

Perspective

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The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming!

In college, I majored in political science with a speciality in international relations. I wanted to be in the State Department's Foreign Service, specializing in U.S.-Soviet relations. At the time (mid 60s), we were engaged in the Cold War with the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), and I wanted to be in the thick of the fray.

Plus I'd just read George Keenan's memoirs. Kennan was our ambassador to the USSR and a diplomat credited with guiding our nation's path during the turbulent, dangerous Cold War. His life seemed exciting, meaningful, and rewarding. I wanted to be like George Keenan.

And did I mention Bond, James Bond, of His Majesty's Service? At the time, I was also being marinated in Bond's movies such as the Cold War thriller "From Russia With Love" ('63). Bond, like Kennan, also had a life that seemed exciting, meaningful, and rewarding, but with lots of beautiful women—which Keenan never mentioned. I wanted to be more like James Bond.

From the end of WW II on through the 60s, the violent

I'm just sayin'

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revolutionary export of communism dominated the world stage: from Mao's communists revolution in China in 1949, to Castro's communist takeover in Cuba in 1959, followed by the Vietnam War, and similar hot spots around the globe. Communism was spreading its freedom-devouring tentacles around the globe like some ideological virus: this pandemic of mandatory group-think and rigid speech control.

Kennan was preaching "containment" of this "red menace," and I was called by various voices in my head and heart to go man that wall. For God and country, flag and freedom, for family and friends.

And so I tailored my curriculum choices to that end. My toughest course was the one that taught Russian language.

The problem wasn't the language itself—if you can hear a Russian word you can spell it, as every consonant in this Slavic language makes a sound.

The problem was that the teacher, Ms. Ovecharenko, only spoke Russian in class. This created an embarrassing moment on the first day of class when I walked in late, and she looked at me and said something in Russian. I responded in English. She started lecturing me in Russian, probably about tardiness, but who knew? It didn't go well.

Needless to say, from that day forward I learned some basic Russian, such as "I'm sorry I'm late; my dog ate my alarm clock" or "I just got back from the hospital. Great news: it's a boy."

I was not good at Russian.

But Ms. Ovecharenko came to like me because I told her I hated the Soviets. Anyone who openly hated the Soviets automatically got at least a C in her class.

You see, Ms. Ovecharenko's parents—along with about 4 million other Ukrainians—died as a result of Stalin's "purge" in the form of a starvation campaign in the 30s against Ukraine. It was all part of Stalin's plan to replace small farmers with state-run collectives and to punish independence-minded Ukrainians who posed a threat to his dictatorship.

But—long story—I never made it to Moscow, as that would have required me crossing the County Line. And for a while, that was OK, especially after President Reagan got Soviet Premiere Gorbachev to blink, sneeze and bow low in the late 80s.

Under his new policies of perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness), Gorbachev released most of the Soviet's eastern bloc states from Russia's iron grip. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989, and the former satellite republics of Russia engaged in democratic elections that swept

communism out the back door. The Cold War was over.

My former mission in life had been successfully attained by others.

But, today, my old mission has risen from the ashes like a Phoenix. As I write, current Russian "President For Life" Vladimir Putin has positioned his war machinery menacingly on the Ukrainian border, poised to invade at any moment. Putin seems to desire to forcefully recoup those lost Soviet Republics that once were locked deep in the bosom of Mother Russia, thereby reclaiming the glory that was the former USSR.

Communist China is licking its chops at this situation—and how we clumsily handled our exit from Afghanistan—as it eyes its own invasion (of Taiwan) and expansion south to Australia and West to India. Chinese Premiere Xi, like Putin, seems unafraid of America's response to his communist expansion.

The Cold War is back.

Many experts say our enemies increasingly see an America in decline—war weary, softening, politically fractured. They see a military more fo-

cused on the social goals of equity, diversity and inclusion than the military goals of protecting our nation and winning wars. And they sense we are consumed with a corrosive culture war where many citizens feel our nation—its laws, institutions and founders—is inherently racist, corrupt and unworthy of championing its traditional values in the new world order.

Iron-fisted nations like China and Russia see our nation's problems as proof that their autocratic system of governance is superior to our western liberal democracy model, and will dominate the new world order.

Which is dismaying to consider but not necessarily the way things will or have to turn out. Maybe the Russians are coming, and maybe they're not.

Much of our nation's, and the world's, future depends on the actions of our younger generations. Because here we sit, us older Boomers, retired and too bone-weary to get back into fighting shape. And even if we could get back into shape, who would we fight—the Marxists over there or here?

mike carroll

It's not magic, Grandpa; it's science

We finally had Christmas with our grandkids. Between snow and sneezes, it was put off for more than a month.

I had gotten them a magic set, which I didn't really want to give them because I wanted to keep it for myself. I figured I could learn all the tricks and

then put on a magic show for them. I could give them the props then and teach them how to use them.

