PERSPECTIVE ON SECURITY

Conference on
Overseas Information Services:
A New Career

New York University

6 May 1955
Perspective on Security

In order to gain some perspective on the vast and complex problem of security, I propose to approach the subject from several positions. Different angles of vision produce differences in perspective; resultant opinions will not be in accord with each other. This multiple approach should make us at least more understanding regarding differences, if not more hospitable to views other than our own.

First, let us look at the word “security” itself — one of the most overworked terms in our modern vocabulary. It has been used in connection with so many different concepts that it is necessary, unless the discussion is to go astray, to identify which meaning one is talking about. We speak of a security — an evidence of ownership or an obligation, an item of wealth, great or small. Economic independence is often described as a condition of security. Personal security can mean safety, or a feeling of being wanted, of belonging, or even self-confidence. The hedge against destitution in old age is called social security; it might better be called, perhaps, geriatric insurance. Various types of insurance are used to give family security upon the earner’s death or to hedge possible losses from fire or theft or accident.

Security is used as a synonym for military adequacy in the protection of the national integrity or interest. It is employed to describe what are essentially police procedures to weed out those whose government appointment may prove, on balance, to be a detriment to the national service rather than a constructive contribution. It would be possible to multiply illustrations of the wide diversity of situations and circumstances where the word appears.

When its many employments are assembled and considered, one striking fact emerges. It is a word that alway suggests
more than can actually be delivered; it implies a promise that can never be quite fulfilled. Insurance does not defeat the tragedy of death; it can never fully compensate the injury of accident or the loss of valued possessions. At best social security is an imperfect protection against difficulties inherent in age. Many a business represented even by a high grade "security" has gone bankrupt. Self-confidence is not completely invulnerable. No one will deny that military security is only a relative term; it can never be perfect or complete.

To whatever use we put the word, therefore, security remains a relative term however much it sounds like an absolute. Indeed, security rarely means the same thing at two consecutive times or to two successive people. Circumstances shape the responses of all of us to some extent. Characters and temperaments, moods and basic philosophies vary the responses of different individuals even in the same circumstances.

Its relativity calls attention to one of the most profound paradoxes of life. When a man does not have security he thinks he wants it; when there is security he abandons it. In periods of great instability he yearns for a refuge; in moments of calm he craves excitement. The welfare state is designed to give security beyond the dreams of earlier times; yet today gambling exists on a scale never before known and is indulged in by those who can least afford it. We build faster and faster cars, and kill more on the highways than in battle. The word "security" is used more than ever before, yet all the slogans for buying bonds, all the safety-first pleas show that, in reality, danger is fully as attractive. If total security were feasible physically and financially, it would be rejected psychologically.

This is as true of national as of personal security. Though peace could be had at a price, nations have deliberately engaged in adventures at great risk. History is replete with
examples of wars unnecessarily, even frivolously, undertaken when peace was quite possible. Indeed, we need not go outside our own national history to find instances that give food for reflection. Such episodes arise partly from a desire for more and more complete security; partly they come from the gambling instinct which is ever in a state of tension with the desire for security. Appreciation of the relativity of security is vital to any perspective on the issue before us.

Upon reflection a second characteristic appears. Practically all forms of security are costly in money or effort, or both. Military expenditures made in the name of security account for a huge percentage of governmental costs. Premiums on all forms of insurance (including social security) run to many billions annually. The money put at risk in “securities” is enormous; a recent stock flotation of over $500,000,000 for a single corporation was successful. The costliness of the basic idea in most of its manifestations ought not to need elaboration.

When we turn to that form of security which is our special concern tonight, it is evident that it shares the basic characteristics of other forms of security. Certainly it is never complete. All the police work in the world does not prevent crime; policing personnel with regard to their loyalty, their invulnerability to blackmail, and other forms of pressure will never eliminate spies. No matter how rigorous the standards, how severe the investigative procedures, how vigorous the exclusion of doubtful cases, spying will not be wholly prevented. Like all other forms of security, personnel screening hints at more than it actually delivers. Its relativity, therefore, is undoubted.

