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# RUMORS, CONSPIRACIES AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE OF WORLD POLITICS

W. SCOTT THOMPSON

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In a lecture at Oxford in 1966, the late Isaiah Berlin argued that international relations was not susceptible to the terse application of "science," that its lessons were elusive and suggestive, and often emerged from personal experience which only slowly, over time, lent itself to organization into more general propositions. Much intellectual blood has been spilled in the interval arguing that position, for or against. On balance, Sir Isaiah, in my opinion, has got the better of the argument. In the thirty years I have spent, in a fairly routine life among academia, government and think tanks, much of what I have learned about world politics could have been better taught by John le Carré than by most American political "scientists." My point here is perhaps better illustrated than argued, somewhat idiosyncratically, using my own experiences in the world of conspiracy and rumor. I hope, however, that some more theoretical points about the American persona in world affairs during the past generation—or that part where rumor and conspiracy abound—can, if only implicitly, emerge.

## The American Persona

We have had the privilege of bestriding the globe, betaken as the powerful, often even as conquerors. However, our actions have not been without consequences or implications—and protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, but taken as proof of the proposition. The extent of this privilege, one with (as we will see) both positive and negative effects, is well illustrated by my own graduate school experience. As a first year student at Oxford in 1964, several friends and I ventured off to the world's diplomatic frontier,

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sub-Saharan Africa. We were determined to do the whole continent. With me were Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, lately an MP of Edinburgh and the son of the powerfully connected Duke of Hamilton, premier peer of Scotland; Bill Butler, now an environmental lawyer in Washington, then a Marshall scholar; and a friend from my Stanford days who later became a legendary, but sometime incarcerated, drug dealer. We armed ourselves with rubber stamps from our college kitchens, big chunks of engraved school stationary, and sufficient chutzpah. We wrote the foreign minister, American ambassador, and assorted other worthies along the way, of each of the twenty or so countries we had planned to visit, informing them of our arrival plans, our intention to write articles or theses on *their* work in that country, and most importantly, our *availability* – for meetings, dinners, whatever.

To our astonishment, we got exactly what we fantasized, including official cars at airports, and meetings with tribal kings, country presidents, prime ministers, guerrilla warriors—you name it. When it looked like appointment

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secretaries failed to understand our import, we supplied them with consequential-looking letters, stamped with our buttery's insignia, or passed out duty-free gin from the last airport. This last was to save our life during the Congo's first civil war. We escaped across the great river to Brazzaville, thanks to the three bottles of Tanqueray we produced for a ferry operator who had numerous more qualified claimants to space on his leaky boat.

And all this because three of us were Americans on the outposts of the New Frontier. James, as our most distinguished—he was president of the Oxford Union—had his family contacts in East Africa. But at least in West Africa, before James could join us, the mere fact of our being Americans at Oxford had a defining effect on our targets. Everywhere we went we found pictures hanging on walls of our recently slain president, which indicated that our country was not only feared but esteemed. We got much benefit: even on Kwame Nkrumah street, in Dar es Salaam, the locus of freedom fighters for the frontline states, we could bemuse ourselves with our accosters' denigration of our country's imperialism as they fished for scholarships to our universities.

Some of the results of the American persona were more personally consequential on a later visit. Consider an experience I had in West Africa during the Vietnam war while researching my Oxford doctorate. I was living in the reasonably spacious house of a University of Ghana professor on leave. The recent visit of a friend from Nigeria, in whose honor I had given a party, who happened to be a British diplomat in Lagos but was more prestigiously known as seventh in line to the British throne (he was HRH Prince William of

Gloucester), might have also contributed to the notion that I had other roles than that of a mere doctoral candidate living in Ghana. So might the presence of duty-free foods on my table, at a time of great hardship in Ghana, though these came from my girlfriend, a diplomat at a European embassy. I had a steward, a *Fra-fra* from northern Ghana, who lived with me, and even in those days not all doctoral candidates had full-time menservants. In reality, however, I afforded my lifestyle by publishing articles in *Atlantic Monthly*.

To the party had come, as it happened, a reasonably senior and very experienced Indian diplomat with whom I was friendly. We had had a fairly intense discussion about the Vietnam war, its brutality, and the harm it was doing America in the world. I therefore assumed that he took me to be a part of the larger radical anti-war sentiment, which American students were driving world-wide. I found the unctuousness towards Americans, on the part of Indians, and of which he had his fair share, less unpleasant in those days than I do now; and it has in any event declined.

