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THE USES OF NAVAL FORCES

The purpose of nuclear deterrence is to prevent nuclear war. Even so, politics continue to require limited forces in support of national policies for national defense. Flexibility is among the chief requirements for such forces, and it has traditionally been the hallmark of naval forces. Changing political conditions, developments in technology and an emerging maritime regime affect but do not obviate the use of naval forces. It is still necessary to pay close attention to the strategic effect we wish to achieve and to the employment of the means best calculated to produce that effect.

by

Captain James A. Barber, U.S. Navy

There is a striking contrast between the concerns which dominate naval planning and force structure and those things we actually do with the fleet. For 30 years the specter of a major war with the Soviet Union has been the contingency that has dominated our planning; yet none of us, in careers filled with naval operations in support of national policy, has ever exchanged anything more lethal than gun salutes with a Soviet warship.

This does not mean that the focus of our planning is wrong. Major war with the Soviet Union is the most demanding and threatening of possible contingencies, and therefore quite properly has a first claim on our attention. But now that technology has provided both us and our potential opponents with mutually suicidal weapons, the upper levels of available violence cannot be sanely used in the pursuit of policy goals. A major nuclear war would be a

catastrophic failure of policy, not a Clausewitzian pursuit of policy by other means. Thus as a first priority we must deter nuclear war, by making it abundantly clear to the Soviet Union or any other nation that the costs of such a war would far exceed any imaginable gains.

The Political Context of Military Force. A recurrent theme throughout the literature of strategy is the intimate relationship between military strategy and national policy. Henry Eccles has stated it well:

Political purpose must dominate military strategy. The use of military force without a clear political purpose is futile and ultimately self-defeating.¹

A clear and continuing understanding of this primacy of the political objective is basic to the effective use of military force. Navies, like other military forces, are nothing but tools, and

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need to be measured by how effective they are in helping to achieve desired political ends.

It is interesting to examine what really takes place at the decisionmaking level of government when we are confronted with a new or changed international problem. It is only in minor affairs that previously planned routine is followed. The more important the crisis, the more surely the response is an improvised one. Depending on the style of the incumbent President, the players may be bureaucratically determined—for example the National Security Council—or simply chosen by the President because he wishes to consult men whose knowledge and judgment he trusts. The JCS as individuals are usually important players, but only by happenstance will the options considered track closely with existing military contingency plans.

In grappling with their problem the decisionmakers cast about to see what tools can effectively be brought to bear, and military force is by no means always a useful one. The ultimate response is usually a combination of actions, containing diplomatic, psychological and economic as well as military elements. Thus, most of our policies which involve the use of military forces combine both military and nonmilitary actions.

To digress, it is interesting to note that, after spending more than a year on the Murphy Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy, Paul Schratz concluded that in crisis situations military options often get a disproportionate share of the decisionmaker's attention because the military staffing is more thorough and responsive than that for nonmilitary options, and the alternatives are set forth more clearly. Schratz argues that it is important for the State Department to improve its staffing performance in crisis situations in order to ensure that nonmilitary options are given full weight.²

Once it is determined that a military option is the appropriate choice, the effective use of military force must follow a political logic, and not a logic of its own. This is equally true whether the use involved is actual combat or the more frequent nonfighting use of military forces to pursue desired political outcomes. In this regard the Center for Naval Analyses recently completed a catalog of naval responses to international incidents and crises during the 20-year period 1955-1975. CNA identified 99 cases (excluding the Vietnam War) in which naval forces were actively used in response to events occurring outside the United States.³ In fewer than a dozen cases did even a minimum amount of actual fighting take place, yet in each of these circumstances responsible decisionmakers viewed the potential utility of naval force as being sufficiently high that nonroutine naval operations were directed.

This nonfighting utilization of the Navy underlines the point that military force must be viewed as a tool to gain political ends, and that the proper yardstick for evaluating it is how relevant it is to the particular political goals desired. Dr. Schlesinger makes the point well in stating: "Military power properly must be judged by whether it is relevant—in particular places, times and circumstances."⁴ This test of relevance to particular circumstances is an important corollary to the principal of the primacy of political goals. It is precisely this kind of relevance that is a particular characteristic of navies, and therefore an important key to an understanding of naval strategy.