And it is costly. It is costly, first of all, in money. Procedures have become more and more elaborate; duplication has become more and more frequent; the range of investigation has broadened almost continuously. It covers not only government personnel but those who deal, even indirectly, with
governmental matters. Take the instance of a four-star general who in addition to long service in the Army has been an ambassador, headed our principal security agency, and has served as Under Secretary of State: his mere election as a director of a corporation which has government contracts leads to a requirement that he fill out a twenty-two-page questionnaire, and all the mechanism of investigation is tuned up to clear him for the nth time. Because Brown University has some contracts with governmental agencies its Chancellor, Secretary to the Corporation, and Treasurer were required to be fingerprinted and cleared. All are unpaid volunteers; none has any contact with the contracts or work carried on under them, or the personnel engaged in that work. Surely the ripples from the stone of security run to far shores indeed.

As a consequence the sheer direct expense of the current effort to eliminate all doubtful characters from office—save elective office—and also from secondary contacts is fantastically large. I doubt anyone could put a dollar sign on the amount with any assurance of accuracy. Even a rough estimate would be startling in its size.

Indirect costs are beyond calculation. The dislocation of work is tremendous. It is sheer nonsense to say that a man who is not conscious of doing wrong should not worry or let his work be adversely affected. All of us know instances where the police mentality, excess of zeal, errors incident to misinterpretations of standards, incompetence of investigators, poor judgment of evaluators, testimony of professional witnesses, some of whom may be counterintelligence agents, have led, as they are bound to lead, to injustices. Worry is a dislocating factor of great importance. The time spent in looking up forgotten—or never known—family histories and answering innumerable questions is lost to other endeavors. The whole process, in all its ramifications, has slowed down important, even vital, work. It, and the secrecy which is its
concomitant, have retarded scientific research, technological advance, weapons development, and even the ordinary administration of government. The slowdown appears in too many places and in too many ways to be capable of estimation. If, as is constantly asserted, we are engaged in a race with the Russians, time lost is security diminished. It is no answer to assert that all is well because we are still ahead of our potential enemy. It is an assault upon security needlessly to decrease the margin of that superiority. If the margin is narrowing, it gives the advocates of preventive war a fresh argument for their folly. If the margin is narrowing, it reduces the incentive for the potential enemy to ease tensions by negotiation in good faith. Many a race has been lost because the leader looked over his shoulder and broke his stride.

Some expert opinion is available about our losses. When the late Dr. Karl T. Compton resigned as chairman of the Research and Development Board of the Department of Defense, he spoke of "the complications of excessive checks and counterchecks which multiply the manpower requirements" and affect efficiency adversely. He also pointed out that the system discouraged competent scientists from entering upon a government career or accepting contracts to do secret work. His testimony accords with the widely expressed opinions of many others in position to give sound opinions.

Moreover, it is in harmony with what we know of people. Men who have the insights and enthusiasm that create new ideas do not want to be hobbled with yards and yards of red tape. When they return to the laboratory after hours, it is not to get time-and-a-half pay; it is because they are afire with ideas. When red tape checks them, it impairs or destroys an element fundamental to their success.

At the time of his death Albert Einstein was given credit for having interested President Roosevelt in research to produce an atomic bomb and for having convinced him of the wisdom
of making the effort. It is highly doubtful that Einstein could have been admitted to this country if the present immigration laws had been in effect when he sought admission. It is certain in my mind that he could not have met present security standards. The same can be said of many another who contributed ideas essential to that revolutionary development in modern instruments, both of war and of peace. Had they been excluded, what would have been the gains in security, and what the losses?

Apparently about half the foreign scientists who seek to visit this country are now excluded; and there is clear evidence that many who would like to come do not apply because of the barriers, delays, and inconveniences, to put the matter charitably. Moreover, some of those denied admission are the same men who earlier had made distinctive and valuable contributions to our national security—clear proof that two different meanings of the omnibus word “security” are not only in tension but sometimes in direct opposition to each other.