Come the new week I received a peculiar call from the Indian diplomat, asking permission to come out—ten miles—to Legon to visit. I of course acceded to his request, though I expressed my willingness to come to the High Commission in Accra. Graduate students, after all, are used to meeting people on *their* turf, but in this case mine was his choice. He came with a case of Scotch, the usual stock-in-trade for the exchange of serious information and favors. Indeed, it was the customary price a particular American diplomat in Accra paid for intelligence, from a famous drunk, who happened to be a powerful cabinet member. Over the next hour ensued a remarkable discussion—or monologue.

It turned out now that America was India's fellow democracy; indeed, we were the two largest. But what we had in common went far deeper, in fact, into our mutual souls. There was an instinctive consanguinity between our two nations, and we needed to find more ways to show that kinship. The Scotch was open, and I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. "Ah," he went on, there were times when two such similar countries could help each other given that there remained, still, some differences. Now we were on to it, I thought. Differences, ones needing resolution. But ho! It turned out to be the reverse. It was the differences that opened doors!

The differences were no less than our skin color, the fact that India, as a leader of the dark-skinned countries, a leader of the non-aligned movement, could venture where we could only fear to tread. Not to put too fine a point on it, India could help America where it could not help itself.

I was dumbfounded. It was my first experience of, at the least, diplomatic tergiversation. And my friend continued to look deep into my eyes. Perhaps

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for the first time, I was at a loss for words, a vacuum which the Scotch helped to fill, not for the last time. I made some modest suggestions—but they turned out to be too modest. Essentially, India would help America settle in Vietnam. At this time Lyndon Johnson was sending emissaries around the globe trying to open doors for a political settlement in Vietnam, without however stopping the bombing of that country. India was now proposing to offer its *bona fides* with its fellow-nonaligned, or so it seemed, to effect a settlement.

Had he suggested that he and I go to Mars I would have been less surprised. It took me a while to wonder, and put to words, whether there was to be a quid to the pro. He was offended. It was our kinship, our democratic affinities, that drove this generous offer. Luckily, Rochefoucauld's observation that "hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue" stopped me from full effusion.

On his departure I was in a moral confusion. Apparently, my friend was under the misapprehension that I could act on his assertions. Why else the whiskey? But I was *not* an employee of the United States government. Indeed I had recently been turned down for a particular (and visible) U.S. government position. He thought otherwise. I was, in Intelligence (and traditional Marxist) parlance, to be an *objective* agent—one who *bon gré mal gré* carries a

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mission irrespective of whether he knows what he is doing. But I was not a *subjective* agent, one who willed, was conscious of, his acts; my Indian friend continued to believe otherwise.

I resolved. I called a friend at the embassy—someone who was to become famous in due course—Jack Matlock, lately U.S. Ambassador to Moscow. He averred no surprise whatsoever that the Indian had come to my house, asked me to say nothing more on the phone, and requested that he come out to my house. I again offered to come to town, but again I was the one doing the favor. He drove to Legon, without, however, bringing whiskey. He wanted to know every detail, including ones which had to be dredged from my unconscious; I hadn't

known after all what was important about what had transpired, even at its end—that is the essence of being an *objective* agent. All my friend would say is that what had happened was not unimportant, but was not singular either. The incident was part of an international *démarche*; apparently in most capitals of the world, something similar between an Indian diplomat and a chosen American had transpired. There *was* a quid: though the internet was long in the future, I could quickly discover that India was suffering famine, and PL-480 foods, spilling out of American storage bins, were the only solution. If India were to have made this suggestion or request through traditional diplomatic channels, the failure of its socialist model and its willingness to play running dog would have been all too apparent to everyone. Deniability at the

least was ensured by using a network of presumed, deeply covered CIA personnel all over the world.

### Accusé

If it is discomfiting to be used, and used in a way where the user incorrectly attributes a false identity to the "agent," it is much less pleasant to be accused of that identity against one's chosen mission. There are numerous contexts where Americans, especially during the Cold War, have been all too publicly accused of being CIA agents. In 1976 I was in Lagos, at a time of deteriorating relations between Nigeria and the U.S. government, for whom I was then openly working, as an assistant to the secretary of defense. The very powerful foreign minister General Joseph Garba was, we had reason to believe, providing a diplomatic umbrella for the Soviet provision of massive arms shipments to the Marxist MPLA in Angola. Vietnam had already fallen, and the American government was trying to turn itself around to prevent an international rout, as we perceived the situation at the time: Angola had become the touchstone of international politics. I was in a group discussion with the foreign minister in an open argument. He suddenly cut me off with the accusation that I was a CIA agent. The discussion was ended, through *ad hominem* means, not by fact. In the third world prior to the age of Reagan, this was all that needed to be said; one no longer existed.

