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President's Notes

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President's Notes

It is my cherished belief that education deals with the accumulation of information, the encouragement of thoughtfulness and the growth of intellect to cope with the challenges of complexity and change.

At the conclusion of each academic year, we convene at the Naval War College a forum on Current Strategy which helps our graduating students assess their progress in pursuit of those three objectives. Sponsored by the Secretary of the Navy, this annual Current Strategy Forum brings together about 300 distinguished Americans to examine a topic of current importance. Prominent speakers focus attention on the full scope of the issue under examination. Usually, after each major speech in Spruance Auditorium, the visitors and our students retire to classrooms for seminar discussions on the issue, under the leadership of our faculty.

The fundamental goals of the Secretary's forum are two. The first is to anchor in the minds of our students the fact that they have achieved impressive intellectual growth. We do this by having them measure their articulation of their positions on a complex subject against the critical judgment of a difficult audience, the experienced and distinguished visitors who sit in the seminars with them. The second goal is to acquaint our visitors with what we achieve here in educating military officers who have proven

themselves as operators. An ancillary objective is to generate a milieu which gives busy executives who are interested in the Naval War College a chance to recharge their own intellectual batteries and reinvigorate their own thought on major issues of the day.

One year ago, the Current Strategy Forum focused on the "Sources of Soviet Conduct and the American Response." The examination of change in the U.S.-Soviet relationship could not have been more timely in the face of what appeared at the time to be some of the most momentous events seen in the world in decades. In the wake of the Moscow summit last year, we asked ourselves if that "Moscow Spring" signalled the onset of a thaw which would prove to be the end of the cold war, or if it merely marked another phase of that struggle similar to the short-lived "Prague Spring."

This June at the Current Strategy Forum, as we met to consider "U.S. Strategy in a Changing Security Environment," the scope of last year's conference and the changes in the Soviet Union which led to our choice of theme for 1988 already seem dwarfed by the incredible events of the past year—especially those of the month just before the conference. In retrospect, we could well have concluded last year's conference with the old vaudevillian line: "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" Consider just a few of the events of the past year:

- Chinese leaders welcomed a smiling Mikhael Gorbachev to Beijing, apparently signalling an end to the 30-year-old Sino-Soviet split, but found they they had to bring him in by a side door, in effect, because the front door on Tiananmen Square was blocked by their own people hailing the Russian communist leader as a symbol of freedom. No sooner had Gorbachev returned home than a maelstrom of political aspirations threatened to engulf an aging Chinese leadership increasingly out of touch with the aspirations of the nation's one billion citizens.

- Back in Moscow, Gorbachev convened a somewhat freely elected Soviet Congress which included in its membership such diverse personalities as Andrei Sakharov and Boris Yeltsin—a Congress in which delegates openly criticized everything from the Soviet Army—withdrawn from Afghanistan earlier this year—to the KGB, Gorbachev himself, and even his wife, Raisa. Meanwhile, Soviet republics from Southwest Asia to the Baltic have been demanding more autonomy, if not outright self-determination.

- Reportedly on the verge of disintegration in the face of Gorbachev's shrewd diplomatic and military initiatives, NATO, in a dramatic turnaround, unexpectedly found itself unified and revitalized by President Bush's conventional arms reduction proposals.

- The Polish Communist Party conceded a landslide defeat in that country's first open elections since before 1926, and offered the once-outlawed Solidarity union a role in governing the nation. Next door, Hungary's leadership committed that nation to political pluralism.

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- In Asia, a series of political crises in Japan ironically led investment back to the United States, while to the West, with the summer Olympics safely concluded, students of one of America's staunchest Asian allies—South Korea—marched in favor of reunification with the North and demanded an end to the U.S. presence on the Korean peninsula.

- In Latin America, Panama's Noriega resisted the will of his own people as well as all U.S. attempts to dislodge him; while to the South, Argentina's successful return to democracy has been threatened by runaway inflation leading to food riots.

- Having caused immeasurable misery in his own country through prosecution of an exhausting eight-year war of attrition with Iraq, and untold mischief around the world through sponsorship of terrorism, the Ayatollah Khomeini died, leaving behind a power vacuum and the possibility of further unrest.

This list could go on—for example, we have not even touched on the leadership changes in the U.S. Congress caused by questions of ethics or the arrival of environmental politics as a critical item on the agendas of nations from Brazil to Canada, from New Zealand to the Soviet Union. Almost forgotten, but no less important, are other simmering world hot spots temporarily on the back burner—South Africa, Lebanon and the Middle East, Cambodia, Nicaragua. As Bob Dylan used to sing, “The Times They Are a ‘Changing.’” Some would argue that the current pace of change is the most dramatic since that benchmark year for democratic movement—1848. If so, we truly “ain't seen nothin' yet.”

Many of our civilian guests at this year's Current Strategy Forum came from the West Coast, and I was reminded of Stanford University's motto, “the winds of freedom blow.” That thought echoed among our students and guests. They discussed how those winds threaten to encircle the globe with hurricane force, cutting us loose from some of the moorings which have anchored U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II.

To guide us through our discussions at the Current Strategy Forum, we chose two interrelated frameworks for examining changes.

Firstly, we tried to identify regional and national areas of potential crisis or conflict in the immediate years to come, not only in military terms, but more importantly in the areas of economics and technology.

Secondly, we sought to keep three issues in mind as we proceeded:

- What has changed? What has changed that makes a difference? And what has remained the same?

- What are the United States' national interests in this changing world?

- What *are* the possible responses we might employ to ensure our interests and adjust to the changes taking place?


Providing military officers with the principles and intellectual tools necessary to navigate uncertain, shifting strategic waters has been the

business of the Naval War College for over 100 years. Interacting with the distinguished Americans who were our guests, and responding to the suggestions and leadership provided by our speakers on the platform and our faculty in the seminars, the results were remarkable. Our students passed this practical examination of their growth with credit to themselves. I was approached on a personal basis to be told this by our distinguished guests at the conclusion of the forum. Since then, I have also received a sackful of letters attesting to this achievement, as well as to the extraordinary quality of the forum.

In the years in which Admiral Stephen B. Luce sought to establish the Naval War College, he wrote of what it was he wanted to correct through the education of naval officers. In 1877, seven years before he finally achieved his goal in Newport on Coaster's Harbor Island, he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy:

Extraordinary as it may appear, the naval officer whose principal business is to fight is not taught the higher branches of his profession.

At the conclusion of the Current Strategy Forum, had he been there, Admiral Luce likely would have been pleased with the results of his long, diligent effort. I think we are meeting his goal.


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