An important part of relevance is the ability to respond at an appropriate level. In the Korean DMZ incident of 1976 a number of informed observers expressed the view that the way in which the United States responded with an impressive but restrained show of force, coupled with the effective symbolic act of cutting down the tree

around which the original incident revolved, was at just the right level to gain maximum political advantage. Many might have preferred more forceful action, but at least in this case vengeance was not really the proper goal. The goals we sought involved not only demonstrating firmness and resolve, but also displaying judgment and prudence. Our chosen actions gained widespread international support for the U.S. position, despite North Korea's attempt to exploit the incident for propaganda purposes.

Because international problems requiring U.S. response take an unpredictable variety of forms at a wide range of threat levels, it is important that we be able to respond with flexibility. Without flexibility we could be limited to a choice between withdrawal and escalation. During the Cuban missile crisis this is exactly the choice our naval quarantine presented to the Soviet Union. It is often suggested that Soviet dissatisfaction over being limited to those alternatives was in large measure responsible for the subsequent strengthening of the Soviet Navy.⁵

Perceptions about military capacity, and the political will to use that capacity, are often as important as realities, and can influence a wide range of international behavior. Strong military forces exert their influence across national borders without anything so crude as a direct threat. The constraints exerted by nearby Soviet military might upon the international behavior of even a nation of people as demonstrably courageous as the Finns should be an adequate example of this point.

A further point is that although relevance is always a valid test in assessing the utility of military force, rationality may not be. Even though it may not be rational to use military force in a given circumstance, this does not mean that there is no utility in threatening the use of force—or even in just possessing usable military force without any

explicit threat. An adversary can never be certain that one will behave rationally, and since an irrational action may be at least equally painful for him, he may be induced to tread more cautiously.

By way of illustration, during the Arab oil embargo the fact that the U.S. Marines were conducting desert maneuvers received widespread attention in the press. Despite the obvious fact that the Marines have had a training facility at Twentynine Palms for many years, and have regularly trained there, this time the training was widely interpreted by the media as evidence that the United States was considering use of the Marines in some military response to the oil embargo. As a result, Arab spokesmen were quoted in a variety of ringing responses to the alleged threat, which included vows to blow up the oil facilities in response to any U.S. military intervention.

For a variety of reasons, it would not have made much sense for the United States to respond to the oil embargo by landing the Marines. Such an attack would have provoked instant and bitter worldwide opposition. It could have triggered an Arab scorched-earth policy, and might well have resulted in a dangerous confrontation between the United States and the U.S.S.R. But the fact that a Marine landing might have been irrational does not mean that it was necessarily bad for the Arabs to fear it as a U.S. option. The threatened scorched-earth policy would have been more costly for the Arabs than for us, and thus they had a vested interest in not pushing us too hard, for fear that we might indeed prove irrational. It is hard to establish that any particular Arab action was affected by such considerations, but the evidence does indicate that the possibility of a military response was much on their minds.

There is another problem in being too "rational" about the use of force. The joys of peace are sufficiently sweet

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that it is not difficult to become convinced that any use of military force is irrational. But this can be a dangerous idea, for an increasing belief by one side in the irrationality of force may tend to encourage violence by the other side, as the "rational" nations make clear that they will yield in preference to fighting. The concessions to Hitler at Munich to achieve "peace in our time" are a familiar example. Thus, the paradox: Too firm a conviction that violence is irrational may serve to encourage violence.

The Uses of the Sea. The discussion to this point has concerned the uses of military force in general. Let us turn now to a consideration of naval force in particular. To understand the uses of naval power, it is first important to understand the uses of the sea. From the viewpoint of naval strategy there are only three major useful characteristics of the sea: It is an efficient means of transport; it is a valuable natural resource; and it can serve as a base for the projection of power against the land. Naval forces can be employed both to ensure any of these three uses to ourselves and our allies or to deny them to an enemy.

