

1978

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Recommended Citation

Vardamis, Alex A. (1978) "Professional Reading: Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy—Faulty Rationale for Current Practice," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 31 : No. 1 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol31/iss1/13>

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NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Faulty Rationale for Current Practice

by

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Few works have so conspicuously influenced American nuclear planning as Henry Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. Published in 1957, it was the book of the hour with Congress, the State Department, the Pentagon and President Eisenhower himself. Written for the Council on Foreign Relations, it appeared at the perfect moment to gain acceptance, for it synthesized ideas that were already current in Washington, but which had not yet been articulated within such a persuasive intellectual and historical framework.

Although the book deals with many facets of policy, its most controversial chapter, the one that received the greatest attention from the Eisenhower administration, argues that limited nuclear war, particularly in Western Europe, should be a strategic option for the United States. This was not a new idea, but it arrived at a convenient time for opponents of Dulles' strategy of massive retaliation; attempting to convince the Administration of the need for U.S. limited-war forces, they seized on the work to support their arguments. As pointed out in a *New York Times* article of 11 August 1957, officials at the highest governmental levels were interested in the concept of limited nuclear war and that the lead in the debate had been taken by "scholar Kissinger" and his new book.¹ *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, which was on the best-seller list for 14 weeks, rapidly became the single most authoritative document on limited nuclear war. Perhaps more significantly, it ultimately vaulted Henry Kissinger on his way to un-

paralleled levels of power and prestige in U.S. foreign affairs.

Not everyone was convinced by Kissinger's conclusions, and many found his notion that nuclear war could be controlled to be extremely dangerous. Dean Acheson was appalled by the book. He wrote: "Quite apart from its military impracticability, our allies would see at once that the proposed strategy would consign them to a fate more devastating than would compliance with the demands of the Soviet Union."² Paul Nitze criticized Dr. Kissinger's futuristic vision of a "little nuclear war." More was required, he felt, than a "Rube Goldberg chart of arbitrary limitations, weightless weapons, flying platforms with no fuel requirements, and tactics based on no targets for attack and no logistic or communication vulnerabilities to defend."³ James King, writing in the *New Republic*, found Kissinger's conclusions to be based upon a

uniquely fragile argument . . . and upon an imaginative picture of nuclear ground tactics that seems . . . to leave out some essential facts. The picture is supposed to show that tactical nuclear combat need not prove intolerably destructive of the combatants. This picture needs the closest examination.

And although King praised Kissinger's "brilliantly developed theory of limited war," he declared that the book contained "many inadequacies." "Surely," he wrote, "Kissinger is not asking the German people to believe they would be

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spared destruction in limited war . . ."⁴

But most reviews were favorable. August Heckscher, in *Saturday Review*, wrote that

the book has already become something of a classic in the field . . . Here is the great subject of war and peace set forth in the round, with its interrelated factors kept steadily in perspective, with its feasible choices patiently and imaginatively explored. Apart from the great service it has undoubtedly rendered at the official level, the book has served the vital purpose of restoring to laymen the possibility of thinking meaningfully about the things upon which life and civilization depend.⁵

Hans Morgenthau found the book answered "the questions everybody is asking: how can a nation defend its interests in the atomic age without destroying itself and civilization in the process?"⁶ *Newsweek* declared the work to be "must reading for United States government officials."⁷ Perhaps the most effusive and simplistic praise came from *Time*: "In the Pentagon, the State Department, the White House, top United States policymakers are earnestly debating a new book, a brilliant, independent analysis of the nation's post war diplomatic and military struggle with communism." Kissinger "gets and deserves high marks from . . . top policymakers and military men." With a flourish of admiration, *Time's* reviewer concluded:

It takes a firm hand and steady nerves to face a small-war challenge, to resist the outcries against atomic weapons, and to confront the enemy with the choice of backing down or risking all-out war . . . At a time when public apathy, disarmament talk and budget mindedness are being felt in the scales of U.S. policy . . . Kissinger has brought fresh ideas to weigh.⁸

Such enthusiasm over the prospect of any war, let alone a nuclear one, seems dangerously naive, in view of our experiences of the past two decades. Since Vietnam the desirability of U.S. involvement in limited conventional warfare has been seriously questioned. Of course, limited nuclear war was never tested in Vietnam. Possibly some may argue that had U.S. forces been armed with small-yield nuclear weapons, the outcome would have been more favorable to the United States. In any event, the thousands of American tactical nuclear weapons in Europe indicate that the United States remains committed to the concept of limited nuclear warfare. Yet a widespread suspicion exists that densely populated Europe is the least appropriate arena for even a limited nuclear exchange. The debate is far from over. In fact, it is perhaps approaching a new period of prominence. European reluctance to accept deployment of the neutron bomb illustrates the growing concern in NATO over the dangers of a nuclear confrontation with the Warsaw Pact. Civilian strategists and military planners are once again questioning the purpose of the American tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, alleged to be so essential to Western Defense. Insofar as *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, which articulated the rationale for stationing nuclear weapons in Europe, stands largely unamended after 20 years, it now seems necessary to reexamine its conclusions. A retrospective book review can perhaps shed new light on one of the most far-reaching military debates of the 1950s; it might also suggest that revision in our nuclear arsenal in NATO is in order. It is time to reexamine whether Kissinger is the drummer to whom we should have marched.