If a genius is to be regarded with suspicion because he is not a universal genius, if men of science are to be suspect because some of their social ideas and political notions are unorthodox or even naïve, we may lose more in one aspect of security by their elimination than we gain in another. Many are somewhat one-sided; but we should treasure men for their strengths, not their weaknesses. That is fundamental to any organization—industrial, commercial, educational, governmental. It is fatal to do otherwise, for all of us have blind spots.

Henry Ford’s peace ship was one of the most fatuous ideas of the twentieth century; its patent folly did not invalidate the revolution he wrought in transportation and industrial production, or his many other contributions—direct and indirect—to American life. If we are henceforth to bar men from what they do superbly well because they do not do
everything well, we will set curbs on the progress of the United States in many lines.

The damage done directly is not the full measure. There is a loss far beyond the deprivation of able services to the government. There is the further damage to the individual in his nongovernmental activities. Many other avenues of endeavor besides the official ones are closed. Often he cannot be employed by a firm that holds a government contract. To assert that government employment is a privilege, not a right, is true enough so far as it goes. But to assert that denial of employment on security grounds affects only government use of his talents is nonsense, and cynical nonsense at that.

It does infinite damage to a man's good name. When a man is barred, it suggests disloyalty or serious defects of character. The exclusion is the more damning because the grounds for it are vague. Conceivably it involves a lack of integrity which should bar him from any further professional responsibility. The security officials will not say; their evidence is secret, even from the courts; the man himself cannot say for he may know neither his accusers nor of what he is accused. To impair a man's good name is to weaken the morale essential to his best work; publicly to doubt his loyalty is to divert his attention from constructive research to sterile efforts at self-defense. To the primary loss of his services to the government must be added many more losses, tangible and intangible, direct and indirect.

It has been reported that a government agency refused at least 30 research grants to scientists because of "security" difficulties. Many of these were for research in the battle against disease. Efforts to improve the national health are surely a direct contribution to one form of security. If there is any truth in the hysterical figures about draft rejections for physical disabilities, it is an urgent and vital phase of security. The supposed reason for declining to make such research grants was that Congress would not be pleased to
subsidize men who were denied 'clearance. If the report is at all correct, it is a perfect illustration of irrelevance raised to fantastic proportions.

Suppose Dr. Salk had been dependent upon government subsidy instead of a private foundation, and that "derogatory information" had been filed against him, and he had therefore been refused a grant. Would not the world have been the loser? A skilled warrior against polio, or cancer, or other lethal enemies should be kept at that task; refusal to facilitate his work, based on the assumption he is not sound in politics, is needlessly to imperil the lives of others. It is an impairment of national security.

To sum up this phase of our inquiry, the critical question is whether the gains achieved by the elimination of "risks" exceed the losses occasioned by the retarded pace. No one can give a firm answer. There is no clear definition of "risk." No one can tell how many real risks have been eliminated. No one can calculate—or even estimate within tolerable limits—the extent or significance of the retardation of progress in particular areas.

Under such circumstances the answer to this question will be an expression of opinion. That opinion will be based, to some extent, upon the evidence available; to some extent, it will be a reflection of one's basic philosophical orientation.

Some will take the position that security is a false ideal because it does nothing positive to meet our problems. It is a strictly defensive concept; they will ask to be shown any instance where total defense has won a war—or anything else. The ideal of security seems to such people a manifestation of a Maginot Line mentality; it depends upon static defense; there is no drive to go anywhere; all the emphasis is on standing pat. The idea is to dig in, making the defensive works as complicated as possible, leaving little room for maneuver and even less for imagination.

From this point of view security, taken as a primary ob-
jective, is a modern illustration of the great teaching that he who would save his life shall lose it, losing it in frustration, losing it by letting circumstances master him and shape his policy by his own default. Such would argue that the United States contributed to bringing on both world wars by over-accent on negative considerations of security. This was the tragedy of isolation in the thirties; we were a world power, yet exercised our influence not positively but negatively, not seeking to achieve something but only to escape. The very effort to avoid war led potential enemies to misinterpret our spirit and helped precipitate what we sought to evade. We increased our danger by seeking to avoid risk. Overaccent on security defeated its attainment.