The classic concern of naval strategy is the use of the sea as a highway, or in current jargon, a SLOC (sea line of communication). Viewed as a means of transport the oceans can be either a highway or a barrier, depending on who controls their use. This aspect so dominated the strategic thinking of Mahan that he declared the sea to be an unfruitful possession "... except as a system of highways joining country to country."⁶ This is still probably the most important use of the sea, and many of the concerns of naval strategy revolve around the tasks of denying sea transport to an enemy, while insuring it to ourselves.

The second of the uses of the sea, as a natural resource, is increasing steadily

in importance, partly because the technical capacity to exploit the riches of the sea and the seabed is expanding dramatically, and partly because land resources are becoming inadequate to world needs. All of the implications of this process are not yet clear. But it is clear that there is danger of conflict as nations move to establish their claims over larger areas of the sea and seabed. Evidences of this process have already appeared in the waters around Iceland, off Peru, and in the Aegean and South China Seas. It is as safe as a prediction can be to say that this kind of conflict will become both more frequent and more serious in the future. As a single example, one might ask what happens the first time the U.S.S.R. commits a major overfishing violation of our new 200-mile fishery zone.

This process of bringing increased areas of the sea under national control is beginning to affect one of the most ancient and valued characteristics of the high seas: their status as an international commons to which all of mankind had free access. For naval forces the international character of the oceans has provided a freedom of movement to and from areas of potential problems unfettered by the complications and commitments of having soldiers on foreign soil. The freedom of the seas is being eroded, and the implications are worth careful attention.

The third major use of the sea is as a base from which to project power against the land. The importance of this use has increased greatly in the last half century. Neither large-scale amphibious operations nor naval strike warfare were really practical until World War II, and the use of the oceans as havens for submarine-launched ballistic missiles is, of course, an even more recent development. The use of the sea as a base for the projection of power has become one of the most important areas of contemporary naval strategy.

There is a different way to go about

classifying the uses of military force, by focusing not on the use of the sea to be achieved or denied, but rather on the way in which a use of force tries to achieve a desired result. There are three such strategies. The first strategy involves direct action against an enemy's military forces. The intent is, by defeating them or reducing their capacity, to place oneself in a position either to win a conflict outright, or to dictate terms of settlement, in anticipation of the fact that if the conflict were to continue victory would be certain. This is close to the philosophy espoused by Clausewitz and Mahan, in which the principal focus of military or naval strategy is the pitched battle between opposing armies or fleets.

The second strategy seeks to inflict pain on an enemy. The intention here is to convince an enemy that his aim in pursuing the war is not worth the beating he is taking. It is not the actual violence itself that does the persuading, but the threat of further violence. If it succeeds, it is not because of pain that has already been inflicted, but because of the fear of pain that may be inflicted in the future. In those circumstances the reason for causing an enemy pain and terror is to convince him that more will follow if he does not accede to our demands. The airpower theorist Giulio Douhet was a leading exponent of the systematic use of terror as a weapon in war. According to Douhet, the will of the enemy was the proper target of military power, and he thought that the will to fight could be broken more easily than an enemy could be defeated militarily. This concept has found expression in arenas as diverse as our use of the atomic bomb against Japan, France's strategy in Algeria, and the terrorist tactics of the IRA and PLO. Rarely has it been as effective as its advocates have claimed, mainly because the human animal often reacts to pain by becoming angry and hitting back instead of by giving up.

The third strategy is that of the siege, the blockade and the U-boat war. In current terminology, it is the strategy of interdiction. The intent of this strategy can be similar to that of either of the other two. It may seek either to reduce military capacity by the denial of supplies and reinforcements, or to create shortages that cause pain and starvation. A variant of this strategy is directed against the source of supplies—factories and oil refineries. In general, blockade or interdiction produces results slowly, but history provides numerous examples of just how effective it can be.

In the real world it is, of course, difficult to identify pure examples of any of the three strategies. In the Vietnam War, for example, Market Time and the mining of Haiphong utilized interdiction; the bombing campaign had elements of interdiction as well as pain and destruction, and at least parts of the campaign in the south used the strategy of the battlefield war. The important point for a strategist is to be entirely clear in his own mind as to what effect he is trying to achieve and then to employ the means best calculated to produce that effect.

The efficacy of a particular strategy is often dramatically affected by geography. We would, for example, have had a much better chance of winning in Vietnam if the country had been shaped like the Korean Peninsula instead of being bordered by Laos and Cambodia.