Kissinger perceived, in 1957, that the United States was in a life-or-death struggle with the Soviet Union. The contest was ideological, political, economic, and military; the enemy was

monolithic, unscrupulous, and totally dedicated to the overthrow of the Western world. And the West was losing the battle. The irony of our retreat was that we possessed a weapon Promethean in magnitude but found ourselves unable to use it because no single Soviet provocation seemed to warrant such a drastic response as thermonuclear war. Our strategic nuclear arsenal, wedded to the doctrine of massive retaliation, was so terrifying, so threatening to the existence of life on earth, that we were paralyzed into inaction. From time to time we made bullying threats of massive destruction which clearly bore little relationship to the minor skirmishes all over the globe by which the Soviets were seen to be nibbling us to death. Incrementally, through internal subversion and limited war, in small struggles that never seemed sufficiently grave to risk all-out war, the Soviets were relentlessly pursuing their goal.

Kissinger, writing to effect new policy, explained that there should be a choice between thermonuclear war and surrender, a middle ground which offered new alternatives. "No more urgent task confronts American policy than to bring our power into balance," he wrote.⁹ His solution was to make the power fit the situation; to scale our nuclear response to the level of aggression; to "create alternatives less cataclysmic than a thermonuclear war."¹⁰ If the Soviets pursued limited war, we should have the capability to counter with limited nuclear war. Kissinger explained that because of America's economic, technological, moral, and psychological strengths, we held a clear advantage over the Soviet Union in a limited nuclear confrontation. He was writing, of course, when Soviet intercontinental capability was negligible, and when Soviet tactical nuclear weapons were practically nonexistent, a sharp contrast to the situation today.

Clearly, the service best suited to implement limited nuclear war was the

Army. Far too much reliance had been placed on SAC. What was needed, Kissinger decided, were small, mobile, self-contained nuclear ground units, employing tactics based on speed, surprise, and the overwhelming firepower of nuclear weapons. Such units would neutralize the superiority in manpower of the Soviet Union. This part of the argument was especially appealing to a budget-conscious Administration, eager to reduce the costs of maintaining large conventional ground forces in Europe. It was politically convenient to learn that the United States could maintain its defense commitments, at the same time realizing large savings in dollars and manpower, by substituting small "atomic units" for conventional ground troops.

Another attractive aspect of Kissinger's book, for those disturbed by the influence of the Strategic Air Command on national policy, was his rationale for returning the vast nuclear power of the United States to political control. Too long, Kissinger argued, nuclear policy had been dominated by Air Force generals. His goal was to bring that power under the control of diplomats and to relate it to specific diplomatic objectives. What was needed, he wrote, was a "strategic doctrine which gives our diplomacy the greatest freedom of action."¹¹ The measured, deliberate and limited application of nuclear weapons, always as an extension of politics, underlies his theory of limited war. Kissinger believed, however, that politicians should not shrink from the prospect of using nuclear weapons, for they represented the ultimate extension of national power. Each "small" mushroom cloud could become the equivalent of a diplomatic exchange which would serve to inform an opponent that we had great power, that we were willing to use it, and that there was more where that came from. But the decision to use such weapons had to reside in the hands of the political

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leadership. Nuclear weapons were much too powerful, to paraphrase Clemenceau, to be entrusted to the military.

Since the end of World War II, the U.S. Military Establishment, for a variety of reasons, had played an ever-decreasing role in the formulation of strategic concepts. A large and growing number of civilian strategic theorists, frequently university-based, had taken the initiative in establishing the directions for U.S. military doctrine. The military professional had played, at best, a secondary, consultative role. That Kissinger, a university professor in 1957, prescribed a theoretical framework for limited nuclear war, was not unusual. It was remarkable, though, that an academic with extremely limited military and scientific background presumed to deal with specific tactical, technological, and operational questions. With considerable arrogance, Kissinger explained why he felt it was necessary to instruct military professionals in their own specialty. American generals were locked into a World War II mentality. They erroneously believed that the next war would begin with a surprise attack on the continental United States. Their principal characteristics, he concluded, were a reliance on tradition and a lack of versatility and imagination. They seemed unable to recognize that nuclear weapons had revolutionized warfare and that total victory, in a military sense, was no longer possible. The military had to learn to settle for limited objectives and to scale its response to an appropriate level of destructiveness. In the nuclear age, battles would approach "the stylized contests of the feudal period which served as much as a test of will as a trial of strength." If the U.S. Army could learn to follow Kissinger's guidelines, the advantage in a limited nuclear war would fall preponderantly to the United States. But if the military failed to heed his advice, such a war could end in disaster:

... Unless they [nuclear weapons] are coupled with sophisticated delivery means, highly complex communications systems and appropriate tactics, it will be difficult to utilize them effectively. Unless the whole military establishment is geared to nuclear tactics, nuclear war becomes a highly dangerous adventure.¹²

In *Necessity for Choice* (1961) Kissinger seemed to abandon his strategy of limited nuclear war, primarily because the Army was unable to implement a tactical doctrine based on his earlier guidelines. He had also come to believe that we were probably incapable of keeping a nuclear war limited for very long. But he returned to his original opinion in 1962. In an article in *Foreign Affairs*, "The Unsolved Problems of European Defense," he again argued that tactical nuclear weapons could be used most effectively on the NATO battlefield. Although the services were still remiss in failing to implement his model, Kissinger remained convinced that his concept of limited nuclear war remained sound. Because nuclear weapons were crucial to a defense of Western Europe, the Army's inability to grasp the new and daring form of warfare had to be overcome.