People who scorn security as an ideal insist that the true goal is achievement. Only so can the law of life be fulfilled, rather than frustrated. Achievement in the hard circumstances in which man finds himself in this universe involves not only skill and boldness, it also involves inescapable risk. The prudent man, therefore, accepts risk as inevitable. He does not seek to escape it; instead he tries to avoid paralysis through terror in its presence. He will not take profitless risks, nor will he resort to bravado and pretend there is no danger. Instead he will learn to meet danger with calm philosophy. He will protect others, so far as feasible, by insurance, to reduce their participation in the hazards he must accept if he seeks to achieve some worth-while result.

As with individuals, so with nations; the ideal is achievement. If that is the goal for America there must be much more than industrial, financial, and commercial strength. There must be so profound a faith in our national tradition that confidence replaces fear as the dominant mood. That fear is the deep underlying root of present personnel security emphasis is beyond question. Such fear concedes, without argument, an easy vulnerability of our social, economic, political, and spiritual strength. The concession is not justified.
We would do well to reflect upon a passage in the speech of President Soekarno of the Indonesian Republic, as he opened the recent Bandung conference: "We are living in a world of fear. . . . Fear of the future, fear of the hydrogen bomb, fear of ideologies. Perhaps this fear is a greater danger than the danger itself, because it is fear which drives men to act foolishly, to act thoughtlessly, to act dangerously." He was speaking to the Afro-Asian peoples, but he might have been addressing us directly and warning us again of the folly of fear as a dominant mood.

Surely the need for such warnings is a modern development in the United States. Self-confidence has been one of the notable characteristics of our people in the greatest periods of our history. With all its crudity, "Manifest Destiny" was a stirring slogan. It was optimistic, it was an expression of faith, it was self-confident, it was a call to action. In poetry Walt Whitman sang of that firm confidence in the future; he exalted the pioneers and their venturesome mastery of the continent. He was not unaware of the shortcomings of democracy, but he was willing to say that "amid endless ridicules, arguments, and ostensible failures" democracy "is the only scheme worth working for." Moreover he spoke of his "conviction . . . that the crowning growth of the United States is to be spiritual and heroic." We can go further back and appeal to a foreign observer. De Tocqueville remarked: "It is by the enjoyment of a dangerous freedom that the Americans learn the art of rendering the dangers of freedom less formidable."

The speeches, statements, and writings of those who have insisted upon tighter and tighter security measures show none of this faith in our destiny, none of this confidence in the inherent toughness of democracy, none of this passionate belief in freedom and its exercise as the way to make its dangers "less formidable." In the name of patriotism they have sought to let concepts of policing thought become
dominant, ideas adapted only to a different political and moral philosophy than has characterized the history of the United States.

They have sought to break all contacts with other ideologies because they were not sure our own is best and can stand the test of direct competition. How else explain fear to let an American Nobel-prizeman lecture abroad on scientific topics? How else explain refusal to admit scientists to the United States for scientific conferences? How else explain the banning of Russian magazines and books and the refusal to let citizens read Pravda and Izvestia? It is a strange patriotism which so denigrates our cultural heritage, our democratic education, our economic and social structure that we doubt their capacity to meet the challenge of alien ideas.

But if we are fair in this analysis it must be emphasized that the reactionaries are not the only ones to blame for the spiritual negativism that makes security a fetish. Liberals have loudly bewailed American immaturity; they have measured our performance against perfection. Yet the inference was clear enough that they thought other nations and people had greater stability than we, that other forms of government, particularly those dedicated to “planning” (a word of delightfully vague import), were somehow more effective.

Confidence in the inherent soundness of our tradition has been eroded both from the right and from the left. As so often happens in political life, the ultraconservatives and the ultraliberals join in deploring what is. One group believes it was superior in days gone by; the other feels that it can be better in the future. They agree, however, that it is bad now.

Until there is a genuine resurgence of faith in the democratic thesis, as manifested in our history and practice, the negative emphases, typified by overaccent upon security, will continue. The present difficulties do not arise merely from amendable procedures; they stem from a mood that must be reversed to produce an adequate result as far as reform is
concerned. The President has pointed the way. He has said clearly enough that to combat Communism we need to know as much as possible about it. We need also to know—and to appreciate—the strength of our own ideology. Until there is a resurgence of confidence in the validity and viability of our national ideals we shall not make headway against the doubts, the fears, the negativism which underly excessive "security" practices.

