no country can seek influence in a culturally different land without reaping a rich harvest of animosity. The poorer the country, the more likely this is to be so. It is a prime tenet of the strategic mind that ideological affiliation overrides nationalist sentiment or passion. We can be certain that it does not. And the poorer the country, the greater can be that certainty. That is because nationalist feeling does not diminish with income, but ideological passion does diminish in the absence of capitalism and thus in the absence of anything to socialize or anything much to protect from socialism. Though the point does not figure in modern strategic thought, in the East or West, it was basic for Karl Marx.

Also where there is no effective industrial and governmental structure, influence is over a vacuum, which is another thought that seems largely to have escaped the exponents of global strategy and balance. Instead, influence, at most, is over individual politicians who can change their affiliation from one day to the next or be changed from one day to the next. Also, to have influence over only one politician can be to alienate the alternatives and the relevant public, as our Vietnam experience so well revealed. So, seeking influence can be a superb design for ensuring that one's influence will come abruptly to an end when the favored politician comes to his end, as later, or more often sooner, he does.

William Colby, though he mentions it as an easily rectified difficulty, is also impressed by the trouble Americans in Saigon had in communicating with Vietnamese and the resulting conflict and misunderstanding. But far more serious is the kind of people who get selected and select themselves for this line

of work. Colby, Stockwell and the other of the semi-licit authors (Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval*, Random House, 1978) are all, intentionally or otherwise, emphatic on this point.

In the last century, colonial influence and power were expressed through pedestrian civil servants — in the British case, hard-working, disciplined, unspectacular men who lived within a fairly firm legal frame. In contrast, the sword arm of relentless global strategy is a romantic egoist in whom bravery or bravado — Colby calls it macho — takes the place of good sense. The most vivid characterization is in Snepp's book. The CIA station chief in Saigon was not merely lacking in common sense; he had lost touch with reality and lived in a world manufactured out of, and peopled by, his own illusions. Snepp's portrait of the men who had been guiding the Vietnamese to democracy, drinking their turn to the helicopters, is also unpleasant. However, the older, orthodox colonial ventures, virtually without exception, were equally notable for their messy end.

Stockwell is also vivid on the American operatives and even more on the local talent with whom they worked. The station chief in Zaire who guided the Angola intervention was an ego-hedonist of startling inadequacy. The money that the CIA sent over to hire mercenaries or win support in Zaire went mostly into a series of larcenous rat holes, which, perhaps, was the one thing better than having it used to sustain combat. In the past I've known quite a few CIA people; most of them were sensible, restrained and undramatic men and women engaged in routine reporting and research. I'm disposed to think that the serious and careful public servant is still the norm. But this, it is terribly clear, isn't the kind of person who is attracted to the strategic and mostly covert enterprises.

It could be supposed that Stockwell and Snepp, since they published without authorization, were inclined to give an unduly unfavorable picture of these CIA troops. Otherwise they would have gone through channels. Unfortunately for this theory, the worst view of all is given by William Colby. He shows, without quite intending it, that the irrationality and dementia in covert and strategic operations also occurred at the top. Were the men of strategic mind as effectively self-protective in suppressing books as in ignoring experience, they would have buried William Colby and let the others go.

Colby's case for irrationality is made partly by exclusion. He never asks why we are competing with the Chinese or the Soviets in Vietnam or elsewhere. Or what we accomplish. The competition itself is the only and sufficient thing. Find a Communist and automatically you react. He also powerfully reinforces my earlier point about national leaders. No matter how unpopular these may be, Colby is unswerving in their support. At the same time (since, to his credit, he would rather be inconsistent than dishonest), in talking of Vietnam he concedes the unpopularity as well as the peculiarity of, for example, the ghastly Nhus and affirms his strong belief that the war had to be won with the people. This isn't the only inconsistency that he refuses to paper over. We lost, in his

view, because we didn't take "into account the determination of the Vietnamese, Southern as well as Northern, to make their own decisions and fight each other to decide what sort of life Vietnam should lead." But we were winning almost up to the day of the helicopters. Then Congress cut back on military aid.

Colby is, however, most devastating on the kind of people who carry out the policy. The illicit authors tell of romantic incompetence at the bottom; Colby shows that irresponsibility went right to the top and that misjudgment and the resulting proven capacity for disaster in nowise detracted from reputation. Few men ever so admirably proved themselves incapable of prudent thought as Allen Dulles. In less than a year he was responsible both for the Gary Powers flight over the Paris Summit and the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs. He was then sacked for his errors but wrote a book on the craft of intelligence for which, it has recently been said, he recruited none other than E. Howard Hunt as the expert ghost. Colby remembers Dulles as a "superlative spymaster," and ends his book with a biblical tribute to his insight. Similarly Richard Bissell, who was immediately in charge of the Bay of Pigs (and in earlier times a very competent economist), emerges from that disaster as a "brilliant, intense" man. One of the CIA men whom I did know and mistrust was the late Desmond FitzGerald. He was charming, uncontrollably activist and given dangerously to self-dramatization. When he came to India, I was deeply uneasy and spent a fair amount of time, as I've often told, assuring myself that I knew what he was doing. Here is Colby on FitzGerald: "I urged that Des FitzGerald be chosen [to be responsible, for God's sake, for all covert activities], but I cautioned Helms that he would have to maintain tight control over him to keep him from charging off into some new Bay of Pigs. Helms did choose FitzGerald . . ." Colby, the source of this remarkable personnel judgment — the selection of the man who would have the single most alarming job in the United States government — went on himself to be head of the whole works.

It was the men of relentless strategic mind who guided Lyndon Johnson on Indo-China and sent him back to Texas. It was their operatives who went in to bug the Democratic National Committee and sent Richard Nixon back to San Clemente. (Colby disavows Howard Hunt, though he couldn't possibly have been more dangerous than FitzGerald.) I don't especially believe in the rule of three. But I would urge Jimmy Carter to watch those relentless strategic minds.