

Foreign Service Reporting

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LET ME, first of all, say simply that my family and I appreciate your invitation to be here, and that is probably the understatement of the year.

There have been some very kind remarks about us "old China hands." I particularly appreciate the mention of John Carter Vincent. We all knew him as a staunch friend, and as a capable, courageous and loyal chief.

The group of officers you are remembering today have some things in common—beyond shared experiences in China and in post-China. One of these is that in China we were primarily political reporting officers. But another is that we are all strong-minded individuals. To pretend to speak for this group would be foolhardy—and presumptuous. I speak for myself alone.

If, by some miracle, the clock could be turned back and I had my life to relive, I would still wish to be a Foreign Service officer. But if denied that choice, my second wish would be a career as a foreign correspondent. The link, of course, is the absorbing quest to observe, understand, and report in depth what is really happening in a foreign society: to get beneath the superficial, pick up the important, underlying trends—and from that basis to try to look into the future.

Classified policy matters aside, this common reporting goal often makes natural allies of FSOs and press abroad. Many of the best brains I've picked have been those of newspapermen: American, Chinese, and foreign. A junior officer, nebulously assigned to the American Army in Chungking, would be told to "get lost" if he sought interviews with august figures such as T. V. Soong or Generalissimo Chiang. The same questions might just as well—or even better—be put by a representative of the world press, who *could* get a private interview. It was my good fortune that we had a remarkably able group of correspondents in Chungking during the war.

Obviously, reporting is not merely a glamorous, exciting pastime. It is utterly basic to the intelligent formulation of a realistic foreign policy. And to keeping it up-to-date. Without facts, and an understanding of those facts (which may often be tenuous and largely intangible because they involve people and attitudes rather than quantifiable items in the national balance sheet), our policy makers are flying blind. And even being hard-nosed in a condition of blindness is not to be recommended.

Of course, the Foreign Service officer has many functions other than political reporting: you can name them as well as I. I submit, though, that none is more vital to the country, or more rewarding to the individual, than reporting. It was the best, most satisfying part of my own career. But, again, I was fortunate in having unusual opportunities.

Twenty-three hundred years ago, a Chinese scholar of strategy said: "Know your enemy, know yourself; a hundred battles without danger." Much of our policy toward China and Vietnam since World War II has been a negative example of Sun Tzu's wisdom. Of course, the other side has had problems knowing us.

But the value of reporting is far broader than "knowing the enemy." We must also know and understand the problems and attitudes of friends, and neutrals.

Reporting obviously varies. From some countries (such as the developed, free press countries of Western Europe), the flow of information is so great that Foreign Service reporting may play a relatively unimportant role. Elsewhere, reporting may have to be done from a distance, or under severe limitations. Kremlinology, refugee interviews, the piecing together of rumors try to fill the gap.

Foreign Service reporting becomes vital as we move toward countries that may be small, less developed, non-white, or with cultures and institutions drastically different

from our own.

I have yet to learn of a computerized prediction that Mao's people-based forces would defeat the vastly larger, better-equipped, American-trained armies of Chiang Kai-shek; or that Mao would turn against his party and carry the country with him in the astonishing Cultural Revolution. There is a limit but also much truth in Mao's idea that man and his spirit are more important than machines.

I recently heard a talk by a man who has spent many years, up to the present, as a China-watcher in Hong Kong. His gist was that all the recent American visitors to China since ping-pong diplomacy and the President's visit had learned little that was not already known to his craft in Hong Kong. When the chance came for questions, I had two: Had he applied for a visa to China? And, if granted, would he go? The answer to both was an unqualified affirmative.

Confucius seems *not* to have said: "One picture is worth a thousand words." But perhaps one can coin another phrase: One close look is worth a thousand distant guesses. There is no real substitute for being on the ground. The briefings and lectures I listened to during my recent trip to China meant less than being able freely to walk city streets and country paths and to travel some 6500 miles.

Political reporting, if worthy of the name, is nonpolitical. My two chiefs, Ambassador Gauss and General Stilwell, both anathema to the China Lobby, were both—so far as I know—staunch, life-long Republicans. But their views and reports of the facts in China were inseparable from those of their subordinates whose inclination might be Democratic or plain liberal.

We who served in China during the 1940s have awaited—for what has seemed an excessively long time—the publication of the annual China volumes in the fat, red-bound series, "Foreign Relations of the

United States." They have just reached 1947. The product has been worth a wait. These are an admirable, objective, and complete presentation of the historical record. There has been no attempt, so far as I can see, to doctor that record, to make it look better than it actually was. Everything is there: including reports and views that pointed in directions other than the policy finally adopted. Perhaps I may be bold here with a collective "old China hands" word of appreciation for the uncompromising honesty and high professional quality of these works of the Historical Office. Personally, I shall also look forward with anticipation—hopefully before 1990—to reading what Foreign Service officers on the ground in Vietnam were actually reporting in 1963, 1964, and 1965.