Thus far we have discussed the word "security," its meanings and implications. We have seen its costs, direct and indirect, but beyond estimate. We have observed one origin of the overaccent on security in the psychological loss of national self-confidence. The meaning and results of security can be observed from other viewpoints, specifically from a standpoint I define as political physics. The principle that action and reaction are equal, familiar enough in physics, applies to politics also. Furthermore, it is of universal validity, applicable in every sort of government from democracy at one end to totalitarianism at the other.

The pendulum swing with regard to security furnishes an apt illustration. Since the Russian revolution of 1918 there have been violent oscillations in our view of the bolsheviks. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer sparked a drive against "subversives" which went to extravagant lengths until rebuked and checked by a federal court. When official zeal was diminished the cry was taken up by volunteers and vigilantes. The name, Elizabeth Dilling, and her "Red Network" are only a dim memory, if that much, to most people, but her work typified the efforts of many others. Martin Dies sought to achieve by "pitiless publicity" what could not be done through the courts.

After recognition of the Soviet government, and more particularly after we entered the Second World War, the pendulum swung too far in the other direction. This, like the contrary swing, had official impetus. If you want evidence,
read President Roosevelt's characteristically scornful phrases in a February 1942 press conference referring to Washington's "Cliveden set" and their fear that Russia would become "too powerful" after the war. Or take his Fireside Chat on Christmas Eve 1943: "The Teheran Conference . . . gave me my first opportunity to meet . . . Marshal Stalin. We had planned to talk to each other across the table . . . but we soon found we were all on the same side of the table. We came to the Conferences with faith in each other. . . . Now we have supplemented faith with definite knowledge." Again, on March 8, 1944, he said: "I think the Russians are perfectly friendly; they aren't trying to gobble up all the rest of Europe or the world. . . . They haven't got any crazy ideas of conquest . . . these fears that have been expressed by a lot of people here—with some reason—that the Russians are going to try to dominate Europe, I personally don't think there's anything in it."

I am not seeking to criticize the estimate during the war years with the advantage of hindsight. I am merely noting historical fact. The government of the United States was as slow in identifying the implacable enmity of Communism as it had been in understanding the hopelessness of doing business with Hitler. The President had available sources of information not open to the public; when he proclaimed the view that the danger was exaggerated it is not surprising that many accepted his estimate as valid. Those who objected were accused of carping opposition rather than sincerity.

That mood on the part of the leaders—the sentimentalization of our relationship to Russia as an ally, the sense of war urgency that did not want to offend an ally by purging Communists even from sensitive posts such as radio operators on ships—created a situation in which infiltration was relatively easy. Infiltration is a favorite Communist technique, while it is almost totally unavailable as a democratic pro-
There can be no doubt that there was infiltration or that there was toleration of infiltration. Moreover, Communist-front organizations operated freely, and people friendly to Communism, though not intellectual converts, found their way into many posts in public life.

That the reaction would ultimately be equal when the pendulum reversed was as certain as any political event can be. When a large part of Europe had been engulfed and the rest seriously menaced, when aggression had been carried to Asia, when the Communist ideological dogmas were stressed more strongly than ever, the law of political physics was bound to operate. New leaders would help thrust the pendulum of public sentiment to the other extreme. There would then be no confidence in anything that came from the Kremlin. From being regarded as a “loyal ally,” the U.S.S.R. would be considered an implacable enemy. All negotiation would be called appeasement, and all who had been associated with earlier miscalculations would become suspect. Such a reaction has no roots in alleged American “immaturity,” or in anything else peculiarly American; it is a mere manifestation of a political law.

Inevitably the threat was effectively dramatized by politicians who could profit by its exploitation, and just as inevitably public opinion became inflamed. People who sat mute when the pendulum was pulled too far the other way, people who made no protest at the 1944 misevaluation of Russian plans and intentions, are not in a first-class position to insist that the 1953-1954 interpretation of purposes and actions was wholly indefensible and a shocking evidence of democratic—and particularly American—instability.