But we don't see them very often. I figured by the time I learned all the tricks, they would be too old to care about it. Magic is for any age, but it becomes harder to compete for the kids' attention when sports and other interests begin to take priority.

Ben, the oldest at 7, loves to be amazed by magic tricks. He wants to see the trick done over and over. Adam, 5, will figure it out after a couple of times.

I was trying to read the instructions for a cup and ball trick for an impatient Ben, so I just improvised and made up my own trick. I hid a ball inside one of three cups and turned then upside down over identical fuzzy balls. Inertia keeps the hidden ball hidden.

I told Ben that I would use magic to move one ball to another cup. When I lifted the cup

with the hidden ball, there were two balls under it. Ben was amazed every time.

Meanwhile, Adam had grabbed one of the props and was playing with it. It was a small, plastic box the size of a matchbox — you know, the kind that kitchen matches come in.

Adam had the box open and said, "Watch," as he dropped a button in. He closed the box then opened it again and the button was gone.

That kid scares me. Five years old and he's already figured out a trick he'd never seen before.

His uncle said he had gotten the boys one of those machines that drops a claw down to pick up a prize. When it wasn't working right, Adam took it apart and fixed it.

The alternator in our car isn't working. I'm thinking about seeing if Adam will come take a look at it.

With Ben, I gave him a regular deck of cards and kept a

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trick deck for me so we could both do the old "pick a card, any card" routine. He couldn't make my card come out on top like I did his. After five tries, he finally figured out that "his" card was always the five of hearts because my deck had only fives of hearts in it. He finally wanted to see the rest of my cards. So I did an abracadabra and magically turned all the cards into the five of hearts.

To convince him, I had him put his deck on top of mine. I put them behind my back and moved a five of hearts off the

bottom and placed it on top. I also snuck a few fives into my back pocket.

I brought the deck back out and showed him that his card was again on top.

To further convince him, I had him mix the cards up and verify that the five was not on top. I put them behind my back again and pulled a five of hearts from my pocket. Magically, his card was back on top.

So for the next time, I had him remove all the fives of hearts from the deck and mix them up. But when I brought the deck back out from behind

me, lo and behold, the five of hearts was again on top.

Ben was amazed. Adam said, "Look in his pocket." This is the kid who, when shown the "magic" of an automatic towel dispenser, said, "It's not magic. It's science."

When we first walked in, I announced that we had forgotten to bring their presents. Ben fell over groaning melodramatically. But Adam said, "You're just teasing us. That's what you do."

I think it was Abe Lincoln who said you can fool some of the people some of the time but you can't fool all the people all the time. I don't think you can fool Adam any of the time. This is no slight on Ben; it can be fun to be fooled, at least when you know it's just magic.

© Copyright 2022 by David Porter who can be reached at porter@ramblinman.us. I think I'll take Adam to my next poker game. He can see a bluff from a mile away.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Martin Luther King left this timely thought for us. And two particular things come to mind—our health and wellbeing and our luxury of living in a democratic society. If we want to preserve these things, we need to speak up. We need to act in ways to protect them. Neither is guaranteed.

Roger Tice, Sullivan

PUZZLES

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Remain as is
- 5. Functional
- 11. News magazine
- 12. Popular treat
- 16. Area units
- 17. Artificial intelligence

- 18. Marten valued for its fur
- 19. Forms of matter
- 24. Home of the Dodgers
- 25. Bordering
- 26. Part of the eye
- 27. It might be nervous
- 28. Visualizes

- 29. Crest of a hill
- 30. Measures engine speed (abbr.)
- 31. Tears in a garment (Br. Eng.)
- 33. Not easily explained
- 34. Song in short stanzas
- 38. Detonations
- 39. Intestinal
- 40. EU cofounder Paul-Henri
- 43. Balmy
- 44. New Mexico mountain town
- 45. Gobblers
- 49. Insecticide
- 50. Golf scores
- 51. Has its own altar
- 53. "Pollock" actor Harris
- 54. Being livable
- 56. NHL play-by-play man
- 58. "The Great Lakes State" (abbr.)
- 59. Unpainted
- 60. Swam underwater
- 63. Native American people
- 64. Containing salt
- 65. Exam

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Small bone in middle ear
- 2. Long, angry speech
- 3. Move out of
- 4. Male organ
- 5. Two-toed sloth
- 6. Making dirty
- 7. Article
- 8. Oil company
- 9. Emits coherent radiation
- 10. Amounts of time
- 13. Unit equal to one quintillion
- 46. Drug that soothes
- 47. Railroads
- 48. Most slick
- 50. Jacket
- 51. A radio band
- 52. Hello
- 54. His and
- 55. Supporter
- 57. Popular software suite (abbr.)
- 61. Railway
- 62. NY coastal region (abbr.)

CROSSWORD

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