My own feeling at the time was that which agency I served really didn't matter; I was an agent of the American government, whether I worked for the Agency for International Development, USIA, or the CIA. But it did matter. The CIA had so nefarious a reputation that the mere suggestion thereof cut off any attempt at negotiation. But assumptions of CIA employ can be as damaging. On that same trip I attended a party thrown by a senior U.S. embassy official, and mid-way the ranking Nigerian guest, who had taken an instant dislike to me, whispered audibly in the ear of another the famous three letters. From that point on it mattered not what I said.

When I first joined this world of real international relations, the falling apart of the intellectual apparatus of the CIA, the Congress of Cultural Freedom and its spill-overs was rapidly progressing. This was 1967 and the opposition to the war in Vietnam was having its multiplier effect throughout the academy. I had long known how intertwined the government (and the CIA in particular) was with academe, and this provides a glimpse into how much we have changed. As a Stanford undergrad five years earlier, I was driving on El Camino Real one spring day to hear on the radio that the "Communists" (can you imagine the reaction to that word today?) were holding a giant youth conference in Helsinki, and one of its aims was the propagation of faith and the infiltration of youthful souls, including American ones, in great number. I vowed to fight this nefarious assault on "young American minds," and consulted campus Wise Men, of whom one, the vice president for development, thought he "might know" someone who could finance my idea of a Stanford

reverse infiltration of the gigantic congress of world communist, or world communizable, youth.

Amazingly, at every turn, doors opened, airline tickets appeared, great people came up to help. I flew to Washington to see Attorney General Bobby Kennedy, who in the days of the Kennedy family's incorporation of America saw Anybody with an Idea (including, self-evidently, Stanford sophomores). His office packed me out to Langley in his car to see his people there, including a case officer who tracked communist youth efforts. These CIA officials were testing me, and spent a great deal of time trying to convince me that the forty-plus year old tough 'youths' from Prague and Moscow weren't kids who'd confront us on a level playing field. We might as well give up in advance.

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It wasn't my courage or still less my knowledge that convinced the CIA that they had better help; it was my bloody-mindedness. Ego had come to the rescue. My "handlers" reluctantly decided that they had better work with me and pass me along to their own academic front. I was in the meantime suitably awed by the seeming power of Langley—it was to be a continuing ride downhill from then on for that estimable institution.

Now for the story. They sent me to New York to see their all-but-open front, the admirables of the "New World Foundation," high up on the Hudson River, which existed with some manner of cover operations of a vaguely academic and student-oriented nature. There I was introduced to none other than Gloria Steinem, who

seemed to be the real power within it, otherwise shared with a charming Rhodes scholar named Dennis Shawl, who commuted between Oxford and New York to Fight Communism.<sup>1</sup> They were coordinating a national effort like ours at Stanford, with the difference that they had been at it for over a year and had not come up with the results we already had: an impressive delegation of thirty student leaders, all funded in less than a month. But they assured me that they would have great help networking, liason, preparation, from their other people, including Barney Frank of the National Students Association, and the even then famous Al Lowenstein,<sup>2</sup> at the time our assistant dean but already the pied piper of liberal academe. And we would have the benefit of none of this and so might as well have throw in the towel. Indeed, Lowenstein openly tried to obstruct our efforts at Stanford until he saw that we would succeed regardless, at which time he too got on our train, but not without a little blood on his face. So by this time I had lost some of my innocence. The upper stratum of political American academe, the student stratum thereof, that is, had an octopus-like relationship with the CIA. The cause

of freedom had elastic demands. But we would press ahead with or without their help. And I could pretend to myself that we were, somehow, acting alone.

There was one last footnote to the story. We got the money for more than twenty-five of Stanford's finest to go to Helsinki. Jim Woolsey went, Tom Grey, now a distinguished professor of law at Stanford, went. I did not. I received a mysterious phone call at some point from a person whose name was not familiar, but whose familiarity with what we were doing was sufficient to give him *bona fides*. He told me not to go to Helsinki. It would not be good for my future "political career." I said I had taken care of that, as I planned an academic career. He said it might also not be good for my health. That I understood a bit more clearly. But a free trip—and I had "raised" the money—was a free trip. There was even a stop-over in London. This wasn't fair.