A useful mental exercise is to work out the ways in which each of the strategies for the employment of force can be applied to each of the uses of the sea. It is not practical here to try to work out all of the possible interactions, but it may be useful to develop a single example by way of illustration. One of the uses of the sea, as developed earlier, is as a medium of transport, and we can seek to ensure its use to ourselves and our allies, or to deny its use to the enemy. The intersection of the utilization of the sea for transport with each

of the three strategies can serve as an illustrative example.

Suppose the Soviet Union, in response to a local conflict, chose to announce a naval "Quarantine" against, say, Norway or Israel. What use can be made of each of the three strategies for the employment of force to get shipping through to our ally?

If we use the battlefield strategy our task would be to engage and destroy those elements of the enemy's military forces that threaten the sealanes. If we use an interdiction strategy, our task would be to keep those forces from gaining access to the crucial sealanes, by the use of minefields and barriers across their access routes. Finally, if we use the pain strategy our task is to inflict sufficient pain and destruction on our opponent that he is willing to forego his attempt at sea denial in preference to further punishment. An example of this technique might be an announcement that we would respond to any sinking of an allied merchant ship by sinking two Soviet merchant vessels anywhere on the high seas.

It is not self-evident in advance of a particular crisis which of the strategies, or what mix of them, would be most effective. None are without dangers, but any confrontation between the super powers is dangerous. Each strategy does, at least, provide an option between backing down and threatening nuclear war. And that is exactly what we are trying to do: provide usable and relevant tools that can be used in carrying out national policy.

Naval Flexibility in an Uncertain World. In the kind of world in which we live, one of the most important characteristics military forces need to have is flexibility. This is because the world is unpredictable: We rarely fight the kind of war we are prepared to fight. The reasons this is so are complex, and go far beyond the well-known tendency of our profession to prepare to fight the

last war. One reason is that the better prepared we are for a particular kind of war, the less likely is any enemy to challenge us on those grounds. He is, after all, interested in winning, and therefore can be expected to choose strategies and tactics that play into our weaknesses, not into our strengths.

Continuing conflict is inevitable, but the particular forms it can take come in infinite variety, and given our national preference for peace, usually at someone else's choice. In consequence it is important that our military forces be broadly flexible if they are to meet the test of being relevant to "particular places, times, and circumstances."

One way of appreciating the role of flexibility in military strategy is to look at the results of inflexibility. The phrase "Maginot Line Mentality" has been often used as a description of inflexibility. Yet during the 1930's the Maginot Line was touted as the ultimate achievement of military technology, and it was widely believed to be invulnerable. What went wrong? The basic problem stemmed from too great a certainty as to what kind of war would be fought. If the Wehrmacht had attempted a frontal assault against the line, it might well have proved as invulnerable as its designers supposed it to be. But by locking a major portion of France's military resources into a single scenario, the Maginot Line permitted the Germans to choose a strategy that made that strength virtually useless. There was no way in which the resources invested in the Maginot Line could be brought to bear in the kind of war that was actually fought.

The kind of inflexibility at issue has not just to do with geography, but rather with the problems that result when major military resources are not applicable to the problem at hand. To select another, less dramatic example, in the early years of this century, following the dictates of Mahan, the U.S. Navy concentrated on building an impressive

fleet of battleships, somewhat to the neglect of smaller men-of-war. Yet as it turned out, the surface dominance of the British Fleet was such that our major naval task of World War I was to assist in defeating the submarine menace, a task for which a large portion of our naval investment was almost useless.

Yet even though navies are by no means exempt from the problems of inflexibility, naval forces have certain kinds of inherent flexibility that suits them to a wide range of contingencies. Four of these inherent characteristics are discussed here: (1) geographical mobility; (2) relative freedom from foreign political constraints; (3) the ability to linger; and (4) the ability to operate at a wide range of relevant force.

Not a great deal needs to be said about the inherent geographical mobility of naval forces. The seamless expanse of the oceans permits us to move forces appropriate to the circumstances freely and rapidly wherever there is blue water. Men-of-war, as self-contained units, arrive ready for action, and are much less dependent upon the existence and availability of local bases than are most other kinds of military forces.

