

Honoring Ingemar Dörfer

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It is an honor and a pleasure to speak about my colleague, and my friend, Ingemar Dörfer. I have my own favorite stories about him, and I'll tell you several. But thinking about this gave me the opportunity to talk to other of Ingemar's friends and colleagues, and they had perspectives I did not know so well. Some of them knew him, if not much longer than I did, more deeply or more continuously during some period. I'll give you their view as well.

The incident I remember best speaks to Ingemar's intense interest in ideas. We were having a drink in the living room of my house in Cambridge, sometime in the early 1980s. I don't remember the subject but sure do remember his excitement. He had a drink in one hand and was trying to manage cheese and crackers with the other. As he talked, he ran his hands through that unruly and slightly greasy hair of his – I say with envy – and the cracker zone began expanding, first to his hair and dark suit, then in circles on the floor. But he was caught up in the idea.

Perhaps a Harvard story is appropriate next. He introduced Karl and Solveig Spielman at Harvard, and they were his dear friends until the end. Because of Ingemar's preoccupation with America, they could count on a visit or two to Washington every year. What struck me about their reflections was what a meticulous friend he was. As Solveig put it: "He was the most loyal and devoted of friends. I know that wasn't just true for us. He cared deeply about his friends, and he was unfailingly proud of them and tried to stay in touch."

All the people I reminisced with recalled Ingemar's laugh, sometimes almost manic. Best, he seemed to take particular joy in laughing at himself--his picture in the *Viggen*, his picture riding an elephant in India. He could be very funny. He was returning from a visit to Moscow and was asked if he'd like to go back. "Only in a B-1 bomber" was said to be his response, though Ingemar's reputation may have embellished our recollections.

Most of Ingemar's other close American friends were and are more conservative politically than I am. I sometimes thought I was his token liberal friend. But not only do these labels not travel well across the Atlantic, particularly between Sweden and the United States, but Ingemar understood very well that the trans-Atlantic partnership rested on broad support. Indeed, when Bill Clinton was elected president, Ingemar had fairly recently moved into the Foreign Office with the conservative government – provoking terror in several younger Swedish diplomats I knew. Ingemar brought me to Stockholm for a seminar on the new administration, including a long lunch with the Foreign Minister. It was typically wise and analytic of Sweden. And typical of Ingemar.

For Ingemar's more American conservative friends, one of the wellsprings of Ingemar's laughter was irony, as one put it "his rueful reaction at the pieties of the un-strategic discourse that surrounded him during the Cold War years." A Swedish colleague remembered a seminar in Los Angeles – good choice, that – with Ingemar arguing with a senior Swedish diplomat about post-World War II agreements providing for real and armed assistance by the United States in case of a major war. The diplomat asked for written proof, which wasn't likely. It is said that American presidents pass down a notebook, reputedly green, in which are recorded all the agreements their predecessors have made in absolute secrecy, not to mention absolute unconstitutionality!

Most of these Cold War agreements have since become public in Sweden, and President Eisenhower commented in 1960 that support for Sweden was necessary to prevent Norway from being occupied, making U.S. control of the North (and of Europe) becoming impossible. Perhaps this is an example of the "pieties of un-strategic discourse" to which Ingemar's conservative American friend alluded. In that sense, it was vintage Ingemar – factually correct and political incorrect. He said what in my experience many other Swedes believed – that armed neutrality did not really mean Sweden could bear any storm alone.

I expressed my own view last fall when I was honored to be inducted into the Swedish Academy of War Sciences. When I handled Europe for the White House in the 1970s there were but 15 members of NATO. I could get the list right about half the time – it was hard to remember that Iceland was a member, Benelux was three and Ireland wasn't. But if we couldn't always get the 15 right, we never had any doubt which country was the sixteenth member of NATO!

