

Von Hoffman

Stand By for New Adventures

By Nicholas Von Hoffman
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SOME PEOPLE don't like Joe Alsop because he enjoys the war so much. He gets on their nerves so they don't read him. That's a mistake if you're interested in knowing what country we're going to invade next.

Joe was the first to point at Cambodia and shout, "Eureka! There's golden opportunity in them thar jungles." More than likely he'd been tipped off that we were going in. Joe gets a lot of information from high-up people.

Lately Joe, the wise, old screech owl of war, has been softening us up for an intervention in the Middle East. What Joe says in June often happens in July but it's more than him; the news being seeped out of the White House is scary enough to cause prudent people to check their life insurance coverage.

"The hypothetical — or real — possibility of a U.S.-Soviet confrontation is being discussed here privately in even more apocalyptic terms than the President employed" in his TV conversation the other night, writes Murrey Marder, the sagacious diplomatic correspondent accompanying the royal household in its transcontinental passages. Those words mean that the people closest to the throne are talking very tough.

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HOW COMES this rush to get us killed in the Middle East? There're probably many reasons

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and more rationalizations, but one of them seems to be that our commander-in-chief loves crises. He digs them. Our clutch hitting, fourth down passing, all-star field marshal has made a study of himself under pressure. He's measured his appetite, the sweat on his palms, his disposition and he's concluded that it's during crises that he's at his sharpest best. Read what he writes:

"... I stepped up my activity until I was spending as much as 18 to 20 hours a day at my office. I deliberately refused to take time off for relaxation or 'a break,' because my experience had been that in preparing to meet a crisis, the more I worked the sharper and quicker my mental reactions became.

"... I began to notice, however, the inevitable symptoms of tension. I was 'mean' to live with at home and with my friends. I was quick-tempered with the members of my staff.

"I suppose some might say that I was 'nervous,' but I knew these were simply evidences of preparing for battle." (From "Six Crises," by Richard M. Nixon, and there's lot more passages like it.)

He has other reasons for opening up this new crisis: "... where the battle against communism is concerned, victories are never final so long as the Communists are still able to fight. There is never a time when it is safe to relax or let down. When you have won one battle is the time you should step up your effort to win another — until final victory is achieved." ("Six Crises," P. 41).

He thinks he's just won one, big battle, and now he's ready to step up his effort: "The situation in the mideast is more dangerous, more dangerous because it involves — and this is not the case in Vietnam — a collision of the super powers."

With such exciting prospects, let's not reflect how we got into the eastern Mediterranean 23 years ago under President Truman, a more matter-of-fact man in a crisis. The pretext then was that the Russians were subverting Greece by revolutionary warfare — it was the domino theory and remember the appeasement of Hitler at Munich at that time also. The Russians were doing no such thing, but our hysteria made it impossible for us to believe it.

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TODAY Russian missiles, airplanes and pilots are certainly more of a threat, more of a source of continuing war, but not more than our own planes and pilots if we put them in the Middle East as Murrey Marder suggests is being considered. And once our men arrive the commander-in-chief has the reason he needs to get on the telly to announce he's sending in ground troops as he explains, "I'm doing it to protect the lives of American boys. Once he gets the first men in there we're committed."

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WHILE BEING forced to back up an executive fait accompli Senator Robert Taft, the best conservative mind of our era, said something during one of the early Cold War debates. "It is easy to slip into an attitude of imperialism and to entertain the idea that we know what is good for other people better than they know themselves. From there it is an easy step to the point where war becomes an instrument of public policy rather than the last resort to maintain our liberty."