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bureaucratic imperatives: the corruption of military intelligence during the Vietnam War. At the 1985 Westmoreland-CBS libel trial, for example, the senior officer charged with estimating enemy strength in 1967 testified that his superiors ordered him to conform to "ridiculously low" official figures. General Westmoreland's reaction to contrary estimates, he declared, "included statements like 'What will I tell the president? What will I tell the Congress? What will be the reaction of the press to these high figures?'" That deception had a profound impact on the course of the war. Though the Tet offensive in Vietnam ended in a Communist defeat, it took the American public, conditioned by optimistic military estimates, by surprise and opened the credibility gap too wide to close.

More serious than any omissions in Laqueur's account, however, are the distortions in his analysis of intelligence breakdowns. Sometimes he even fails to convince that any such breakdown took place. He asserts that "American intelligence in general, and the CIA in particular, had underestimated Soviet ICBM deployment from 1962 onward." His evidence shows no such thing; rather, they underestimated long-range future deployments. The difference is important. His statement implies, quite wrongly, the CIA's inability to count existing Soviet ICBM forces—a capability critical to the success of any future arms-control agreement.

Laqueur would also have us believe that the CIA gullibly believed Soviet ICBMs in the 1960s "were neither accurate nor reliable enough to threaten the hardened silos in which the Minuteman and Titan II forces were deployed." The reader looks in vain for any evidence that the CIA was substantially wrong. The most-recent Air Force and CIA estimates indicate that even late-model SS-18 and SS-19 missiles, far more accurate than the SS-9s of that era, cannot pull off a high-confidence attack against our land-based silos.

When Laqueur does cite evidence, it doesn't always support the intended conclusion. In 1975, he notes, the CIA found reason to double its ruble estimate of Soviet military spending. "This new information made it clear that the Soviet aim was not parity but superiority," he claims. Yet elsewhere he admits that the new estimate "did not affect its appraisal on the size or capabilities of Soviet military forces." In fact, the CIA concluded

that Soviet military production was much less efficient than formerly believed. In total spending, moreover, the Warsaw Pact has always lagged behind NATO—hardly a case of Soviet "superiority." (Of course, the Soviets do have some geostrategic and organizational advantages that make them a serious potential threat to Western Europe.)

Ideology rather than sound scholarship seems to influence many of Laqueur's conclusions. How else can one account for his claim that "the more intelligent [Soviet] young men and women—those of character and integrity—will look for a career outside the KGB, and usually as far away from politics as humanly possible"? You don't have to admire the thuggish and unscrupulous KGB to believe that it is not staffed only by dolts. Since when are character and integrity synonymous with brains, anyway?

Similar ideological dispositions may explain his exclusive focus on bureaucratic foibles to discredit the notion of an invisible government. "I will examine intelligence analysis," he announces, "not covert action, counterintelligence, propaganda, disinformation, or other such topics." Yet those are the very functions that gave rise to the popular term "invisible government" in the first place.

From Laqueur's sanitized account, you'd never know that the CIA sent mercenaries into the Congo, bought journalists and news agencies, directed suicide missions in Cuba, consorted with mobsters, and parachuted SS veterans trained as guerrilla warriors into the Soviet Union. When he does allude to such sensational activities, his account deceives by omission. His glancing mention of "CIA ventures into the field of pharmacology" takes no note of the Technical Service Division's involvement in developing undetectable poisons (including one introduced unsuccessfully into the Congo to kill Patrice Lumumba) and mind-altering drugs (which led to the death of at least one unwitting subject) and in exploring the potential for using "Manchurian candidate"-like assassins, with unwitting dupes drugged by secret agents and then instructed to carry out assassinations.

Such activities are relevant even to Laqueur's narrow focus. No full analysis of bureaucratic influence on intelligence gathering can fail to note the potential conflict of interest posed by the CIA's dual missions of intelligence and covert action. Did not the CIA's commitment to overthrowing Fidel Castro affect its perception of his domestic unpopularity

at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion? Of the link between the two, Laqueur acknowledges only that the shortage of "talented personnel" in intelligence may stem from "the effort (that) had gone into training operators, rather than analysts."

Instead of exposing "a world of secrets," Laqueur illuminates one corner of the espionage community. His account may have value as a balance to the CIA-as-the-source-of-all-evil literature. As a scholarly analysis, however, it lacks sufficient breadth or objectivity to rise above the pack.

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■ **A Country Such As This**, by James Webb, New York: Doubleday (hardcover); Bantam Books, 588 pages, \$3.95 (paper). Born in the mid-'50s, I have many childhood and adolescent memories tinged by images of the Vietnam era—nightly scenes of combat and body counts on the evening news, student protests, funerals for local boys not much older than myself, and many more. On my 18th birthday, I dutifully registered for both the right to vote and the draft, although the selective service system had sent out its last notices two years before. Perhaps as a result of being so close to the turbulence without actually being a part of it, I have always had difficulty in forming a clear understanding of the forces and events that strained the ties of American society more than any time since the Civil War. I suspect that there are many others—probably both older and younger than I—who share the problem.

James Webb's recent novel, *A Country Such As This*, goes a long way toward making sense of the Vietnam-era maelstrom. Webb, currently assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, was one of America's most-decorated Vietnam veterans—earning the Navy Cross, the Silver Star, two Bronze medals for valor, and two Purple Hearts—before returning to graduate from Georgetown University's law school and write his first book, the Pulitzer-nominated *Fields of Fire*.

In *A Country Such As This*, Webb explores the 25 years between 1951 and 1976 through the lives of four graduates of the US Naval Academy (from which

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Webb himself graduated). It is a work vibrant in its realism, no doubt inspired in large part by Webb's own personal experiences, along with those of numerous historians, veterans, former POWs, and wives of former POWs who shared their time and emotions with him in interviews.

It's not only that Webb paints vivid images with words, whether of the interior of a navy Blue Angel jet or a Vietcong prison camp, but that he also populates the book with characters who express intriguing ideas and observations. One scene, for example, has a military bureaucrat in Vietnam briefing a group of visiting members of Congress on the logic of a plan initiated in 1952 under which Vietnamese villagers were forcibly evacuated to almost 12,000 "strategic hamlets" in order to "provide physical security from Viet Cong terrorism and to sever the social ties the VC have established." "We're interested in keeping communism out of South Vietnam," prophetically responds one fic-

tional legislator, "not creating the ideal laboratory conditions for it to grow!"

A Navy pilot ponders "the almost malevolent" way that he and his fellow airmen "were being wasted." "They flew against railroad yards" yet "were not allowed to attack MiG training bases." "They could not attack Soviet missile sites until they were operational, and then, of course, it was like walking down the tube of a cannon."

And from a frustrated general trying to understand the concept of a limited war: "the man sends us against the North day in and day out. Not against targets that will hurt the North Vietnamese, but against 'interdiction targets.' I don't know how many pieces of railroad track I've blown away in the last five months. But I can guarantee you that Russia and China and the other communist countries have been replacing them as fast as we've been blowing them away. The North Vietnamese probably love what we're doing. It keeps their people united. It doesn't really hurt them. And it keeps

the aid rolling in from the communist bloc."

