**Naval War College Review**

Volume 42
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 5

1989

# Competitive Strategies? Good. Next? Long Range Planning

Victor Galdorisi
*U.S. Navy*

# Competitive Strategies? Good Next? Long-Range Planning

Commander George Victor Galdorisi, U.S. Navy

"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things."[1]

All military establishments have inherent strengths and weaknesses. Applying one's own strength against an enemy's weakness, while seeking to prevent the enemy from doing the same, has been a fundamental principle of successful operational planning and execution since the days of Alexander the Great.

In its waning years, the Reagan administration attempted to do just that, maturing the maritime/continental debate into one involving competitive strategies designed to apply enduring U.S. strengths against long-term Soviet weaknesses. As articulated specifically by President Reagan in 1987: "Competitive strategies are aimed at exploiting our technological advantages in thoughtful and systematic ways to cause the Soviets to compete less efficiently or less effectively in areas of military application. Such strategies seek to make portions of the tremendous Soviet military machine obsolete and force the Soviets to divert resources in ways they may not prefer, and in a manner that may not necessarily threaten our own forces. Low, observable (stealth) technology, for example, can render much of the Soviet investment in air defense obsolete and require the Soviets to divert resources from offensive to defensive forces. The contribution which new technologies can make to our competitive strategies is an explicit consideration in making defense procurement decisions."[2]

---

Commander Galdorisi is executive officer of the U.S.S. *New Orleans* (LPH 11). A 1970 Naval Academy graduate, and a LAMPS aviator who commanded HSL-43, Commander Galdorisi holds a masters degree in oceanography from the Naval Postgraduate School, a masters degree in international relations from the University of San Diego, and he graduated from the Naval War College with highest distinction. He is the prospective commanding officer of HSL-41.

Key tenets of the competitive strategies include:

- Maintaining a secure deterrent without matching the Soviets plane for plane, ship for ship, tank for tank.
- Adopting programs that make existing Soviet defense investments obsolete. Such programs must insure that an effective Soviet response would be far more costly to them than our initiative is to us.
- Forcing the Soviets to shift resources from offensive to defensive operations.
- Forcing the Soviets to forgo other offensive forces because of their real and perceived inability to overcome our defensive systems.
- Determining which combination of technology, weapon systems, and operational plans will allow the United States to capitalize on its strengths and exploit Soviet weaknesses.[3]

The competitive strategies have several antecedents. The post-World War II policy of massive retaliation, using nuclear weapons at times and places of our choosing, sought to apply U.S. strengths against Soviet weaknesses. As early as 1972 the Pentagon established the Office of Net Assessment under the direction of Andrew Marshall. This organization's charter, "to provide a comparative analysis of those military, technological, political and economic factors which impede or have a potential to impede our national security objectives, with those factors available or potentially available to enhance accomplishment of those same national security objectives," was the precursor of Secretary Caspar Weinberger's competitive strategies.[4] Many defense analysts have been urging the United States to do business in this fashion. Some have urged that U.S. military strategy be based on America's remaining strategic advantage over the U.S.S.R, that is, the fact that the United States is blessed with many rich allies while the Soviets have only a few poor ones. Jeffrey Record has urged the United States to attempt to gain qualitative advantage in critical war-fighting technologies while fashioning a war-fighting doctrine that exploits Soviet geographic and operational weaknesses. Record goes further in providing a basic list of Soviet weaknesses:

- Unreliable allies
- Rigid centralized control system
- Constrained access to the sea
- Fragile East-West lines of communications
- Technological inferiority
- Ethnic nationalism[5]

Thus, the concept of competitive strategies looks at technologies, mission areas, and leverage points in attempting to go beyond the old maritime/continental debate and to determine the optimum application of U.S. defense resources.