He had anticipated this objection. Were I to apply for a summer job at the Democratic National Committee, with access to the Kennedy White House almost across the street, he had reason to believe rapid action would be taken on my desire. *Mirabili dictu*, he was right. Almost by return mail my application was accepted and there, with so little time left in that golden twilight of the American imperium over which JFK presided, I went, my first time to live in the city I thought to be of my destiny. All, I still presume, courtesy of that powerful all-knowing agency across the Potomac.

### CIA Spotting

A perennial game in international relations was trying to figure out who the CIA case officers were in each foreign country. This process went two ways: Americans figuring out which of their fellow countryman was under cover, and foreign nationals nailing the diplomats and runners who worked for the U.S. government. I was once staying with an inexperienced U.S. ambassador in Thailand, who for my benefit had a party at the residence for the entire political section. One of the attendees at the party seemed particularly acute, too much so to be an ordinary diplomat; and his wife was rather better dressed than the others. On these two not irrelevant data I knowingly commented in our after-dinner "debriefing," using a time-honored ploy to get, or confirm, information—namely to drop a presumption of that which you are trying to nail down. The ambassador, attributing more savvy to me than I deserved, made a basic mistake. "Yes, he's the key guy for *them* in the section...you figured it out. You must be discreet about this." But with knowing one *fact*—not a surmise, a hypothesis, or a guess—I could now put together the entire network within the embassy. The Soviets worked likewise to build their certain knowledge of our intelligence network: they started with one fact from which they could derive all knowledge. All the cold war exposes of American (or Soviet) intelligence networks proceeded from the same method.

Two years after that, when I was serving in the front office of the Defense Department, I had to work through mountains of CIA reports every day, most

of which were tedious but some of which were breathtaking. The hourly reports on Franco's inexorable decline in the fall of 1975 revealed that there was, as in so many other places one presumes, a physician on our payroll—fairly tedious and a waste of money surely. But the breadth and depth of people working for America inside other governments in high places astonished me and often produced remarkable insights into events abroad, of which we made ever so little use. At one point it seemed obvious that one of our informants was an Indian cabinet member—and indeed a later revelation confirmed my suspicion. Foreign ministers, editors, ambassadors, journalists—so

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many had answered the call for "freedom" and agreed, in writing, to work for the U.S. government for pay.

During this time Bill Colby, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), sent his long-time friend, the legendary Campbell 'Zup' James, to London's station to give him a chance to resurrect his career as a case officer (his cover having been blown in the 1960s in Thailand). Zup was from the rich, old and aristocratic James family, and he had earned his spurs by helping to bring Laos to neutrality in the 1960s, often (it was said) by paying for black tie dinners in the rain forest ferried in on elephant back. Meanwhile in Britain a nasty tug of war was going on between Prime Minister Heath and the American government over a minor issue. Soon after his arrival, Zup dropped in on "White's," a posh men's club up from Pall Mall, and found Mr. Heath sipping sherry. That kind of contact enabled Zup to "settle" the conflict there and then. Just imagine Bill Clinton walking the block and a half to the Metropolitan Club at six for a beer and having a chat with another member, a European diplomat, whom he hadn't seen in several years, and whom he dealt with as an equal, a fellow member of the club. Imagine him settling a trade dispute on the spot, which is what

had happened at "White's." But when Zup reported this at the country team meeting the next morning, he was shipped out of town that very afternoon.<sup>3</sup> The solving of serious problems, let alone turf, should never get in the way of maintaining hierarchy!

In the nature of America's extraordinarily intimate involvement with a number of countries, we had a number of allies within. Though the real facts are beginning to emerge as to who they were, during the Cold War, a plausible accusation of working for the CIA in some countries was the kiss of death. On the basis of the little I do know—of who really did work, clandestinely,

for the U.S. government—the charges were usually wrong. Alejandro Melchor, for example, long the Philippine Executive Secretary—often the number two position in that government—had so “American” an accent (he had gone to high school in Washington before attending Annapolis), and had worked so closely with American military, AID, diplomatic business and other personae that opponents of the government and those typecast as “anti-American,” whispered that he was “CIA.”