Related to the geographical mobility of navies is their relative freedom from foreign political constraints. Naval forces are freer of dependence on over-flight authorizations and diplomatic clearances than are land-based forces. The difficulties we encountered in being able to utilize certain of our forces based in NATO Europe during the 1973 Mid-East War is a case in point. Because ships are integral units which carry much of their own support with them, they can be maintained in the neighborhood of potential trouble spots for as long as necessary. This means that naval forces need not necessarily involve the political difficulties inherent in troops or bases on foreign soil. Nor do naval

forces automatically trigger the same pressures toward involvement that exist when U.S. forces are physically present in an area of crisis.

U.S. bases and troops in foreign countries can serve as prime targets for anti-U.S. propaganda and, in the event of a local conflict, they can be the object of an attack. Our natural and proper reaction to such an attack is to defend American lives and property. This can easily escalate into full U.S. involvement, as much as a matter of instinctive reaction as of carefully considered national interest. Seabased forces can provide desired local capability without the loss of flexibility involved in a physical presence on foreign soil.

Naval vessels have an almost unique ability to linger. This ability often lets us move forces to the vicinity of potential need far in advance of an actual requirement, stay for as long as is desirable, and either take rapid action or withdraw quietly as national command authority dictates. The flexibility in timing and commitment this ability provides us is highly valued by those who bear the political responsibility for decision. At the first sign of an international problem the first JCS question asked is always "Where are our ships?" and the majority of the time the first military action taken is to begin to move ships to the proximity of the trouble spot. Even the most long-ranged and mobile aircraft cannot perform the same role, since they lack the warships' long endurance on station.

The last of the specific elements of naval flexibility is the available range of relevant force. Naval force can be applied in infinite gradations ranging from showing the flag up to and including nuclear strikes. The integral nature of warships, together with the task force concept, allows us to tailor forces specifically for the tasks at hand.

In presenting the Navy's case, we sometimes fail to make the importance

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of this kind of flexibility as clear as we might. A good example is a comparison of two weapons systems that are presently on the drawing boards: the MX intercontinental ballistic missile and the new Navy A-18 attack plane. In comparing them in the most catastrophic of occurrences, an all-out nuclear exchange, a single MX would be worth more than a number of A-18's, because it would be more likely to survive a surprise attack and almost certainly would have a higher probability of getting through to key targets. Thus, in a forum like SALT the MX would be worth a great deal more than the A-18.

But vital as it is to maintain an effective nuclear deterrent, there are many other kinds of conflict with which we must be concerned and here the values become somewhat different. As Figure 1 illustrates, the A-18 is useful across a much wider range—from large-scale conventional war to peacetime presence—than is the MX. This by no means argues that we need the A-18 more than the MX, for there is no military task more vital than maintaining effective nuclear deterrence. It does argue, however, that once a satisfactory deterrent level is achieved, flexibility becomes a virtue much to be desired.

	MX	A-18
Major Nuclear Exchange	X	X
Tactical Nuclear War	?	X
Large-scale Conventional War		X
War At Sea Only		X
Limited War		X
Police Action		X
Guerrilla War		X
Peacetime Presence		X

Figure 1

It is almost always true that in a narrow scenario a single-purpose system can be demonstrated to be more cost effective than a multipurpose system.

One widely circulated study by a former Rand Corporation scholar concluded that since a European war would inevitably be short, there would be no need to protect the sealanes to Europe. We could, therefore, dispense with our escort forces and use the money saved thereby to buy tanks and guns. His analysis, which was perfectly sound within the narrow framework he established, neglected to address the possibility that such a war might not be short, or the possibility that the destroyers and frigates might have value in other situations than the one he addressed. Because of the inherently flexible and multipurpose nature of naval forces, they are more likely to get their proper share of scarce resources if we can ensure they are evaluated against the entire range of relevant uses.