I hope you will observe the dates I mentioned—1953-1954. I did not say 1955, for already the pendulum seems not only to have reached its extreme, it seems to have started back toward the center. Impatient people (and we all tend to be impatient part of the time) would thrust it back more rapidly.
If they succeed, it will again go well beyond center. Those who would rather see the pendulum swing in a moderate and sensible arc near mid-position will be content to ease it gently, rather than thrust too hard.

We have some concrete evidence of the turnback. It is not dramatic but may be very real. The recent exchange of correspondence between the President and the Attorney General about Executive Order 10450 illustrates the new trend. Each revision in procedure is designed to protect the rights of individuals more completely. For example: "Charges against the employee should be drawn as specifically as possible . . . enough to be meaningful to the employee." "The final decision as to suspension should not be delegated below the Assistant Secretary level." "Every effort should be made to produce witnesses . . . [who] may be confronted and cross-examined by the employee."

The reformation of procedures in the House and improved behavior in Senate investigations are further evidences. Public opinion is calmer than it was a year or two ago. The self-confessed perjury of a professional witness has ended such employments by the Department of Justice and cast doubt upon the reliability of a group whose memories are conveniently precise at strategic moments. At last a good test case has reached the Supreme Court, which has yet to speak.

Moreover it is a healthy development to have the President point out that some breaches of security have not been the work of men and women identified as security risks. The President is convinced that too much military information has been published. The shadowy morality of some of the members of the press who find elaborate reasons why they are not bound by off-the-record remarks or nonattributable briefings are also open to criticism. Anyone familiar with Washington during the past 35 years can testify to the calculated leaks, to the slipping of documents to favorites, and to the many other tactics by which "confidential" or "secret"
things come into circulation. The explanation of the Secretary of State about how the release of the Yalta papers was no violation of security seemed too elaborate to be very convincing.

All who have supplied “too much information” have been copper-riveted, double-dyed, triple-tested for security. “Clearance” of people by whatever elaborate, costly, and repeated procedures does not achieve complete security. As the Germans found a way around the Maginot Line, so, also, there is no security line that can stretch far enough to prevent someone from making an end run or infiltrating or otherwise defeating its purpose.

One of the best steps toward sanity in this whole matter would be a recovery of our sense of humor. The Senate Republican Policy Committee recently published a thirty-two-page booklet on “positive accomplishments” in defense. When Democrats attacked it as a violation of security, perhaps the necessary element of farce appeared. The President in his press conference (April 27) called it a blunder and said it contained military information he would not have given out. If the group who have been most insistent upon the most rigorous security measures tremble on the brink of violating security, it is to laugh. If no one can tell what is a violation of security, it is clear the concept has been carried beyond reasonable limits.

I am not contending that the apparent reversal of the pendulum is definitive. The swing of public opinion is not under laboratory-controlled conditions; it is not a true pendulum swinging freely in a vacuum in a plane. It moves in a dense atmosphere and its motion is constantly deflected from a plane; it is both impelled and impeded all the time. As a result its dominant direction can be assuredly determined only after the lapse of a considerable period.

If a discussion of loyalty and security issues is to be useful, it cannot be confined to instant circumstances, which can be
terrifying (terrifying in 1944 because of carelessness and overoptimism, terrifying in 1954 because of hysteria). Even to discuss the subject in terms of a trend is dangerous if one takes a period so short as to be represented by a straight line either toward the disaster of complacency or the twin disaster of panic.

An extrapolation of short-term drifts may constitute a misrepresentation of the whole situation. Politics knows straight lines only for relatively brief periods. Even during those short intervals the straight line is a mean among points on a scatter chart; a political line is never really straight at all. But even with that fictitious straightening, it is certain soon to vary in direction. Therefore, both the optimists and the alarmists need to establish a frame of reference regarding the time-span of which they speak.