Kissinger proposed to replace the military "Maginot Line mentality" with what frequently seems a Star Wars fantasy. His strategy of limited nuclear war was based on a technology of science fiction that, 20 years later, still seems unrealizable. By focusing on Kissinger's advice, comparing his vision of 1957 with the reality of 1978, we can begin to understand why there is a growing uneasiness in NATO over the entire prospect of fighting a limited nuclear war in Europe. Kissinger's instructions on nuclear tactics and organization, his assessment of military technology, and his evaluation of American character superiority on the nuclear battlefield, seem, in retrospect, not only

superficial and occasionally absurd, but also, when we realize that we are reading a prime example of the rationale that underlies our current Army nuclear force in NATO, deeply unsettling.

Nuclear Unit Organization. Kissinger began his instructions with an organizational scheme for nuclear units:

The tactics for limited nuclear war should be based on small, highly mobile, self-contained units, relying largely on air transport, even within the combat zone. The units should be small, because with nuclear weapons firepower does not depend on numbers and because a reduction in the size of the target will place an upper limit on the power of the weapons it is profitable to employ against it. The units must be mobile, because when anything that can be detected can be destroyed, the ability to hide by constantly shifting position is an essential defense. The units should be self-contained, because the cumbersome supply system of World War II is far too vulnerable to interdiction.^{1 3}

There is little similarity between Kissinger's organizational theory and present-day fact. NATO ground-delivery nuclear forces are relatively large, somewhat cumbersome, and dependent on considerable external support. Why is this the case? Is the military petulantly dragging its feet? Or is there a solid reality that stands in the way of Kissinger's prescription?

Part of the answer lies in the physical characteristics of U.S. Army tactical nuclear weapons. They consist primarily of nuclear projectiles designed to be fired at ranges of a few miles from 155-millimeter or 8-inch howitzers; warheads launched at medium ranges (less than 100 miles) by rocket or missile: the Honest John, the Sergeant, and their newest replacement, the Lance; the rela-

tively immobile Nike Hercules, a nuclear air defense system; the complex Pershing, which fires larger yield warheads (up to a few hundred kilotons) several hundred miles; and finally, atomic demolitions which can be thought of as nuclear landmines. Most of these weapons are physically unwieldy; some of them, such as the 8-inch howitzer nuclear projectile, require complicated assembly; many of them are large, particularly the Honest John, Sergeant, and Nike Hercules. And when the warhead is relatively simple and small, such as the 155-millimeter nuclear projectile, it is fired from a delivery system of World War II vintage. Atomic demolitions, which are physically emplaced at the desired point of detonation, could be moved around by small, mobile units. But they, like all nuclear weapons, require protection by an extensive array of security forces.

All U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe are currently stored in highly protected storage sites far distant, in most cases, from their actual field deployment area. Nuclear storage sites are easily identifiable, for they are ringed with double fences, brightly illuminated at night, and bristling with security guards. In peacetime, nuclear weapons are rarely removed from their secure bunkers. When they are, it is in small numbers for maintenance purposes, or for evacuation prior to shipment back to the United States. Weapons are not moved for exercise purposes. Should actual field deployment of nuclear weapons to wartime field storage sites be ordered in a period of increased mobilization, they would be, for the most part, transported on large motor convoys, accompanied by heavily armed security troops and by vehicle-mounted communication systems. On the road, these convoys would be easily identifiable, slow-moving, and vulnerable to air or ground attacks. When they reached their field storage sites, in some forest, along a wood line, or in a deserted farm complex, a tem-

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porary depot consisting of perhaps several dozen nuclear warheads would have to be established. The security problems would be immense. These temporary sites would be tempting targets for espionage, sabotage, or small, local ground attacks.

Extending beyond the immediate vicinity of the nuclear delivery unit and its storage site is a complex and far-reaching communication system extending back to additional security forces, to operational headquarters, and eventually, to the President of the United States, who, under existing law, alone has the authority to order the release of nuclear weapons. At each field storage site, therefore, an elaborate communication center would have to be established linking that location with the nuclear release chain. By simply combining the security forces, the radios, the nuclear weapons, the delivery vehicles, and the support troops, one begins to appreciate the difficulties of moving nuclear weapons around the tactical battlefield.

Tactics and Technology. Kissinger seemed to rely upon technological breakthroughs that would improve the mobility of nuclear units. But he was not writing for the distant future, but for the here and now. NATO forces have had to make do with currently available equipment and not with esoteric science-fiction possibilities. Kissinger theorized:

These tactics will require a radical break with our traditional notions of warfare and military organizations. The army has already made a start by reorganizing some of its divisions each into five self-contained combat teams. It stresses the development of troop-carrying helicopters, and even the individual soldier in some units has been given a rudimentary ability to transport himself through the air by means of the "flying platform."¹⁴

The Pentomic Division Kissinger referred to simply did not work. Separated into five combat teams, the organization was too large and unwieldy to be controlled by a single division headquarters. And the combat teams were too small to sustain independent operations without extensive logistical support. Although the Pentomic Division looked good on paper, it rapidly became apparent in practice that nuclear operations demanded centralized control. Five combat teams overtaxed the command and control capability of a single division headquarters. The Pentomic Division was disbanded and the Army returned to the traditional three-brigade division.