If we are to make the most effective use of the inherent flexibility of naval force, we need to structure our forces appropriately. In this regard, there is a recurrent controversy over the relative desirability of less expensive single-purpose ships and more expensive multipurpose ships. The fact of the matter is that we usually wind up using our warships in multipurpose ways no matter what the intent of their designers may have been. A case in point is the FF-1052-class frigate. As single-purpose an ASW ship as has been built by any modern navy, the FF-1052 has still been used almost continuously as a general-purpose destroyer, steaming in company with carriers and shooting on the gun line. It was not particularly well-designed for those tasks, but operational requirements have an imperative of their own.

The problem, of course, is that we never have enough money to buy both the numbers and quality of ships that we need. The result is a continuing compromise. To have an affordable Navy we do need large numbers of so-called low-mix ships. But I would argue that they should almost always be

conceived as multipurpose platforms, since that is inevitably how they will be used. The low-mix FFG, with the Harpoon and Standard missiles as well as an effective ASW capability, will be a more useful and flexible ship than the FF-1052—useful as that ship has proven in carrying out missions for which it was never designed.

Since the October War of 1973 a number of military commentators have emphasized the increasing importance of precision-guided munitions. Many have heralded PGM's as creating a revolution in warfare as profound as those which accompanied the introduction of such earlier technical innovations as the armored steamship, the airplane, the submarine and the tank. Michael McCwire has argued that precision guided munitions will have several kinds of significant impact on naval warfare. Among the effects he anticipates are (1) that there will be an increasing role for land-based systems in maritime war; and (2) that the increased hitting power of small vessels, coupled with the wide dispersion of missile technology, will increase the reach of coastal states to seaward.⁷ His overall conclusion is that the sea is becoming "A much more complex and potentially hostile operating environment."⁸

The key point is probably that weapons like Harpoon and the Soviet SS-N-9 give to relatively small warships essentially the same kind of offensive punch that large warships have. This is a more dramatic change than may at first be evident. From the day of the trireme through the sailing ship of the line, the Dreadnought, and the aircraft carrier, the general rule applied that the large man-of-war held a decisive edge in combat power over lesser men-of-war. This no longer holds. It is important not to exaggerate—the larger warship does still hold important advantages in sea-keeping ability, longer range, command and control, magazine capacity and the ability to support aircraft, whether

rotary wing, VSTOL or conventional. Still, the fact that a patrol boat with significantly higher speed can fire the same weapon as a cruiser is cause for some painful reflection. It is a far cry from the dominance the armor and 16 inch rifles of a battleship gave it over any lesser ship.

This probably means that our ships are more likely to be attacked at sea during future limited conflicts. The relative immunity from attack we enjoyed during the Korean and Vietnam Wars may be a thing of the past. It also means that we need to disperse the combat capability of our Navy more widely throughout the fleet. Right now far too high a proportion of our capability resides on our remaining carrier decks. In a combat environment the disablement of a carrier can reduce the combat capability of an entire task force catastrophically. Programs are underway to remedy this, notably Harpoon, SLCM, Aegis, the strike cruiser, development of a family of VSTOL aircraft, and the inclusion of air-capable ships smaller than the carriers in our future building programs. It will, however, be several years before we will have managed to divide our eggs among a more reasonable number of baskets.

Conclusion. There is no evidence of a decline in the role of force and conflict in relations between nations, yet tech-

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



A graduate of the University of Southern California, Captain Barber holds an M.A. in economics from Vanderbilt University and a Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University.

In addition to extensive duty in Washington, D.C., he has also commanded U.S.S. *Hisser* (DER-400), U.S.S. *Schofield* (DEG-3). Currently he is Commanding Officer, U.S.S. *Hyatt* (CG-30).

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nology has made total war unusable as a tool of policy. Deterrence theory tells us we must plan for total war so that we might avoid it, and I see no way of escaping that uncomfortable logic. Yet there is also the entire range of force that must be available in relevant forms to support national policy in a world that still respects force a great deal more in private than is usually admitted in public.

The unpredictable nature of the

world dictates that a prime characteristic of relevant force must be flexibility. This flexibility must be of several kinds: Geographical flexibility, political flexibility, flexibility in timely response, and the flexibility necessary to exert a wide range of relevant force. It is the way in which the Navy fits these criteria that leads to the conclusion that naval forces will continue to occupy an increasingly important role in the support of national policy.

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