

■ Affairs of State, by Stewart Alsop

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'... the pity of it ...'

WASHINGTON:

The time was July 4, 1962, on a sunny morning. The place was Independence Square, in Philadelphia. With the old red brick of Independence Hall as a background, the young President of the United States rose to address a big, enthusiastic audience, crowded into the square.

The President began his short speech by movingly recalling the Declaration of Independence—"the testament handed down by those gathered in this historic hall one hundred and eighty-six years ago today." Then he turned to the present, and spoke of how "the nations of Western Europe . . . are today joining together, seeking, as our forefathers sought, to find freedom in diversity and in unity, strength."

He spoke then of the future. "The United States looks on this vast new enterprise with hope and admiration. . . . We see in such a Europe a partner with whom we can deal on a basis of full equality. . . . I will say here and now, on this Day of Independence, that the United States will be ready for a Declaration of Interdependence, that we will be prepared to discuss with a United Europe the ways and means of forming a concrete Atlantic partnership. . . . All this will not be finished in a year, but let the world know it is our goal."

There is a sadness in reading those words now, less than six years later—a sadness that recalls Othello's words, before he murdered Desdemona, the wife he loved: "O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!" The sadness is partly human. The President who spoke on that bright day in Philadelphia—one can see in the mind's eye the strong, graceful figure, and the summer sun on the bushy hair—is dead. But there is a larger sadness as well. For President Kennedy's "Grand Design" for a "concrete Atlantic partnership" is dead too—as dead as Desdemona or John Kennedy.

The "Grand Design" seems now, in retrospect, an idle dream. It did not seem a dream only six years ago. In those days, serious, practical and well-informed men on both sides of the Atlantic believed that a new kind of Western World was growing up out of the ashes of the Second War.

This new kind of world would see a Europe that had found "freedom in diversity and in

unity, strength." Britain would join the Common Market, and out of the Common Market would emerge a new federal European system—a true United Europe.

This United Europe would, in turn, join in a "concrete Atlantic partnership"—economic, military and political—with the United States. Thus would be formed what Walter Lippmann called at the time "an Atlantic Community . . . a great and secure center of power and wealth, of light and leading."

This "Atlantic Community" was "the shore dimly seen." It was the "goal" of American power and policy when Kennedy spoke his stirring words, in that distant time less than six years ago. Now the shore is not seen at all, even dimly. Instead, another kind of shore is dimly seen, a shore on which civilization may one day be wrecked.

Britain is not in the Common Market. NATO, the cornerstone of the Western alliance, is a farce. Instead of the United Europe that Kennedy foresaw, there is emerging what Gen. Charles de Gaulle calls "*l'Europe des nations*," and this Europe of nations is not unlike the divided, nationalist Europe of the prewar era.

There is no "concrete Atlantic partnership." Washington and Paris are hardly on speaking terms any more. Even the relationship between Washington and London, once so intimate, is now cool and distant, while the signs and portents multiply of a deep and growing impulse in this country to return to a latter-day version of the old American isolationism.

These signs and portents are many and various. Some are large and obvious, like the growing resistance to any sort of foreign aid at all. This year's foreign-aid program was extracted from a reluctant Congress with great difficulty, and there are experienced congressional observers who predict that this year's program will be the last. Thus the combination of generous impulse and enlightened self-interest that gave birth to the Marshall Plan is almost wholly dissipated.

Generosity and enlightened self-interest have been replaced by attitudes strikingly similar to those which produced the ultra-isolationist and wholly disastrous Smoot-Hawley tariff act of the 1930's. As this is written, 90 out of 100 senators

are sponsoring protectionist legislation of one sort or another. As the *Washington Post* has pointed out, the ever-more-powerful protectionist lobby is pushing legislation that "would bring world trade to a halt by imposing import quotas on everything from steel to strawberries."

There are plenty of other signs of the rebirth of American isolationism. General de Gaulle has done everything he can—which is a lot—to nurture this rebirth. He has been enormously helped by the war in Vietnam. The war has alienated Europe from the United States. It has also alienated the United States from Europe. For to many Americans the spectacle of the Europeans, self-righteously lecturing this country about our sins in Vietnam, refusing to lift a finger to help in our time of trouble, while confidently expecting the United States to risk its national existence to protect Europe, is intolerably infuriating.

Those who, like Walter Lippmann, advocate abandoning Vietnam and withdrawing American power wholly from Asia, overlook the obverse of that coin. It is as difficult to be half isolationist as it is to be half pregnant.

Anyone who tests the temper of Congress these days can confirm that is so. "I guess we'll see this one through because we can't help it," says one midwestern Congressman. "But never again. And that goes for de Gaulle and all the rest of them." He speaks for many of his colleagues.

There are many factors, other than Vietnam and de Gaulle, that have promoted a rebirth of American isolationism. But perhaps the most powerful factor of all was Lee Harvey Oswald's bullet. For the bullet that tore through John Kennedy's head seems to have torn something vital out of this country's soul, eroding both our idealism and our self-confidence, turning the country in angrily upon itself.

In any case, the Grand Design of Kennedy's day has been replaced with a design that is not so grand—a sullenly self-centered and nationalist United States, isolated from a sullenly self-centered and nationalist Western Europe. It is not at all a pretty design, for it is very like the design that produced two

world wars.

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