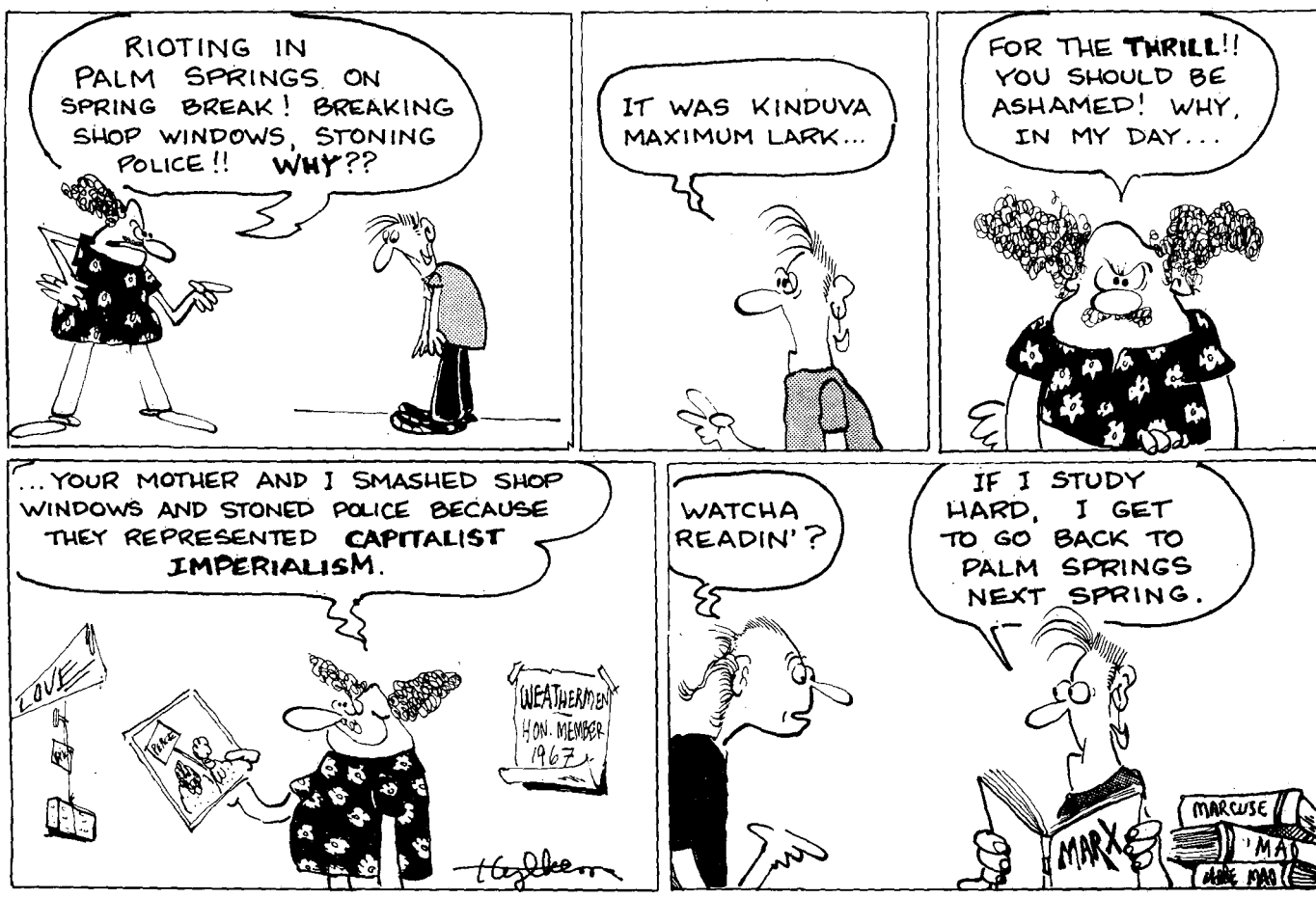
Webb also reserves dialogue for comment on domestic affairs during Johnson's "Great Society" years. As he lounges in a Capitol Hill park, a congressman, anticipating Charles Murray's indictment of Great Society programs in his widely discussed 1985 book, *Losing Ground*, sees a squirrel carefully eating a discarded potato chip. "The squirrel had lost its ability to feed itself," he muses. "Well-meaning people such as himself had tossed it scraps until it became dependent on their kindness, unable to survive without it. *Do we do this to people, too?*"

A Country Such As This is not a new book—it first appeared over two years ago, and the paperback edition has been available since April 1985. But as study of the Vietnam years and their lessons for today loom larger, especially as we ponder intervention in Nicaragua, the book's relevance can only grow.