How real is the Department of Defense's commitment to competitive strategies? One view is that of long-time defense critic, Edward Luttwak. Referring to the competitive strategies working group, Luttwak noted that "there are among the 35,000 working in the Pentagon at least six who are actually thinking about how to make the United States stronger. The last thing on their minds is public relations."[6]

Luttwak may be unfair. The competitive strategies had the personal attention of former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger; his successor, Secretary Frank Carlucci, appeared to share the same enthusiasm for the concept, for he chaired a powerful competitive strategies council. All indications are that Secretary of Defense Richard Chaney has also resolved to support the competitive strategies.

The continuing personal attention of three successive secretaries of defense and their strong efforts to insert the concept into the mainstream of the Pentagon's processes, along with well-conceived efforts to give all the services a piece of the action, have given the competitive strategies an enormous amount of institutional momentum within the Department of Defense. Secretary Weinberger specifically directed that in the services' proposals for new systems and presentations for ongoing systems, they would be required to provide an analysis of how these systems exploit natural U.S. strengths and Soviet weaknesses. In addition, the strategies now have a congressional mandate. Congress requires the Secretary of Defense to report each January on the specifics of the progress of the competitive strategies. This all but guarantees that competitive strategies will survive changes in administrations which bring new personalities to the department.

While not a panacea for all our national security ills, competitive strategies do provide some relief from the well-worn continental/maritime debate and offer the possibility of igniting fresh thinking about the defense of the United States. If properly and consistently applied, competitive strategies can lead to a truly robust deterrent that relies on advanced design, manufacturing capabilities, and fighting doctrine.

Competitive strategies have the potential to focus incisively on technologies, mission areas, and leverage points, however, they do not address the timing of these concepts directly, and the Secretary of Defense's *Fiscal Year 1988 Report to the Congress* called for just that: greater attention to the timing and phasing of U.S. initiatives in order to render Soviet systems obsolete at the point when investment in them reaches its height.[7] The relatively recent adoption of the competitive strategies doctrine is perhaps one reason why this critical concept has not yet been addressed, but it is necessary that we do so soon.

## Long Cycles and Strategies

It is no surprise that long-range timing gets little attention in the national security strategy debate. Competition between the services for resources is so intense that they present virtually all requirements as pressing needs that must be fulfilled immediately in order to fit neatly into the current year's planning, programming, and budgeting cycle (PPBS) and the ongoing Five Year Defense Plan (FYDP). Each military service and service subgroup has learned painfully that futuristic requirements become the first victims of the mark-up process within the service, DoD, Executive Department, and Congress. Hence, smart players try to get as much as possible under contract as soon as possible.

These budget battles drive force structure, which, in turn, shapes strategies. U.S. global leadership does not seek hegemony; it seeks to deny hegemony to a nation aiming for absolute security, a security which by definition can only be achieved by world domination. Global leadership implies a long-term commitment that cannot be dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis. Unfortunately, this long-term commitment has not been part of our national security strategy planning process. Long-range planning was tried in the Navy in the 1970s but dissolved into staffs working frantically on current issues. Such planning as there is for long-term force requirements is often done by upper echelon leaders responding to outside, often compelling stimuli. This disjointed approach to decision making is not adequate to ensure that the nation's vital interests are protected.

What the tortuous budget process shows is that U.S. forces cannot defend the whole world at any time against every threat. This mismatch between obligations and resources is symbolized by a Persian Gulf intervention force composed of units stripped from other theaters. In contrast, the concept of competitive strategies provides a rational approach to defense. It recognizes that Allied forces cannot be strong everywhere at once and that therefore many campaigns must be sequential; we must be able to defend that which we value, and in our attacks we must concentrate our strengths against Soviet vulnerabilities instead of matching our strength against theirs.

But this process does not yet answer the critical question of *when* it is important to be strongest. Should we posture our force structure to be able to stop a Soviet blitzkrieg on the Central Front in 1990 or 1995, or 2010, or 2030, or 2050? Should our naval forces seek to be more secure against a Soviet blitzkrieg at sea in 1990 or 2000, 2020? These are perhaps the most critical questions that must be addressed in order to plan the allocation of defense resources logically, but they have never been tackled. The primary reason for this failing may be that we lack a method to determine the necessary "when" in defense resource allocations. Attempting to plan logically for the application of defense resources when a planning structure is in place is a

difficult process at best; attempting to do so without a planning structure is impossible.

One method that has some promise of bringing a degree of order out of chaos is the long-cycle approach to U.S. strategic policy as recently devised by George Modelski, William Thompson, and others. The theory of long cycles provides a coherent and meaningful account of the historic role of the United States in world politics and could help us define our strategies for the future. The basic propositions of the theory of long cycles may be formulated in the following statements:

- A global political system has been in existence since about 1500 A.D. This is the modern world's system of politics. The theory explains its behavior, and the patterns it identifies are attributes of the system.
- At intervals of about one century, the global political system has experienced global wars—each finalized by a general and legitimizing peace settlement. Among the more recent of such conflagrations were the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars at the turn of the 19th century and the two world wars of the 20th century. Global wars have been the critical turning points in the evolution of the global political system. The time elapsed between two such wars has marked the period of the long cycle.
- Each global war has resulted in the emergence of a preponderant world power as the system's principal provider of public goods for security and world organization. The world powers since 1500 have been Portugal, the Dutch Republic, Great Britain, and now the United States.
- Each world power is, at first, a preponderant supplier of public goods, largely as the function of its sea power and related command of the sea. This gives the political system a structure of unipolarity (high power concentration). But over the lifetime of the long cycle this preponderance gradually erodes, and the system moves into multipolarity (low power concentration).
- Each successive global order (as defined by its preponderant world power) has gradually decayed and deteriorated into another global war, thus completing the cycle.
- The system has bred the nation-state. All preponderant world powers have been successful nation-states, and through competitive emulation the nation-state has become the dominant political organization in the world system.
- The global political system has been associated with a high-growth economy. In their time, all world powers have been economically "active" zones, known first as mercantile and more recently as industrial powers. Through competitive emulation their example has propelled the world onto a path of rapid growth and development and instigated the formation of economic organizations of global scope.[8]

The existence of these long cycles of world leadership is an empirical fact that may be explained theoretically. In fact, long cycles have close identification with the long waves of the economic system (Kondratieff waves).[9] All of the world powers shared some common characteristics. Most had an island or peninsular location, each was favored with stable domestic politics, each had a strong economy, and each had a politico-strategic organization (in particular, a strong navy) that could exert power on a global scale.

**Long Cycles in Global Politics**

| Phases | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Global War | World Power | Delegitimation | Deconcentration |
| **Events** | | | |
| Major Warfare | Role Assumed by | | Challenger |
| **Portugese Cycle** | | | |
| 1491-1516 | 1516-1539 | 1540-1560 | 1560-1580 |
| Italian and Indian Ocean Wars | Portugal | | Spain |
| **Dutch Cycle** | | | |
| 1580-1609 | 1609-1639 | 1640-1660 | 1660-1688 |
| Spanish-Dutch Wars | Netherlands | | France |
| **First British Cycle** | | | |
| 1688-1713 | 1714-1739 | 1740-1763 | 1764-1792 |
| Wars of Louis XIV | Britain I | | France |
| **Second British Cycle** | | | |
| 1792-1815 | 1815-1849 | 1850-1873 | 1874-1914 |
| Wars of French Revolution and Napoleon | Britain II | | Germany |
| **American Cycle** | | | |
| 1914-1945 | 1945-1973 | 1973-2000 | 2000-2030 |
| World Wars I & II | United States | | Soviet Union |

Long cycles help to explain past international relations and, more importantly, help to clarify the future. They tell us a great deal about how the world works and promise to reveal more in the years to come. Since a

systematic long-range planning process is essential for maintaining strategic vision and building a strategic program, the long-cycle theory appears to be an attractive candidate to help plan strategic futures.

What implications do these long cycles have for U.S. strategic planners? First, the long-cycle theory suggests that the most important indicator of global power during the entire period of modern world politics has been sea power and the global reach it affords. Second, it indicates that the Soviet Union cannot achieve global leadership. Military force is a necessary condition for determining outcomes of interstate conflict, and the U.S.S.R. is a great military power, but military force alone is inadequate. The Soviet Union is incapable of projecting an appealing image worldwide—a condition essential for global leadership. American displacement could not be followed by Soviet replacement.[10] Third, the long-cycle theory indicates that the United States is engaged in world affairs as a successor and heir to a line of world powers, and its accomplishments in organizing world order in the past generation have been substantial. Fourth, the U.S. role calls for a fundamentally defensive posture to protect and maintain that order rather than to overthrow it. Fifth, this defensive strategy will avoid any imperial acquisitions.

These five factors, while important, do not address the question of timing resource allocations. However, a sixth factor does. The long-cycle theory indicates strongly that global war is not now imminent and, even though accidental wars among some powers are conceivable, the theory does not predict another global war for at least another generation. Hence, strategies that heavily prepare for such a war in the near term are likely to be wasteful.[11]

This understanding is absolutely critical to formulating national security strategy and can provide a heretofore missing dimension, that of the proper timing of defense allocations. The long-cycle theory strongly discourages spending defense dollars today on near-term fixes and shoring up initiatives (additional military manpower, service life extension programs, additional operating funds for steaming and flying hours, mission upgrades for aging systems) while encouraging significant investment designed to have a payoff during the height of the prospective Soviet challenge circa 2030 (such as advanced SDI technology, advanced stealth technology, space-based weapon systems, nonacoustic or transparent ocean antisubmarine warfare technology). What is required is that the long-cycle theory be institutionalized into the national security strategy planning process.

Those who think this approach is a radical departure from sound defense decision making and that we are mortgaging a perilous present for an uncertain future would do well to observe the current actions of our principal adversary, the Soviet Union. Could the Soviets already be factoring some type of long-cycle approach into their defense decision making? In a recent article in the *Naval War College Review*, James Westwood identified a retrenchment in Soviet naval deployments and a possible far-reaching

restructuring of their defense priorities. In addition to cutting back deployments, the Soviets have slashed readiness expenditures and dramatically curtailed hardware acquisition. They are pouring the money saved into technology for the future. This major investment in technology acceleration has been made with a view to achieving a more robust military establishment after the turn of the century.[12]

## Who's for Change?

Whatever they criticize, the overwhelming majority of the critics of America's national security strategic development process basically agree that there is a decided lack of long-range planning at any level. Even those who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, such as congressmen who hold weapons systems development hostage to yearly budget review, are nearly unanimous in their demand that we inject some strategic vision and more long-range planning into national security strategy.

Those who have been in the inner circle of government for extended periods also decry the lack of planning. In the words of Henry Kissinger, "lip service is paid to planning. What passes for planning is frequently the projection of the familiar into the future."[13] Congressman Newt Gingrich points out that this weakness is perhaps characteristically American, noting that "America is traditionally a pragmatic, fragmented, short-term focused country. We lack effective systems for systematic, long-range planning and an ability to think about long-range agendas for larger institutions."[14] Collectively, these criticisms focus on a problem in need of solution.

The long-cycle approach to U.S. strategic policy helps to solve this problem and provides a means to help strategic planners target their force structures and strategies to a time that is most propitious for achieving their maximum effectiveness. By introducing this long-range vision to the process and by having the patience to wait for results, we can bridge a critical gap.

But there are large and obvious obstacles in the way of reaching such seemingly desirable ends.

In Western societies, the science of planning has a bad reputation. It conjures up visions of governmental direction and control, and bureaucratic inefficiency and waste. This anti-planning bias tends to spill over into the national security environment.