Kissinger apparently visualized soldiers flying off on individual platforms, with nuclear weapons tucked in their rucksacks. Without intending to ridicule his concept of flying platforms, it might be instructive to take it one step further, to imagine that a technological breakthrough made flying platforms available for the nuclear battlefield and to visualize what such a nuclear force would be like. First of all, rudimentary nuclear security, command and control requirements would prohibit any lone individual from possessing a nuclear weapon. He would have to be joined by a second soldier on a flying platform to satisfy the "two-man" rule. What would be on adjoining platforms? A heavily armed infantry platoon to provide security; a radio to provide a secure link to the nuclear release net; another radio for the unit's operational net; metal containers carrying release codes; explosives to destroy the weapon should capture be imminent; rolls of concertina to ring the perimeter as soon as the weapon-carrying platform landed. In the near vicinity would be a security company with machineguns, grenades, and automatic rifles to reinforce the accompanying security platoon in case of attack.

Unlikely as such a picture of flying platforms may be, it does point out a fundamental problem concerning nuclear delivery units. They have to be so large to satisfy command, control, custody, and security requirements that they are easy to detect, slow-moving and vulnerable.

Or did Kissinger mean that the lone soldier, skimming the treetops with his atomic arsenal in his weapons pouch, should be permitted to wage nuclear war independently? Certainly it seems politically and psychologically infeasible that the U.S. Government, or any nation, would permit one individual, whether an 18-year old private, a veteran sergeant, or an aging general, to assume the responsibility for nuclear warfare. Kissinger's admiration for the proverbial initiative of the individual GI in World War II was apparently boundless. Of course, it might be argued that the individual's nuclear ammunition would be of such low yield that there would be no danger of a berserk "flier" doing irreparable damage. The argument comes full circle. Why, then, make the weapon nuclear?

But beyond the question of trust, there is the problem of this lone soldier falling into enemy hands. Again the experience in Vietnam illustrates the vulnerability of slow-moving, low-flying craft. If a helicopter was an easy target, how much more so would a flying GI?

Kissinger, dissatisfied with the internal combustion engine, urged that science develop an alternative form of locomotion:

Since the mobile units will not be able to rely on a logistic system of the traditional type, they should be able to carry all their supplies and maintain their own equipment. A great deal of thought will have to be given to measures for reducing the bulkiness of equipment, particularly to developing a substitute for the internal com-

bustion engine whose demands for fuel and maintenance severely limit the range and staying power of mobile units.¹⁵

It need hardly be explained that should deployment to wartime field locations be ordered, thousands of nuclear warheads in NATO would be transported on vehicles powered by internal combustion engines. As of now, there are no nuclear- or solar-powered trucks available. Some warheads could be transported by helicopter, particularly those assigned to U.S. delivery units. But our NATO allies, by-and-large, are confined to truck transport. One suspects, though, that in many ways a truck convoy is perhaps no more vulnerable, in a sophisticated air defense environment, than a helicopter convoy.

As for "reducing the bulkiness of equipment," much has been done. But the logistic burdens which impede mobility have not been eliminated. One item which might be illustrative of these problems is concertina wire. When nuclear weapons are deployed outside their permanent storage depots, a defensive perimeter must be established. Concertina wire affords at least some security against infiltrators. But given an area large enough to contain several warheads, it readily becomes apparent that a self-sufficient unit must possess rolls on rolls of concertina, and trucks to transport it all. Frequently, during NATO exercises, nuclear units merely ring their simulated storage sites with white ribbon to lend some sense of reality to the proceedings. Either they lack the concertina, or the transport trucks. The difficulty of moving concertina is merely symptomatic of the logistic problems of nuclear units. In order to be self-contained they are no longer small nor mobile.

As has been stated, a nuclear unit on the move must, of necessity, include a large number of trucks, jeeps, communication vans and other vehicles. It is inevitably vulnerable to air attack. Nor

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does this vulnerability end when it reaches its field location. Careful sound and light discipline and scrupulous adherence to camouflage techniques by well-trained units, traveling only at night, can make it difficult for enemy aircraft to detect nuclear ground units. But not impossible. Survival of Army nuclear delivery units would be in jeopardy without friendly air cover. Kissinger dismissed such mundane concerns:

The concept that air supremacy is the pre-requisite of victory and that it is achieved by bombing enemy airfields will soon be outstripped by technological developments . . . It will then be meaningless to speak of air supremacy, in the traditional sense . . . Even before the advent of missiles and vertical take-off aircraft, the concept of complete air supremacy will have become inconsistent with a policy of limited war.¹⁶

Because missiles would be "dispersed and concealed," because vertical takeoff aircraft "need no airfield" which the enemy could crater, and because deep penetration of enemy airspace might unleash a thermonuclear response, Kissinger declared air supremacy to be irrelevant in limited nuclear war. When one realistically assesses the rewards the enemy would reap by destroying nuclear delivery units and their weapons before such units are brought into firing positions, a different view of air supremacy emerges. As unlikely as a Soviet attack on Western Europe now appears, such aggression probably would be preceded by preemptive strikes, through a variety of offensive means, against all NATO nuclear sites. Enemy use of missiles and assault aircraft cannot be cavalierly discounted. Even more than in a conventional war, air supremacy, backed by a strong local air defense system, is a prerequisite to success.

