

James Hepburn; Herve Lamarre; Phillippe;
Topaz

1/9/69

I ask those of you to whom I send this memorandum to please keep it entirely to yourselves unless, separately, I suggest others with whom I would like you to consult. If any of you respond, I would appreciate a carbon to me c/o Louis Ivon, for it is possible that I may go to New Orleans next week. I do consider it not beyond possibility that this matter may arise in surprising form there and I would ^{like} to be as prepared for that eventuality as possible.

Taking the Hepburn story literally, we have these alternatives:

At a time when French policy is not congenial to that of the United States (remember the gold crisis?) we have French intelligence agents operating openly (at least Lamarre, and he did have a number of American associates), with no official interference. Whether or not the American citizens actually violated the law, there is a foreign-agents registration act, and it could readily have been invoked. If was not. From this I conclude that either those proclaiming themselves French intelligence are not or they were engaged in activities not unwelcome to US intelligence. I suggest we bear in mind that, rather than hiding a foreign-intelligence involvement, these people made it explicit virtually from the first. With their knowledge of American law, I believe this is not innocent, as is their failure to alert those young and inexperienced Americans of the potential of collaboration. Another alternative is that, whether or not of serious purpose, the US government may yet act, possibly soon and not unconnected with the pending New Orleans trial. They can file a general charge, get the publicity and collateral benefits, and later drop the charges. I think, were I one of those involved, I would consult counsel - where I live. If we take the doctrine and propaganda of the book and the movie at face value, they are in violent opposition to the official and resolutely-held position of the US government. I do not for one minute believe this is the purpose, for I do believe the operation may well be CIA. However, the failure of the US agencies to do anything when it was so possible and could be so hurtful, unless they are awaiting what they regard as a more propitious moment, does require thought. I think the probability they are in accord with the purpose of this operation is high, as is their involvement.

One of those credited in the book(s) is Phillippe, identified by some of you who have met him as the former head of French intelligence in the U.S. I have been able to check with an old and trusted French friend. It is his recollection that, in fact, this is so, that the man "Phillippe" was actually stationed in Washington under the cover of an embassy attache. I expect to hear further from him, with the real name of this man.

This makes the lack of any official US action more suspect - unless there is a reason for it. Having confirmed the possibility that the identification of Phillippe is dependable, I gave that some thought and concluded that he might have been in actuality or in spirit a double agent, officially that of France but spiritually that of the "liberal" part of CIA. One candidate comes immediately to mind: the central character of Topaz, the Leon Uris misrepresentation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That work is entirely consistent with CIA interest. My recollection of that character, as portrayed in that book, makes him consistent with the seeming descriptions and prerequisites. Bearing also on this is the information I have picked up (and I cannot vouch for it) that these men are "former" French intelligence.

My recollection of Topaz may be undependable because I was not impressed by it, because I considered it not less than semi-official and quite possibly inspired CIA propaganda, and because the representation of fact is wrong. I recall finding the reason the hero had such a rough time back in France not really credible. It is my recollection Uris says they were pro-Russian. Aside from the lack of any reason to believe it, the history and tradition of the agency is contrary. This spurious explanation would not only be an excellent cover for official suspicion he was CIA (which is consistent with the admissions of other parts of the book), it also served to promote CIA beliefs and interests.

In any event, the normal embellishments of a novel considered, I believe it is certainly tenable to hypothesize that "Phillipe" is the hero of "Topaz", that if this is the case, there is an entirely different perspective to "Farewell America" in its various forms, and that it would be foolhardy to assume we have heard the end of it. Its by-far worst potential remains. I therefore would encourage those of you who may have either knowledge or suspicions to communicate them to me as expeditiously as possible. I have asked some of you who have met him for a description. Perhaps there are things he said that may bear on the above theory. In that event, I would appreciate them. I suggest that if my suspicion is correct, nothing is lost if your letter or call is intercepted, for that will not be knowledge to the interceptor. There may be much to be gained by my having that knowledge, for the possibility of a dramatic confrontation with this operation does exist, and if we cannot meet it the result may be ruinous.

Those of you who have had a very high security consciousness might, I believe, ask yourselves if it is possible for us to learn anything the other side does not already know. If not, we hurt only ourselves by not sharing it, for if they learn it they learn nothing whereas if we do not, one or more of us, we may lose much. Their knowledge of our knowledge does not outweigh the advantage of our sharing it.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg