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# Politics and Force Levels

Richard Ned Lebow

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U.S. Army Air Forces to be caught on the ground and destroyed. Thanks to this avoidable blunder the Japanese gained air superiority over the Philippines in one stroke. Then it was only a matter of time before they triumphed.

The absence of air defense anywhere, even over their base, meant that the surface ships could not attack the Japanese successfully. The only remaining naval weapon was the submarine. Soon Hart and his 29 submarine commanders (the number of submarines had risen during his tenure) learned to their dismay, that they were armed with torpedoes so defective as to be useless. Thus the Asiatic Fleet was robbed of all its weapons.

There was little that Hart could do. His common sense and his professional judgment dictated a withdrawal of his forces from the Philippines, rather than wasting them in action doomed to failure against the Japanese. Reluctantly, he ordered his forces to retire to the south. He and his small staff left in a submarine and under the keels of the conquering Japanese fleer proceeded to Java. MacArthur complained to Washington that the navy had deserted him.

When he arrived in Java Hart found to his surprise thar he had been appointed the naval commander of a new allied command for Southeast Asia. His tenure in rhat position was brief, marked as it was by continuing reverses at the hands of superior Japanese forces, by Dutch inrrigue to have their own admiral appointed to his position, and by MacArthur's malicious complaints to Washington. Finally, after much complicated maneuvering in Java, London, and Washington, Hart was asked to request his relief.

Leutze properly devores the major portion of his fascinating and well-written biography to this short but extremely important period in Hart's life. He sets the stage for these complicated events and he tells of the great difficulties Hart had in receiving adequate support and direction from Washington. There is a fascinating account of his relations with General MacArthur, then his military junior. The relations were not good. MacArthur's petulance, his arrogance, and his blindness to military and naval realities are revealed for all to see. How Hart dealt with MacArthur is a lesson in wisdom and forbearance.

When Hart returned home he did not retire. He served on the General Board and he conducted an extensive inquiry into the disaster at Pearl Harbor. Finally, when he retired from active duty he served for two years as United Stares Senator from Connecticut. He was blessed with a happy old age and died in 1971 at the age of 94.

The task of a biographer is not only to tell the story of his subject's life against the background of his time, but also to explain and to describe rhe man. In this respect Leutze has done an admirable job. Hart kept a personal diary in which he recorded the events of his life and his innermost thoughts. Leurze's keen insighrs tell us the kind of man Hart was and his historian's discipline prevents him from descending the slippery slope of psycho-history. The result is a vivid and compelling picture of a man and his times. It is also a model of what biography can and should be.

B. MITCHELL SIMPSON III
Newport, Rhode Island

Ball, Desmond. *Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. 322pp. $27.50

Desmond Ball has produced a carefully documented and well-written study of the srrategic missile program of the Kennedy administration. He demonstrates that this buildup was not, as is commonly assumed, a response to the "missile gap" because Kennedy and his advisors no longer believed in the existence of such a gap at the time they

made their arms decisions. Nor, Ball argues, was the massive buildup a reflection of strategic doctrine as it went far beyond what Kennedy and McNamara thought necessary for deterrence. Rather, it was the outgrowth of political pressures upon the new administration, some of which Kennedy had created himself.

During the presidential campaign Kennedy had hammered away at the alleged weakness of the American strategic arsenal and had repeatedly stated his intention of supporting a variety of weapon programs to restore clear-cut American superiority. According to Ball, these promises, while they aroused public expectations did not account for the primary source of pressure upon the administration. This came instead from within the government, from the Air Force and Navy, both of which were intent on committing the President to buying as many missiles or submarines as possible. Air Force requests for the Minuteman, for example, ranged from between 3,000 and 10,000. The Navy, which toyed with the idea of a fleet of 100 Polaris SSBNs, pushed for 45; their calculation of the force levels required to achieve finite deterrence ignored completely the existence of the Air Force and its contribution to the American deterrent.

Both services used whatever political clout they had to lobby both the administration and the Congress for their respective programs and succeeded, Ball argues, in committing the administration to a much higher level of strategic forces than it had wished for. In this regard, Ball sees the lobbying efforts of defense contractors, certain to profit from expanded production of missiles and submarines, as another effective pressure upon the administration.

Ball believes, with good reason, that the Kennedy experience has great contemporary relevance. Whereas the Soviet Union has followed an evolutionary path to strategic force development, improving its forces by means of a series of small modifications, the United States has proceeded by fewer but larger generational leaps. The Trident and the MX missile, regardless of the ultimate mode of deployment for the latter, represent another such leap. What level of forces will be deployed?

According to Ball, there is a tendency for existing numbers to assume sanctity and for systems to be replaced on a one-for-one basis regardless of the qualitative differences between them or the changing nature of American strategic requirements. His purpose in writing is to demonstrate the extent to which the Kennedy-McNamara strategic decisions—the source of today's numbers—were both hasty and the product of political compromise. By doing so Ball hopes to prod strategists and policymakers into taking a more open look at force requirements and presumably to opt for lower force levels.

Ball's analysis is sound if unlikely to find a receptive audience in the current administration. Like Kennedy, Reagan has come to power pledged to build up American forces to compensate for our alleged inferiority. To date his strategic decisions appear to be at least as influenced by bureaucratic in-fighting as those of Kennedy were. The Reagan administration is likely to bequeath to us a strategic arsenal that goes a long way toward meeting the "wish lists" of the services and defense contractors. Like the forces Kennedy built, they may bear only a marginal relationship to any coherent conception of real strategic needs.

RICHARD NED LEBOW
Johns Hopkins University, Bologna Center

Henderson, William Darryl. ***Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation in a Modern Army in Combat.*** Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979. 163pp. $17.95

This is another of Greenwood's highly specialized publications, in this