As for vertical takeoff aircraft, they

have not fulfilled their promise, partially because their range is extremely limited. The vast majority of NATO's tactical aircraft is very much dependent on the survivability of airfields.

Kissinger foresaw nuclear warfare obviating the need for communication centers. He explained that communication systems are vital in conventional war, because of "the large numbers of troops involved" and the "relatively small destructiveness of individual weapons." But in a limited nuclear war armies would be "mobile and self-contained" and "because command would be decentralized" the "elimination of communications centers may lose its former significance."¹⁷

It is difficult to understand this reasoning. In a nuclear war, communication centers must serve as connecting links with the entire release chain which stretches back to the White House. The transmission of all traffic concerning nuclear warfare flows from the continental United States to high-level military command centers, down to implementing nuclear delivery units. One could hardly imagine a more centralized, rigid structure of command and control than that demanded by nuclear warfare. Theoretically, all higher headquarters from, say, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe to battalion could be destroyed, and still the President of the United States could relay his release authority for nuclear weapons to an individual firing battery, telling them through coded message to launch a nuclear weapon, to recall it, or to destroy it in place. But the ability of the President to do this on a broad front, with major communication centers out of action, in the confusion and uncertainties of a rapidly deteriorating situation, and under the present state of communications technology, is highly doubtful. Destruction of communication centers in conventional war was serious, but not necessarily disastrous. Conventional units can continue to fight

autonomously for long periods of time, relying on local initiative and leadership. In nuclear war, on the other hand, destruction of a major communication center probably would disrupt operations for days, and could result in a paralysis of NATO forces over a large segment of the European front. Because nuclear weapons can and should be employed only with Presidential authority, a nuclear delivery unit severed from its communications links would be reduced to fighting for its own existence, unable to use the nuclear weapons in its arsenal. Or did Kissinger mean to suggest that small units retain, through a decentralized system of codes, for example, an independent capability to wage nuclear war? Nuclear proliferation, extended to hundreds of small artillery units represents a staggeringly daring concept.

Everything said thus far should indicate that security of nuclear weapons is a vital national consideration. Strict safeguards have been instituted to insure that they are protected against accident, capture, and unauthorized use. The plethora of checks, protective devices, release codes, permissive action links, self-destruct mechanisms, and the like, are not simply a reflection of the military's high standards of security and custody; they are, in large measure, the outgrowth of the immense and proper concern of the U.S. Government, over the past two decades, that nuclear weapons remain under Presidential control. Instructions are specific:

Under existing law, the President alone has the basic authority to order use of nuclear weapons . . . Further, while NATO operational plans contemplate the assignment of U.S. theater nuclear forces to the Supreme Allied Commander [currently General Alexander Haig] in time of war, the President would retain his constitutional responsibility to control these forces and could order or

forbid the use of U.S. nuclear weapons . . . even after assignment of these forces to SACEUR.¹⁸

We recognize in peacetime that if checks were lax, security forces slight, and electronic and mechanical locking devices nonexistent, the dangers of unauthorized use or capture by terrorists would become unacceptable. Strict controls are no less essential in war, to insure that local forces cannot independently precipitate and wage a nuclear war. As now constituted, in numerous battlefield situations, the last vestige of American custody over a nuclear weapon would be two lonely GIs at a launcher or howitzer firing position. The codes, checks and controls keep them honest. They also protect from an ally who may have independent conceptions of what warrants the introduction of nuclear war.

The immense superstructure necessary to insure that nuclear weapons never escape political control apparently was not considered by Kissinger. How else could he have proposed the following?

Since mobile nuclear units will often be operating deep within enemy territory, they will also have to acquire an understanding of political relationships, particularly of methods of organizing and supporting partisan activities. In short, the units for nuclear war should be conceived to approximate a naval vessel as a self-contained tactical formation, but also to act as a political and military spearhead for disorganizing the enemy rear.¹⁹

Can we seriously envision nuclear units cast adrift "deep within enemy territory," carrying along their nuclear warheads while simultaneously organizing partisans or debating Lenin and Marx with rear-echelon Soviet troops? We might also recall that, earlier, Kissinger excluded air supremacy partially because deep aerial penetration would risk

the outbreak of thermonuclear war. Surely it is a contradiction to ignore the same risks associated with similar penetrations by "mobile nuclear units." But leaving such objections aside, one sees these Special Forces patrols with orders to destroy specific targets and disrupt the enemy rear. Such patrols would necessarily have to possess the authority to use the weapons at will. Certainly, any government, short of an absolute military dictatorship, would hesitate to transfer such power over war and peace into military hands. The last vestige of political control vanishes in Kissinger's unusual scenario.

Kissinger believed that limited nuclear war would render conventional weapons redundant. Attempting to carry along conventional weapons would, he instructed, not only slow down nuclear units, it would also create a logistic chain inviting nuclear attack by the enemy:

It is clear that units of this type [nuclear units] cannot both remain mobile and capable of fighting conventional war. Without nuclear weapons they would not have the firepower to defend themselves, and the amount of ammunition required for conventional weapons would present almost insuperable problems for mobile warfare.²⁰

We now know that a nuclear delivery unit would be virtually defenseless without substantial conventionally armed security forces to protect it. Because of collateral damage, for example, one can rarely employ a nuclear weapon in a localized attack against a delivery unit without destroying oneself in the process.