Security must be viewed from one other angle to which we are inevitably drawn—politics. Much as some people might desire it, there is no such thing as total immunity from the consequences of politics. There are those who suppose that it is only or primarily in a democracy that this is true. Certainly politics exists in a totalitarian state and there is no immunity from its consequences, as many a purged official has proved with his life.

Nor is the relationship of security to politics singularly acute in the United States; we have in this matter none of that supposed "immaturity," grief over which is the stock in trade of many critics. We are naturally more acutely aware of politics in this country than abroad, because we are in daily contact with it and can observe the consequences at firsthand. But it is a myth to suppose that the professional civil servant can throw his weight around and expect total security anywhere. The civil service must always operate within the limits of policy, and lines of policy are set politically.

If one party is in control too long the civil service itself
tends to become insensibly identified with the party in power. This is partly fact and partly fiction. When an actual majority of the civil service have entered during the dominance of a single party many do become oriented to that party; that is fact. To the opposition it appears that all do so; that is fiction. When issues are acute, when differences of opinion are sharp, there are certain to be casualties in the public service.

The British Civil Service is often cited as a model of the absence of political influence; its Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office is frequently mentioned as a specific example. Yet he is not invulnerable, by any means. On this point we have the testimony of a famous casualty, Lord Vansittart. He said: “Mr. Chamberlain was perfectly entitled to dismiss me; all Prime Ministers have the right to choose their instruments. I could not have accommodated myself to him and his policy, since I knew it to be mistaken, so it came to the same thing any way.” When Mendès-France was Premier of France he made important shifts in the “permanent” “nonpolitical” posts. In the light of his distinctive policies that was almost inevitable.

That there have been many instances in our civil service where there was resistance to revised policies is beyond question. That some changes in personnel should occur ought to occasion no surprise. But that changes because of differences in policy should be made in the name of security is wholly wrong. As long as there is so much secrecy about charges, as long as “security” covers such a multitude of diverse ideas, there is bound to be suspicion that politics rather than actual security is the reason for dismissals even where that conclusion is not justified by the secret facts.

Suspicion is heightened by such episodes as the Corsi affair. I am not concerned, at this moment, with the wisdom of the appointment or the dismissal; neither properly belongs to this discussion. The expiry of ninety days without technical completion of his security clearance was cited as making it
"impossible" to continue his appointment in the task for which he had been appointed. It was a technicality employed to avoid a candid exposition of the real reason for his dismissal. The shallowness and disingenuousness of the pretense were made clear when both Mr. McLeod and the Secretary said that nothing in his record justified doubt of him on a security basis; that made the use of the device all the more cynical.

Politics in security should be reduced to the lowest possible proportions. To that end security officials should not be political appointees and they should abstain from political speeches. They should be professionals in the fullest sense of the word; only so can they perform their duties in a way to inspire public confidence. Without public confidence in the integrity of the program, much of its value is lost.

In summary: the Communist conspiracy is very real. Recent spy cases in Sweden and Switzerland, both faithful in their neutral policies, offer overwhelming proof of the currency of that menace. It is not merely an American "hysteria"; it is a hard fact of current international life.

The use of the omnibus word "security" to cover not only defense against the Communist conspiracy but against everything else that might make a public servant or employee of a private contractor an undesirable person has seriously confused this issue.

The word's promise of completeness, despite its inherent relativity, opens the way for extreme, indeed extravagant, measures in the name of security. Such measures make security of one kind the enemy of security of other kinds. We can defeat ourselves at a vital point by insisting upon total safety at another. This may make the costs intolerable.

There is tension, inevitable and sometimes serious, between security and achievement, between the static Maginot concept and the dynamic American tradition. It reflects the
dominance of fear at one end and confidence, even boldness, at the other. The extremes are paralysis and rashness.

At different times we have been at both extremes in the swing of the political pendulum from smugness and complacency to overaccent on security. At the moment it seems likely that the move is back toward the center, to a more moderate position.

Finally, politics is inevitable, but it has been carried much too far in this field. Recovery of public confidence in the sanity of our program requires more candor, better procedures, more competent and more professionally-minded security administrators. The vagueness of the word makes it all the more essential that there be confidence in the men responsible for its realization.

May 6, 1955

HENRY M. WRISTON