One notable thing about the record shown in the "Foreign Relations" volumes is the broad unanimity in the Foreign Service political reporting from China. A few of us (like John Davies, Ray Ludden, and myself) may have been more ready to propose policy conclusions and recommendations. But in substance, our reports, though they received publicity, and unmerited notoriety, were not different from those of the many other Foreign Service officers reporting from the Embassy and all over the country. I say this, of course, not to spread the onus; but to suggest that any credit for being "right" must be widely shared.

Successive volumes extend the picture. When the "first generation" of reporters became unacceptable to the fixed ideas of Ambassador Hurley, new men were brought in: men with "fresh minds"—supposedly without "bias" or "preconceptions." To meet these standards, it was obviously necessary to assign men who had not been recently in China. Many were assigned without any previous experience in the country. But very soon the reports of all these men came to sound very much like those of the men they had replaced. The "truth" of China did not change.

There's more to reporting, of course, than merely being on the ground. In October 1964 I arrived in Wellington, New Zealand, as Deputy Chief of Mission. It was just before a national election. Ambas-

sador Avra Warren, an old professional, had assigned a young, new-minted third secretary the task of making an analysis and electoral prediction. Pouch day was upon us—our last chance to get a prediction to Washington. The Ambassador thought the third secretary a capable young man—"likely to do well in the Service"—but had grave reservations about his prognosis. The third secretary conceded that the election would be close, but firmly concluded that Labour (the incumbents) would win by certainly three, and probably four seats. "Hell," said the Ambassador, "almost all the press supports the Tories; everyone I know outside the government is going to vote Tory; and everyone tells me the Tories are

. . . much more remains to be done. For example, rather than downgrading the State Department and its "bureaucrats," we should strengthen it, insulate it as far as possible from domestic political crosscurrents and encourage its experts to join in public debate on the major issues. — Editorial, Garden City Newsday, February 4.

going to win." Furthermore, the Ambassador had a theory (call it history or political science) that democracies change parties after a long war.

My *immediate* task was to read the report and advise whether it should go forward. I knew nothing about New Zealand politics. Having transferred direct from Tokyo, there had not even been the chance for a briefing by the country desk. So I talked to the understandably uptight third secretary about his sources, and how he had gone about collecting the information for what appeared to be a superbly documented, realistic analysis. On this basis, I told the Ambassador that I thought we should send it. In contrast to one other Ambassador I have known, he took my advice.

The wait seemed long but election day finally came. Labour did win by four seats, but one seat was so close that for a while it seemed that the margin might be only three.

A few comments. Most important, the report was right—right on the button. That's what the game is all about. But more. The officer had

a talent for developing contacts among the right people—though in this case the right people were clearly to the left of the Ambassador's circle. Furthermore, those contacts led to the development of useful information; we've all seen high-powered social types who "know everybody" but somehow lack a nose for news. And finally, he knew what to do with the information. Some officers accumulate a terrific amount of data in their heads or personal files; but it doesn't mean a thing in the Department if they can't organize it to produce a cogent, timely report.

Also the reporting officer had done his work so well that he had the courage of his conclusions—despite the intimidating effect (even if not intended) of the Ambassador's doubts. The Ambassador deserves credit, too, for a broad concept of reporting, and for willingness to trust the judgment of the officer.

Incidentally, the young third secretary was Marshall Green. The Ambassador's early judgment, that he was a man of promise, was indeed correct.

We have been looking at reporting from the American angle. Perhaps a New Zealand echo of this story may not be irrelevant. In 1948, as some of us will recall, everyone (and I mean everyone) was sure that Truman was going to lose. In a conversation with an officer from New Zealand External Affairs a few weeks before the election, I was surprised to have him say: "What are you chaps so excited about? Our Embassy in Washington tells us that Truman is going to win."

Obviously, to be most effective, the reporting officer needs some freedoms. If his reporting is to get beyond clipping newspapers and collecting published statistics, he should not be overly tied to a desk. If he is going to be able to travel about the countryside and succeed in getting close to people, he may need time, encouragement, and facilities for intensive country specialization and language training—and some assurance that the time committed to gaining such in-depth specialization will not penalize him in the competitive rat-race for promotion. Finally, he needs freedom in his contacts in order to get beyond the local elites and the particular party that, for the time being, may be

holding (or monopolizing) power.

My assignment at the Embassy in Chungking and later for two years with the Army gave me these freedoms in what—for the Foreign Service—was perhaps an almost unprecedented degree. Without those freedoms, my reporting would have been much more limited—and you probably would not have invited me here today.