Kissinger was interested in demonstrating that dual-purpose forces (equipped for both conventional and nuclear war) would be inappropriate on the nuclear battlefield. They would be "highly vulnerable to the sudden introduction of nuclear weapons by the

enemy." Would nuclear units be less vulnerable? Moreover, it is curious that he ignores the corollary to his suppositions, namely that a "pure" nuclear unit would also be easy prey to a conventional attack.

With the state of technology of 1957, Kissinger's concepts rested on a clearly unscientific and visionary foundation. Has the situation changed? Have there been recent developments in tactical nuclear weapons which might now justify Kissinger's earlier optimistic assessment of the value of nuclear weapons on the tactical battlefield? The neutron bomb comes to mind. But although it represents a smaller, "cleaner," more benign explosive than the current crop of U.S. fission weapons in NATO, it is still a nuclear weapon. It would be no more mobile than any other tactical nuclear weapon and it would be subject to the same control, security, and custodial requirements. No new delivery system has been developed for the neutron warhead. This new bomb merely represents more of the same.

One of the central issues relating to the neutron bomb is whether it would lower the nuclear threshold and make nuclear war more likely. It is argued that because it is smaller and more precise, the neutron bomb seems less objectionable, and blurs the distinction between conventional and nuclear weapons.

Not so, argue its proponents, who also tend to believe in the credibility of limited nuclear war in Europe. They argue that there is a clear distinction between conventional and nuclear weapons; that the President, should he ever be forced to decide whether to use nuclear weapons in defense of NATO, would be making a decision of such immense consequence that he hardly would be influenced by whether the first U.S. nuclear weapon initiating the war was of a neutron or a fission variety.

One suspects that Kissinger welcomed lowering the nuclear threshold. An examination of his theory reveals that, from his point of view, nuclear weapons should be made smaller and more precise because that would signal our adversaries that we would be quite prepared to "go nuclear" in a limited war:

The decision to resist aggression by nuclear war requires a diplomacy which seeks to break down the atmosphere of special horror which now surrounds the use of nuclear weapons, an atmosphere which has been created in part by skillful Soviet "ban-the-bomb" propaganda. It should . . . put great emphasis on measures to mitigate their effect. The focus of disarmament negotiations, for example, should be shifted from eliminating the use of nuclear weapons to reducing the impact of their employment.²¹

Throughout *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Kissinger emphasized that the United States should strenuously resist Soviet propaganda which attempts to portray any form of nuclear war as an "unparalleled catastrophe." Once the United States is resolved "to face the prospects and opportunities of limited nuclear war," he wrote, and learns to employ proper tactics, "nuclear war need not be as destructive as it appears."²² He challenged scientists to develop "weapons of an intermediary degree of destructiveness . . . discriminating enough to permit the establishment of a significant margin of superiority."²³ The neutron bomb would appear to be a response to his challenge. Whether, though, it represents an advantage over a Soviet force fully prepared to respond with their own tactical nuclear weapons, the majority of which exceed twenty kilotons, and none less than five kilotons, remains highly debatable.

Soviet Capabilities and the American Character. Besides specifying the tactical, organizational, and technological superiority the West would enjoy on the nuclear battlefield, Kissinger also explained how the American character would succeed over the Soviet:

. . . the introduction of nuclear weapons on the battlefield will shake the very basis of Soviet tactical doctrine. No longer will the Soviet bloc be able to rely on massed manpower as in World War II and in Korea. In a limited nuclear war . . . everything depends on leadership of a high order, personal initiative and mechanical aptitude, qualities more prevalent in our society than in the regimented system of the USSR. To be sure, the Soviet forces can train and equip for nuclear war. But self-reliance, spontaneity and initiative cannot be acquired by training; they grow naturally out of social institutions or they do not come into being. And a society like that of the Soviet Union, in which everything is done according to plan and by government, will have extraordinary difficulty inculcating these qualities.²⁴

Soviet tactical doctrine remains an area of speculation for the West. We do know, however, that the individual soldier in the Red Army is well-trained and thoroughly equipped to fight in a nuclear environment. The Soviets possess about 1,500 ground-launched tactical nuclear weapon delivery systems, deployed and targeted against Europe. Soviet tactical nuclear weapons, by-and-large mated to surface-to-surface rockets and missiles such as the "Frog" and "Scud," with ranges of 40 and 170 miles, respectively, may lack the discrimination and refinement of U.S. weapons. But they are sufficiently awesome to give us pause.²⁵

We should not overlook the fact that the battlefield of limited nuclear war

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would be Western Europe, where the Soviets might be less concerned than NATO over collateral damage to neighboring civilian centers. If the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons into NATO has "shaken" Soviet doctrine, it has been to push it even further in the direction of a massive, armored "Blitzkrieg," attempting to overwhelm NATO with a surprise attack, coincidental with preemptive strikes against nuclear weapons units and storage sites.

It is always dangerous to prejudge a nation's character. Rather than assume an enemy to be inferior, the military and Kissinger should expect the best from them. Underestimation of American fighting ability by Hitler, or of Vietcong initiative by U.S. military and civil experts are but two examples of this attitude. One would be a fool to surmise that there is anything inherently defective in the Soviet mentality which prevents them from incorporating dispersion and mobility in their plan of attack.

How valuable, moreover, are the American qualities of initiative and mechanical aptitude in the highly structured, centralized operations of nuclear war? Without sounding too heretical, one might even take the opposite view and argue that because the U.S. Government is complex and diffuse, subject to lengthy consultation with NATO allies on nuclear questions, an authoritarian regime, such as the Soviet Union would have the initial edge. And perhaps troops who are dumbly obedient may function no worse in the holocaust of nuclear war than self-reliant, spontaneous Westerners. In past conventional wars, where autonomy of operations on a local level was possible, initiative and ingenuity could carry the day. The Sergeant [Alvin] Yorks of our society were often superior to a regimented enemy. But to put Sergeant York in a nuclear delivery unit might be an absolute danger. And, hang security keys around his neck, restrict his actions

and those of his commanders with volumes of nuclear rules and regulations, and he then becomes a small link in a long chain that extends to powers he only remotely fathoms but who control his every move. If there are American character advantages, they are probably of greatest value in a conventional war, where small units can operate independently under decentralized control.

If, as has been suggested, our current nuclear posture in NATO is based on faulty rationale, can and should anything be done to streamline our nuclear forces? Unless some of the technological developments in mobility foreseen by Kissinger come to pass, one would have to remain pessimistic. Perhaps the cruise missile, developed for tactical use, would represent increased speed of reaction and enhanced mobility. But if the cruise missile is nuclear tipped, it would be under the same superstructure of control that, although politically necessary, makes flexibility of reaction in a fluid situation difficult, if not impossible. The encumbrance of any variety of nuclear weapons deprives military commanders of the possibility of initiative, the advantages of surprise, and the capacity for rapid response to the unexpected. Central is the reality that, because they were married, early on, to revolutionary developments in long-range bombers, intercontinental missiles and submarine-launched missiles, strategic nuclear weapons may well have radically altered strategic warfare. There is not a comparable, totally new delivery system available for ground troops; on the tactical battlefield there has been no fundamental breakthrough. Tactical nuclear weapons are merely a more destructive form of artillery. They require not less, but substantially more in support facilities and personnel. This is hardly a new discovery. General Ridgway, writing in the mid-1950s, maintained that larger armies would be called for in a nuclear war, because nuclear

weapons were complex, caused greater casualties, and demanded far greater dispersion, thus increasing the size of the combat zone.²⁶ His conclusions were, obviously, completely counter to Kissinger's. The composition of our nuclear forces in NATO testifies to the adoption of Ridgway's assessment.

Forecast. Is it possible to fight successfully a limited nuclear war in Europe? Has the military done everything it can to assure success? NATO has tried to incorporate thousands of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons into its defensive doctrine. American and allied forces have devoted their best efforts to guard the weapons, scattered in dozens of storage sites all over Western Europe; to maintain them; to keep communications systems on the air and delivery vehicles operational; to safeguard the release codes, nuclear arming devices, and permissive action links; to train personnel in the complex administrative and technical procedures of a limited nuclear war; to keep the transport ready to roll, the warheads ready to shoot, and the troops ready to fight. If the U.S. military has failed in any aspect of training, it has been in being too scrupulous in the technical aspects of assembling nuclear warheads. Nuclear delivery units in Europe spend several months each year either preparing for or undergoing technical proficiency inspections conducted under sterile and unrealistic laboratory conditions. These inspections are not only grueling and time-consuming, but also bear little relevance to actual field operations to be expected on the battlefield.

Aside from this perhaps obsessive concern with technical proficiency, an outgrowth of the Atomic Energy Commission's (ERDA and NRC as of 1974) high standards, the army has been hamstrung because the weapons are unwieldy; there are too many of them; they require immense efforts to secure

and transport; command, control, and communications requirements, compounded in the multilanguage environment of NATO, are extremely complex and sophisticated; authority to deploy and fire them is necessarily centralized at the highest levels; and all aspects of nuclear release are highly uncertain and time-consuming.

We are, of course, in a defensive posture in Europe. It is difficult to conceive of NATO on the offensive, operating deep within Warsaw Pact territory. Yet, Kissinger told us that dependence on a concept of defense is a formula for disaster. France collapsed in World War II because it "believed in no strategy save the defense." Kissinger criticized a "Maginot line mentality" which seeks safety in "absolute numbers of bombs," or even in "superior destructiveness." He warned us that we should forego a "strategy . . . based on resisting overt attack," that is, "a military onslaught against Western Europe."²⁷ It is perhaps too much to expect that Kissinger should have recognized that our reliance on tactical nuclear weapons in NATO reflects precisely his worst fears. What do these several thousand weapons represent other than a "Maginot Line mentality," through "superior destructiveness," and "absolute numbers of bombs," designed to halt an "overt attack" on Western Europe? Kissinger's facts have come to resemble the lamppost the drunk leans upon. They are used more for support than for illumination.