Change, particularly long-range planning for change, by its very nature, tends to be viewed as a threat by some leaders and staffs, both appointed defense officials and career military officers. Long-range planning appears to reduce the authority of leaders who want to make decisions. This is particularly true if one organization is trying to develop long-range plans for other organizations.

Within the Pentagon in particular, officials hold their positions for short periods of time before they are reassigned, retire, resign, or are ousted because of a change in administration. Therefore, they tend to have "planning horizons" that generally correspond to the amount of time they expect to hold their present jobs. Astute long-range planning designed to make your successor's successor look good is not part of this bureaucratic ethic.

A large number of senior leaders in our government have a basically deterministic view of the future. Many are so accustomed to having their programs and ideas buffeted about by diverse groups and sources that they come to believe that the course of the future is already largely predetermined by forces outside their control. They believe that the best they can do is to make slight adjustments to an already decided future and otherwise make the best of what is bound to happen anyway.

Given this institutional resistance to change within the national security strategy planning bureaucracy, is it possible to either adapt the process to the system, or change the system to embrace a long-range planning process incorporating a good degree of strategic vision?

The answer to the first question is yes, it is possible to adapt the process to the system, but this is not desirable. The long-range strategic planning process has, over time, been adapted to, and corrupted by, the existing governmental bureaucratic structures with disastrous results that have made hip-shot decision making the order of the day by rewarding short-range crisis management and punishing long-range planning. It does not work well.

If it is not desirable to plan for national security within the context of the current system, is it possible then to adapt the system to encourage strategic vision and long-range national security strategy planning? This is a crucial question. Certainly anything is possible, but many efforts fail because the payoff is not worth the investment. This is not the case with national security strategy planning. The stakes could not be higher. Therefore, we must assume that such an adaptation is possible and then ask two questions: One, what steps can be taken to facilitate effective long-range national security planning and two, what conditions will assist in making this work?

There are a number of logical steps that must be taken if long-range planning is to succeed. The key components are:

- We must recognize that long-range planning is the centerpiece of the organization's existence.
- We must institutionalize it.
- We must recognize that it is useful in making current decisions.
- Top decision makers in the organization must support it.[15]

The second step is perhaps the most important because it is only through institutionalization that long-range national security strategy planning can survive.

The only question to ask is, Will we institutionalize these changes rationally and in an orderly fashion, or will we do so in response to a crisis when it may already be too late to change? It is perhaps ironic that most of those willing to gamble on the latter course probably could never envision themselves wasting their money on a lottery ticket.

## Notes

1. James Kotter and Leonard Schlesinger, "Choosing Strategies for Change," *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1979, p. 1061.
2. U.S. President, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), p. 19.
3. Caspar Weinberger, *Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1988* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), p. 68.
4. Jon Englund, "The Doctrine of Competitive Strategies," *Strategic Review*, Summer 1987, p. 65.
5. Jeffrey Record, *Revising U.S. Military Strategy: Tailoring Means to Ends* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984), p. 85.
6. David Morrison, "The Rush to Fill a Strategy Vacuum," *National Journal*, July 1987, p. 1803.
7. Weinberger, p. 65.
8. Robert Harkavy and Edward Kolodziej, eds., *American Security Policy and Policy Making* (Lexington, Mass.: G.C. Heatland, 1980) p. 4.
9. George Modelski, ed., *Exploring Long Cycles* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienuer Pub., 1987) p. 5.
10. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan, The Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the U.S.-Soviet Contest* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), p. 125.
11. Harkavy and Kolodziej, p. 16.
12. James T. Westwood, "Soviet Reaction to the U.S. Maritime Strategy," *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1988, p. 62.
13. Major General Perry M. Smith et al., *Creating Strategic Vision* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1987), p. 29.
14. Smith, p. xvii.
15. Smith, p. 22.

The author wishes to express his thanks to Commander Michael McCune of the Secretary of Defense Office of Competitive Strategies and to Doctor Patrick Drinan, Chairman of the Department of Political Science, University of San Diego, for their invaluable help in preparing this article.