He was too important for that. No one would have been so stupid as to try to recruit him: he was above graft and corruption. He respected the United States in any case, and had hard theory regarding the need of his country, for which he sought more patriots, to work intelligently and purposively with the U.S.; I have other reasons for knowing that he did not work for the CIA. I recall that some years ago I intervened with a former Fletcher student in the consular section of the United States embassy to help Melchor get visas for his personal staff who were accompanying him on a trip to America. I do not think a CIA agent, at his level, would have needed that help. I was amused, on a recent visit to Bangkok, when an enormously influential Thai statesman surreptitiously showed me the brass plaque the CIA had given him for his cooperation over several decades. He noted that he couldn't even keep it at home, so quickly would its meaning be misunderstood. Its meaning for me was precisely that he *wasn't* ever a CIA Asset (though surely he was an asset).

As we approach the millennium, however, in the post-cold war world, bereft of enemies, striding the globe like that colossus with which Proust concludes his three thousand page novel that started literature in this century, I feel lonely, sad. The joke prevails about the Russian who gripes to his wife that his loud complaints at the butcher's—at the absence of all meat—brought only the realization that the KGB couldn't shoot him because “they had no bullets.”

The American version of the joke is what happened during my sabbatic leave last year in Thailand. I was a visiting scholar at Chulalongkorn University, but was also invited to testify at an official inquiry into the allegations by the CIA and U.S. government that a one-time prime minister-designate was a *drug* runner, so much worse now than a communist! I had information that he was not, though it was much too late to fetch him the premiership that the charge had denied him. The chairman of the inquiry was no less than Thailand's elder statesman, Dr. Thanat Khoman, Founder of ASEAN, several times our guest at Fletcher.

How the world had changed: in November of 1997 Dan Arnold, a former Chief of Station (COS) came to Bangkok to buttress my claim that Narong Wongwan was no drug runner, that the CIA may have manufactured the evidence for, presumably, budget-making purposes on Capitol hill. Shame! And Arnold, the former COS, is a man who elicits respect in the kingdom from the inner-most sanctum of Chitrlada (the seat of King Rama IX) to the outposts of (what is still) the Thai economic colossus.

The point of the story is different however. Soon after our testimony, which was featured on the front pages of every Thai paper, a very prominent former

cabinet member attacked me, not as a CIA errand-runner (I was, after all, implicitly attacking the CIA), but as a logger! The new, environmentally-correct, equivalent to a CIA agent in time past. I was fearful that my credibility in conducting my research on Thailand's quest for Tiger status was now compromised.

I was saved. At Chulalongkorn University, a large campus at Bangkok's center, there are guest flats available to scholars for a nominal sum, less than

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a tenth the price of a room at a prestigious hotel. I have almost always stayed there. When the community within which I circulated learned I was staying at the university (so much more protected from the pollution, I could jog, enjoy the intellectual company of students, etc.), the notion that I was paid to so testify at Dr. Thanat's Inquiry dried up in the hot tropical sun. The belief that hundreds of thousands of dollars had gone my way correctly went up with the pollution. For as a scholar with hopes of coming back, I had bigger fish to fry than to meddle in pay-offs, even if principle hadn't stepped in. The Thai were so used to Americans riding high, and so accustomed to graft and corruption in official circles, that it was taken

as a given that I had been well-paid, until they saw that I wasn't spending money in the customary manner of my forebears.

In the *remous* of the affair, I found out that the attacker, the former Thai cabinet Minister, was indisputably in the pay of the CIA. Hosanna—what a discovery! Not a rumor, a *fact* again, of which there are so few in world politics. So now I knew why he had attacked me.

There were debts to be paid. At lunch with Dr. Thanat, I mentioned that B., the former cabinet member, as much his enemy as mine, was a CIA agent, paid and certified. The ensuing conversation went as follows.

"Of course he's a CIA agent. I've always known he was a CIA agent, and said so." "Your Excellency, I'm saying something quite different. B. *is* a CIA agent." The longest of pauses followed. The Founder of ASEAN, perhaps the foremost diplomat of Asia in the twentieth century, next to Chou En-lai, looked up at me. "Je comprends."

The world of conspiracy and rumour had changed.

The CIA is a terribly wounded agency right now. It is difficult to remember the awe it inspired and fear it elicited. When then DCI R. James Woolsey came as late as 1995 to teach a class of my course in "The Making of U.S. Foreign Policy," I had a mile-long line up of would-be class participants—and a ring of security men around Fletcher throughout his visit. Oddly, his staff

told me foreigners would not be welcome; they would inhibit candor. We faced them down; no foreigners, no visit—our victory in itself a harbinger of the agency's decline. In the event we had a typically Fletcher gathering: Vietnamese, English, Americans, among others. I wonder how many students would know the name of the present DCI. A friend of mine abroad, no longer able to share the lunch bill or to alternate treats for dinner, recently bemoaned the diminution of agency funding, as if I would understand. Later, I did: the American network has shriveled up all over the globe, even as new, open, ones thrive in the age of information technology.