The concept of limited nuclear war conceivably has placed NATO at a disadvantage. Our allies are forced into wishfully believing that nuclear weapons will stop a Soviet attack on the border, thus making possible the defense of every last foot of NATO territory from Soviet occupation. NATO's reliance on a nuclear Maginot Line is, perhaps, inevitable, given political and economic realities. It was facile for Kissinger to postulate nuclear "shoot and scoot"

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tactics, to advocate that we ignore defending territory, to prescribe that nuclear units operate deep in enemy territory, and to declare that "the use of nuclear weapons simply as a form of artillery, the attempt to maintain a stabilized front, and similar tactics derived from the experience of World War II would be both ineffective and extremely costly."²⁸ But would frontier nations like Germany derive any benefit at all from his strategy? Or was Kissinger simply designating West Germany as a kind of battlefield playground on which Soviet and American armies could amuse themselves? Is there any alternative, given the defensive posture of NATO, the physical nature of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, and the restrictions imposed in their use? The form of limited nuclear war Kissinger advocated would not only demand radically new weapons and delivery systems, it would also represent a circumvention of the nuclear chain of command and a surrender of political control over nuclear weapons, with all of the potentially hazardous implications for all-out nuclear war such surrender implies.

For the present, we must not expect that nuclear weapons would be of great military utility on a battlefield demanding rapidity of decision and mobility of execution. Our army nuclear units are neither small, highly

mobile, nor self-contained. Nor can they be. The nuclear command and control system trails across continents and over oceans into the Oval Office in Washington, with scores of approval and disapproval terminals reaching into practically every capitol of Western Europe.

NATO is, in a sense, a prisoner of the concept of limited nuclear war. European politicians are seriously reconsidering the wisdom of this concept. The apparent rejection of the neutron bomb, the latest development in tactical nuclear weapons, is but an example of this attitude. A wide-ranging debate in Europe has not only intensified distrust over whether the United States would release nuclear weapons in time to stop a Soviet attack on NATO's borders, but also on the military utility of these weapons.

It is high time that the United States, also, carefully review the rationale for limited nuclear war in Europe. When the concept was enunciated, we possessed a perhaps unjustified confidence in our superiority in nuclear technology. We were less than cautious in adapting this technology for the tactical battlefield. Such unbounded optimism is no longer possible, particularly when one compares the rationale of the 1950s with present-day reality. Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* remains "must reading," precisely because of its misprescriptions.

NOTES

1. "U.S. Considering Small War Theory," *The New York Times*, 11 August 1957, p. 1.
2. Dean Acheson, "NATO and Nuclear Weapons," *New Republic*, 30 December 1957, pp. 14-16.
3. Paul H. Nitze, "Limited Wars or Massive Retaliation?" *The Reporter*, 5 September 1957, pp. 40-42.
4. James E. King, Jr., "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy (Part I)," *New Republic*, 1 July 1957, pp. 18-21; (Part II), *New Republic*, 15 July 1957, pp. 16-18.
5. August Heckscher, "A Doctrine for New Weaponry," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 8 February 1958, pp. 17, 32-34.
6. Hans Morgenthau, "Atomic Force and Foreign Policy," *Commentary*, June 1957, pp. 501-505.
7. "Scholarly Firecracker," *Newsweek*, 13 January 1958, pp. 17-18.
8. "A New Study in the Anatomy of U.S. Doctrine," *Time*, 26 August 1957, p. 14.
9. Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, published for the Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), p. 7.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
18. U.S. Congress, Committee on International Relations, *Authority to Order the Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1975), p. 1.
19. Kissinger, p. 182.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.
25. Information on Soviet and American tactical delivery systems can be obtained from a variety of sources. The data on the "Frog" and "Scud" comes from R.T. Pretty, ed., *Jane's Weapons Systems*, 8th ed. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1977), pp. 410 and 50, respectively.
26. Matthew B. Ridgway, *Soldier* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1956), pp. 296-97.
27. Kissinger, p. 60 and p. 29.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

BOOK REVIEWS

Cave Brown, Anthony. *Dropshot, The American Plan for World War III Against Russia in 1957*. New York: Dial Press, 1978. 330pp.

The promulgation of Executive Order 11652 in 1972 and the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 1975 have resulted in the release of a great number of formerly classified documents to historians and political scientists. For the first time, the basic national security documents of the United States in the atomic age have become available to the public. During the past 2 years in particular, the strategic concepts and plans for war with the Soviet Union prepared between 1945 and 1951 have been opened for scrutiny at the Modern Military Records Branch of the National Archives.

It was inevitable that many writers would want to explore such a windfall. One such is Anthony Cave Brown, the author of the best seller, *Bodyguard of Lies*. A journalist, Cave Brown has a certain amount of experience in editing

secret documents, with *The Secret War Report of the O.S.S.* (New York: Berkley, 1976) and *The Secret History of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Dial Press, 1977) to his credit. Both of these books were advertised and sold on their sensational aspects, however, rather than as contributions to history.

His most recent publication, *Dropshot, The American Plan for World War III Against Russia in 1957*, appears to be an outright exploitation of a newly declassified national security document, which, because of its subject matter and language, promises to have considerable public appeal. Cave Brown has reproduced a massive document nearly intact, and has written a 29-page prologue which purports to outline its historical context and which stresses the frightening prospect of the war which might have been.

There is no question that the contingency war plans prepared by the U.S. Military Establishment in the postwar years are sobering and even terrifying.