It is interesting, though, to recall that when I first suggested in January 1943 that the Kuomintang-Communist struggle for power was going to engulf all policy considerations in China, and that the only adequate way to inform ourselves on the attitudes and strength of the Communists was to send Foreign Service reporting officers to Yenan, my proposal was met in the top echelons of FE with much tongue-clucking and grave head-shaking—in a negative direction. I and others did, of course, eventually get to Yenan. But only because there was a change of guard in FE (with men recently in touch with the actual situation in China—such as John Carter Vincent—taking over). And also because, while State approved and desired our going there, it could be done under the convenient guise of our working for the Army.

There are still countries—in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia—where the situation is not unlike that in China during the 1940s. If we keep ourselves in ignorance and out of touch with new popular movements and potentially revolutionary situations, we may find ourselves again missing the boat. The proper measure of such reporting should not be popular sentiment in the United States as reflected in some segments of the press, or by some Congressional committees not charged with foreign relations.

Sometimes, of course, the reporting is in vain. It may, for various reasons be ignored—or, in effect, rejected—by the President and policy-makers in Washington. This has been well discussed by Barbara Tuchman. But, from the viewpoint of the Department, this should not reduce the value of reporting.

There are many countries, as I have noted, where—despite the information explosion of modern news media and academic research—the Foreign Service reporter is still in a

position to be the best, most current, and only steadily available source of reliable information. For State to reduce its flow of sound, reliable reporting from the field is, I suggest, a sure method of slow suicide.

Where does the reporting officer stand in all this? First of all, he has his responsibility to State and the American government. That responsibility is to report the facts conscientiously as he finds them. If the government dislikes or ignores his reports, that does not relieve him from his responsibility as a reporting officer. When Ambassador Hurley resigned in 1945 with strong charges against the reporting of some of us in China, Secretary of State Byrnes replied:

I should be profoundly unhappy to learn that an officer of the Department of State, within or without the Foreign Service, might feel bound to refrain from submitting through proper channels an honest report or recommendation for fear of offending me or anyone else in the Department. If that day should arrive, I will have lost the very essence of the assistance and guidance I require for the successful discharge of the heavy responsibilities of my office.

But the reporter is also in a sense, writing for himself—for his own conception of what good reporting should be, and for his own integrity. Most definitions of good reporting would suggest that it involves more than a mere recital of facts: it also means an ability and willingness to draw conclusions from those facts.

The reporter owes something, too, to history. He watches history being made, wherever he is. It may be a relatively quiet backwater. Or he may be very close to momentous events—as I was to the world-changing revolution of a half billion people—that make insignificant his role as an individual. But whatever the magnitude of the events he observes, or his distance from their vortex, the reports he writes today will be part of the history of tomorrow. And if he writes them when he is young enough, he may see that tomorrow.

I wish I could say, after all this, that the Foreign Service itself has always supported the value of reporting and area expertise. I imag-

ine we can all think of negative examples: they have not been for me take an example.

When the Sino-Japanese commenced and the Japanese occupied Shantung in 1937 and our consul in Tsingtao was Sokobin. He was a capable, enterprising officer—a China specialist of long experience. As is often the case, he had come to have a genuine liking and respect for the Chinese. Eventually, Chinese guerrillas were to be active in Shantung. So the Chinese press was carrying dramatic accounts of heroic exploits in capturing the Japanese-held railways, denying the Japanese the important agricultural and mineral resources of the province. In his post as main port, and making intensive use of excellent contacts in Shanghai and business circles, Sokobin was able to realize the gross exaggeration of these claims. The Japanese were maintaining and increasing their stocks of these strategic materials to

Sokobin did not consider himself a responsible officer needed to be when (or what) to report. He commenced a series of reports, thoroughly documenting the success of the Japanese in countering the guerrillas and in exploiting the resources of their occupied territory. He should, of course, have been commended; but the reaction his reports received was very different. He was upsetting the picture, then the accepted line, of a Chinese resistance not only brave but also effective. Sokobin's reports were harshly appreciated. He was cruelly and unjustly accused of being "pro-Japanese." And, with a perverted sense of justice, his transfer was arranged to Kobe, Japan. He was never returned to service in China.

Sokobin's career might have reached the heights—on which we never know. But in 1947 he finished 33½ years of loyal service as consul in Birmingham.

This was long before McClellan had become a senator. The United States was neutral in the Sino-Japanese War, and there was no outside high level pressure. It was entirely an internal State Department affair: in fact, it was done by the China branch to one of their officers. Perhaps, in valuing the integrity and honesty of field reporting, few are beyond reproach.