### Psychology and Belief Systems

So what does this all add up to? We can enlarge our scope—and depth of field—and look at the great changes in the world in the most recent period of international relations. Surely the breakup of the Soviet Union is the most important of the entire century. Rumor and conspiracy, in the study of international relations, are only interesting where they bear on politics and are manipulated for political purpose. They certainly played a great role in that stupendous event. Nor is it difficult to establish the enormous import of psychological belief in world politics, a double cousin of rumor and the world from which conspiracies derive.

I happened to have some experience of this in the first Reagan administration. I held the dubious distinction of being, in effect, chief of foreign propaganda, that is to say, all external "information" going through the office of the Associate Director, USIA. As such I was brought into something then so secret that on my secretary's appointment book it was referred to merely as "the group." The meetings were convened by Tony Dolan, the main White House speechwriter who coined the artful phrase "evil empire,"—words that more than any others launched a crusade that helped bring down the Kremlin's walls. I was the junior member (and was there because "I had horses," that is, usable public assets); Bill Casey, then DCI, was the ranking member.

Without getting into all our activities at this point, let me say that our premise was that rumor and conspiracy might well be good things, since our brief was to change popular opinion in America into accepting the possibility that the Soviet Union could be undone—this at a time when no one took such an assertion seriously. Who had how much responsibility for what ensued will be disputed by historians for decades, but suffice it to say that I went onto this committee in 1982 unconvinced that we could affect the Soviet destiny more than marginally. When I came back to Fletcher in 1986 I had no doubt that Moscow was doomed. And though of course the Russian and East European peoples get the lion's share of the credit, it was clear that Reagan administration activities had played a critical role. Consider merely the matter of psychological confidence in the Politburo; President Reagan was convinced that these were men with low international self-esteem, whose confidence he could pummel with a few well-chosen taunts, (not to mention creation of the Strategic Defense Initiative) and he was proved right. Our com-

mittee's job was, in parallel, to shift the belief within the United States and within our alliance that the Soviet Union was invulnerable; that, *per contra*, it might disappear in a cloud of smoke from its own fires, as Dolan liked to insist; or a victim of its own demographics and history, as I and the more conservative view among our number, endorsed. If nothing else, we accomplished a change of belief without our own administration. Almost by stealth we allowed to surface the notion of a great and secret conspiracy within our number, that a Soviet seizure or implosion was possible, plausible, even likely. Money was channeled into the hands of people who could write about such possibilities. Powerful inter-agency committees were let in on our secret—the Soviet Union was vulnerable, and President Reagan wanted results. The truth is, we didn't do very much, though we had some very enjoyable dinners. But the way we did the little we did, I think, had a bracing effect within the U.S. Government at the least.

The rest of course *is* history, and if anyone doubts that the psychological climate that Washington helped to create played no role in the Soviet dissolution, he might well ask the dissidents of the 1970s and 1980s, who were thusly emboldened to act and to press the limits of regime restraint.

In any event, Washington neared the millennium in an extraordinary and unique historical position. It had started this half century similarly; a European diplomat posted to the capital as a young man in the early 1950s, said, with gusto that Washington was....*Rome!* In between, however, the road was bumpy. It was not a certain thing that the United States would win the cold war—indeed from the 1950s through the 1970s it all too often looked like we were losing it. Yet looking back, I am struck by how much we ignored the evidence of our own singularity. Americans in world affairs seemed either to be innocents assuming our omnipotence (Senator Helms comes to mind), or innocents like myself who went through life underestimating our import and impact. Throughout, rumor and conspiracy played a large part.

### Notes

1. He is now a lawyer in Akron.
2. See the biography *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993) for a fair analysis of this extraordinary—but deeply conflicted—icon of the 1960s and 1970s. Also see my own *Price of Achievement: Coming out in Reagan Days* (London: Cassell, 1995), pp 23-25 for an account of my involvement with Lowenstein who, on his arrival at Stanford, had made a wide-ranging pitch for me to come under his protection and direction. Looking back at it it seems clear that our inability to work together was complicated by our denied sexual orientation (his continued so until his untimely death). Ironically, I was close to the fellow student, Dennis Sweeney, who, almost twenty years later, gunned Lowenstein down in New York.
3. My source here is both the late William Colby, and James himself, then a cousin-in-law of mine.

