From The Volcano: Getting Started

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"All warfare is based upon deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe that we are away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near. Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him." Sun Tzu

"It is said that because at the moment there is no disturbance on the surface revolution is far off. Gentlemen, allow me tell you I believe you are deceiving yourselves.

I believe at the present moment we are sleeping on a volcano . . . A wind of revolution blows, a storm is on the horizon."

Alexis de Tocqueville speaking in the Chamber of Deputies

a month prior to tho outbreak of the Revolution of 1848

Alexis de Tocqueville, of course, is a darling of both the political left and right, each claiming his storied life presaged and embodied their present views. He lived during the "long 19th Century," those complicated times racked by revolution and counter-revolution, teetering on the balance of powerful and numerous political forces. In a real sense, for de Tocqueville, an aristocrat with an appreciation of the need for order, the storm was always and everywhere on his mental horizon. This despite his acceptance, as a politician, of the need for reform. Thus, his life and his writings reflect a brilliantly thoughtful man whose sympathies for reform were continuously pitted against his admiration for some of what was to be left behind. He's a bit of a mystery, then, and his admirers often quote the same passages to support contradictory positions.

In any event, no one argues his predictive powers on January 27, 1848 when, in the Chamber of Deputies, he spoke the words quoted at the outset. Indeed, the sleeping volcano erupted a month later and swept the "King of the French," Louis-Phillipe, to immediate abdication, and, thus, to England. This initiated the Second Republic in France, and engendered a series of popular revolts throughout Europe.

"So what?" one might say (including you).

Historical analogies have very little value. Witness the verbal batting about of Hitler and Chamberlain and Munich during the run up and run down to the various Mideastern wars of the past 20 years. Indeed, liberals these days are bring Hitler out again to support many of their arguments about Tea Partiers: they're so Hitler, or Nazi, or whatever. Whatever happened to Genghis Khan or Ivan the Terrible of Vlad the Impaler or Darth Vader or Henry Kissinger? They must feel left out. Is Hitler-Chamberlain-Munich-Nazi the only example of, well, terribleness?

To the point: these Hitler analogies fall flat on many levels due to logical fallacies (about which I know well since I regularly employ them, knowingly or otherwise). The gestalt of the pre-war era differs in far more ways from ours than can be counted. This alone renders these Hitler analogies faulty, at best. Basically, it goes like this: Hitler was appeased in 1934. WWII followed five years later. Ahmadimegad was appeased in 2008. Therefore, Iran will surely invade Poland in 2013.

So, here I go anyway.

The drift in our political direction has lately been driven to a raging torrent by a re-energized and violent general sense of the failure of our political institutions, particularly the U.S. Congress, to produce satisfactory results for nearly anyone except, perhaps, oligarchs. Of course America has traveled this road many times, but these periods of extremity have usually been resolved through the political process, short of outright mass violence. But, remember the Civil War, and, to some extent, the Vietnam era - Kent State, civil rights struggles, assassinations.

With the continuing increase of violent discourse and hate crimes, driven by a national leadership cabal of revolting politicos like Carl Paladino, running for governor of New York, and Sharon Angle who speaks openly and matter-of-factly of "2nd amendment solutions"

Political Animal's Steve Benen asked What's Over the Line When the Line's Been Erased"

New York Times op-ed columnist Frank Rich, in yesterday's column, *The Rage Won't End on Election Day*, put it well:

> Don't expect the extremism and violence in our politics to subside magically after Election Day — no matter what the results. If Tea Party candidates triumph, they'll be emboldened. If they lose, the anger and bitterness will grow. The only development that can change this equation is a decisive rescue from our prolonged economic crisis. Not for the first time in history — and not just American history — fear itself is at the root of a rabid outbreak of populist rage against government, minorities and conspiratorial 'elites.'

he warned Frenchmen of the perils of willful blindness and of the attendant risks of remaining deaf in the face of mounting opposition.

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