This was after the bickerings over Vietnam in the previous decade. I got to know Olaf Palme later, but I never thought of him as anti-American. Like all politicians, he balanced his hopes, his politics and his nation's interest in ways that did not always please others. I'm hardly in a position to judge, but I was impressed when later, during one episode of the apparently visiting Soviet submarines, he remarked that it would be politically popular to come down even harder on Moscow but that did not seem to him in Sweden's interest. And about Vietnam he was right – the most irritating of traits to which we Americans are subjected by our friends!

My conservative American friends recall that Ingemar had an unerring instinct for being on the right side of almost every issues – by which they mean *their* side. Again, I don't think I agree. He was right on most issues by which I mean *my* side. He was fond of America but was a real Swedish patriot. Sometimes he reminded me a little of a strategic and scholarly Helmut Schmidt: Schmidt really thought he should be President of the United States, not merely Chancellor of West Germany. Ingemar's country, too, sometimes seemed a little small for him. But it was Sweden about which he cared most.

His conservative friends and I share the view that there was, as one put it, "more than clarity in his mind --there was high intellectual elegance in a most unelegant man -- not that those fond of him ever noticed , unless he was drunker than usual." His subtitle

for the *Viggen* book – the “domestication of glory” – was characteristically stylish. The intellectual elegance of that book was in the neat dissection of European-American politics from the perspective of a single weapon system, or rather the attempt to sell it. The book will outlast its object, as readers discover and rediscover Ingemar's writings.”

I should add that my own *Viggen* story was being called upon by a Saab senior executive when I was a young White House staffer, just a few weeks into the job. Alas, believing in the importance of alliances and that “sixteenth member,” I would have given Sweden leave to sell it to anyone. And it was a good plane. But I realized immediately there was no hope. Beginnings of administrations are times for grand initiatives to make the world better. Realpolitik comes later.

Ingemar’s slim book on America’s grand strategy in 2005 is vintage Ingemar. It reflects a wide reading and wider understanding of American thinking about strategy. It pulls no punches, labeling the United States an empire and Sweden a part of that empire. From the vantage point of 2011, some of seems almost nostalgic but still relevant. The “consensual empire” of the 1990s was replaced, after 2001, but unilateralism and arrogance. His quotes Zbigniew Brzezinski’s guidance to Europe: “It cannot be secure without America, it cannot unite against America, and it cannot significantly influence America without being prepared to act jointly with America.”

And he notes, rightly, that Sweden has made that advice its own. That has been a happy circumstance for me, as I spend time as a visiting fellow at CATS here in the National Defense College. While other Europeans, including the biggest one, Germany, have been retrenching, at least in military matters, Sweden has been more prepared to engage, including with us Americans. He would I suspect be proud of his country’s role in Afghanistan even as he worried about the strategic implications of the venture more generally. Ingemar notes that this has made the NATO question irrelevant. Americans either regard Sweden as part of the coalition of the willing or, like me three decades ago, regard Sweden as in NATO.

Sadly, too, we never had a complete conversation about Iraq, and his view would have been fascinating. For me the headline would be a haunting one: that I never imagined my country would make the same mistake, the same strategic mistake, twice in my lifetime. Now, the Vietnam war is for students ancient history, right up there in immediacy with the Peloponnesian Wars. But when I taught at Harvard’s Kennedy School in the 1980s, the war was still a living memory, and the received wisdom of graduate students was that the United States had been clueless: Vietnam was a complicated civil war in a far-off place of which we knew little. My mentors, Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, and I taught a course on intelligence, and we used the escalation decision in the summer of 1965 as a major case, drawing on the Pentagon Papers.

What is striking about the intelligence estimates that summer is just how good they were. Their portrayal of South Vietnam made you wonder why anyone would want them as an ally. (The story is told, probably apocryphal, about President Johnson telling

his advisors that in the carousel of South Vietnamese coups, one day those advisors would have him introducing to the press “our gallant ally, General Fuk U.”) But the assessments of the war were right on: it would take a half million U.S. troops and 3 years to turn the tide. Sure enough, three years later came Tet, a decisive defeat for North Vietnam.