—Kelly Ross

rudebarbs

Randall K. Hylkema



By Benjamin Zycher

A Gusher for The Politicians

Amid the tolling of church bells and the joyous shouts of aspiring bureaucrats, proposals for a tariff on imported oil once again are breaking the ice on the Washington cocktail circuit.

Rising oil prices were used in the early and late 1970s as a justification for oil-import tariff proposals, presented as a purported means to tax away OPEC profits. Stable prices were used in the mid-1970s as a rationale for more tariff proposals, justified as a tool with which to promote "conservation" and "reduced dependence" on foreign oil.

Now that oil prices are falling sharply, the same people have reemerged with the same inevitable proposals for an oil-import tariff, this time on the grounds that the revenue could be used as a "painless" means of meeting the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit targets, thus circumventing congressional paralysis in terms of budgetary discipline. This is a strange justification for a new tax, as those making this argument presumably never would support efforts by businessmen to hide price increases, that is, to make them "painless." No matter: truth in advertising does not apply to our honorable solons. But that is another story.

Let us note first that the popular argument that an oil tariff be increased on a dollar-for-dollar basis as oil prices fall is inconsistent with the goal of "kicking OPEC." Such a tariff would make US oil prices and thus consumption relatively constant regardless of changes in world oil prices. The Saudis, then, would have reduced incentives to cut their prices; why should they do so if increased sales and revenues would not result?

If the tariff is instead a constant tax per barrel, then it may exert some downward pressure on world oil prices, but the effect is likely to be quite small because the United States does not possess great market power as an oil consumer. Moreover, the tariff that is "optimal" in terms of wealth redistribution from oil producers to the US economy is not the same tariff as that which would maximize revenue to the government. Notwithstanding the beliefs of congressmen, pundits, and bureaucrats, revenues for



the government are not the same as benefits for the economy. Government is hardly renowned for promotion of the general good over more-parochial concerns; only the innocent can believe that the tariff actually chosen will be that which maximizes benefits for the economy as a whole.

Furthermore, the purported "painlessness" of a tariff is an illusion. A price decrease confiscated by the government is a cost to those bearing the tax, regardless of the degree to which it is hidden by price fluctuations. Moreover, the United States is part of the world economy, so that domestic firms competing with overseas ones that are exempt from the tariff will be put at a competitive disadvantage, thus leading to a long-run shift in resource allocation. This shift will move resources toward less-productive uses, exacerbating the costs imposed upon the economy.

And do not allow anyone to tell you that administration of an oil-import tariff is a trivial matter. The tariff would have to be applied to imports of both crude and refined products in order to avoid serious distortive effects, but application of the tariff to products will produce considerable howling in Congress by innumerable special interests. Add to those the inevitable wailing from northeast heating-oil users. Add to those the various interests supporting exemptions for Mexican and Venezuelan crude oil. Add to those the pleas from owners of

refineries in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Do not forget the small refiners, experts at promotion of "competitive disadvantage" arguments for any and all occasions.

Throw in some additional exemptions for petrochemical producers, and you can see that the administrative

complexities, distortions, and absurdities of the Mandatory Oil Import Quota Program (1959-73) and of the price-control Entitlements Program (1975-81) were not, as *Pravda* would put it, accidental. This inevitable complexity, distortion, and cost means that the tariff revenues inexorably will be consumed in efforts to compensate losers and to buy off interests so as to forge a coalition. In reality, an oil-import tariff has little to do with "deficit reduction."

Proponents of an oil-import tariff actually have done us quite a favor: they have provided a new "shoot-anything-that-moves" theory of taxation. If a price rises, impose a "windfall profit" tax; if it falls, impose a "painless" tax. Since all prices in a dynamic economy shift over time, this philosophy puts the government's fingers into every possible pie. Think of the endless possibilities. Electronics prices are falling drastically; we could impose "painless" taxes and solve the technology-transfer problem once and for all. College tuitions are rising; we could impose a "windfall profit" tax and force the campus leftists to find honest work. And the hell with the deficit: we could use the revenues to enrich economists in Canoga Park whose last names begin with the letter "Z."

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