By then, though, the battle may have been won but the war was lost. It was lost on terrain that should have been the expertise of men I admire – Mac Bundy, especially, but also Dean Rusk – the streets and campuses of the United States. The root of the problem was hubris. They did not believe what military intelligence was portraying. The military was doing worst case analysis. America’s technological might surely would make it easier.

In Vietnam, the hubris was about the war, in Iraq about the postwar. But again, it was men – perhaps that there were too few women, Condi Rice excepted, is part of the problem – whom I know and are able, Don Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Jerry Bremer. But they held premises – such as that Iraq would greet us as liberators – that seemed then preposterous and have only gotten more so with the passage of time. It was hubris, this time less about American firepower than about America as a model. But it is intellectual shallowness about strategy that is breathtaking. But I wonder if Ingemar would have shared that view. I suspect so. He was an old-fashioned strategist.

I suspect that he would have been worried by what worries me the most, the most important national security issue facing the United States now – the nation’s fiscal imbalance. Indeed, he foreshadowed that concern in his 2005 pamphlet. You’ll have noticed the crashing silence about foreign policy in the last election campaign – save a small amount of China-bashing. Hardly a word about cost, in lives or treasure. Not notice that the United States now spends on the war in Afghanistan seven times the Afghan GNP! (Of course, the number is a little squirrely: comparing high tech, rich country occupiers with a subsistence economy.)

To be sure, the first need is to keep stimulating the economy, not cut spending and raise taxes. In that sense, America’s situation is quite different from Germany’s. Britain’s is more like ours, and so the government’s policies amount to a very risky experiment. It’s one I expect will fail, but, as our Soviet friends used to say, life itself will provide the answer. For us, though, the right approach – on both economic and national security grounds – is short-run stimulus combined with a longer-term plan for spending cuts and tax increases to begin to put our fiscal house in order. In economic terms, the task is hard but not all that hard. The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform announced a plan last year for \$1 trillion in additional revenue, about \$2.2 trillion in spending reductions, and about \$700 billion in interest savings over ten years – phased in over time to avoid pushing the economy into recession.

The challenge is political. There seems absolutely no willingness to raise taxes, and to be serious about spending reductions means cutting entitlements, like Social

Security and Medicare, which are half the budget, and Defense which is a quarter. So far, taking the government to the brink of closure has been pure political theater. The whole debate has been over cutting discretionary domestic spending, which accounts for 17 percent of the budget. “Fiddling while Rome burns” comes to mind.

The concern is what happens if gridlock means we don’t act. Then, at some point the markets will. Imagine what an IMF program applied to the United States would look like. In the best of worlds, the United States will have to cut back its military and other commitments around the world. In the worst of worlds, it could be forced to do that quickly, with the kind of non-planning that characterized its approach to Iraq after the conventional war phase of the conflict. Ingermar’s strong suit wasn’t economics, but I suspect he’d be worried about a diminished American ability to lead.

I wonder what he’d make of Libya. Again, I suspect one side would be pride in Sweden flying those Viggen successors to patrol the no-fly zone.. The other, though, might be concern over the shallowness of the strategic thinking that underpins the operation: just how much military force will be provided in service of which political ends? Because he was a good old-fashioned strategist, he understood the goal of strategy was to match ends and means. Wishing for democracy is not strategy. What I wish is that I had the chance to ask him.

I conclude with one more Harvard story, a happy one that brings us together today. Solveig recalled one time when Ingemar brought his mother to visit. They went to the bank with him when he was trying to straighten out some financial matters, and she and his mother sat together rather impatiently. Again, in her words: “She spoke no English and I knew no Swedish, so we tried to communicate in German. I remember her shaking her head and telling me: "Er nie ein Croessus sei." That's probably not correct German grammar and not exactly what she said, but I got the idea--he'll never be rich. She'd have been proud that he saved enough to endow some scholarships for Harvard. He did love Harvard and the friends he made there.” And so he did.