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The Barometer

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THE BAROMETER

(Lt. Comdr. Roger W. Barnett, U.S. Navy, comments on Mr. Edward A. Thibault's article, "War as a Collapse of Policy: a Critical Evaluation of Clausewitz," which appeared in the May-June issue.)

As I read and reread Mr. Edward Thibault's essay that appeared in the May-June Review ("War as a Collapse of Policy: a Critical Evaluation of Clausewitz"), an aphorism from my college undergraduate days kept surfacing through my other thoughts: Knowledge multiplied by intensity of views tends to be approximately constant. The article to which I refer substantiates the wisdom of that equation.

In his haste to castigate the military for its benighted adherence to Clausewitzian dogma, Mr. Thibault has succumbed to the arguments of a rhetorician rather than those of a careful, thoughtful scholar. His indictment is sweeping and unrestrained: Those who ponder the weighty problems of national strategy are guilty, in Mr. Thibault's opinion, of "blind acceptance of Clausewitz's teaching . . . too ready acceptance of the Clausewitzian principle." The "bible of contemporary military strategists" has become "all things to all men." Military strategists, therefore, "will have to do more than simply quote Clausewitz." He leaves the reader with the vision of spike-helmeted lemmings lockstepping their way to the nuclear holocaust.

Mr. Thibault is entitled, certainly, to his opinion of the military. Under the guise of an academic criticism of stra-

tegic thought, however, it is thin gruel. Not to leave this point unsupported, I would suggest that the author has ventured into an area in which his unfamiliarity is all too manifest. His inability to distinguish between nuclear war and strategic war; his careless use of the term aggression, which to other than polemicists (who use the term pejoratively) has no well-defined meaning; his visceral revulsion at the very thought of war; his confusion about the word *rational*—which takes on entirely different meanings in metaphysical philosophy as opposed to strategic decisionmaking models; his failure to consider *preventive* war as a *rational* option for a state; his confusion as regards levels of analysis—all reveal a lack of sophistication in the finer points of strategic thought. The shortfall in knowledge is compensated for by the acerbity of the language he employs.

Before joining the major issue, I shall gratuitously offer some additional support for the criticism of the preceding paragraph. Hans Morgenthau put his finger on one hiatus in Mr. Thibault's logic when he wrote: "Nuclear war is irrational but not, for that reason, impossible; history, alas, shows no necessary correlation between the irrationality of an action and its impossibility." The works of Herman Kahn and Thomas Schelling, *inter alia*, have embellished the argument that irrationality, or even the appearance of irrationality, might be extremely valuable to deterrence. As regards levels of analysis, Raymond Aron's *Peace and War* and

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Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* provide ample food for thought about the difference between man's choosing survival as an alternative to death and the same choice being faced at the level of the state.

Far and above these difficulties in Mr. Thibault's essay is his facile mirror-imaging. By this I mean that he views policymaking as a unilateral intellectual exercise by which strategy can be determined wholly by reference to one's own psychological belief system. Thus, the adversary is perceived as a mirror-image of the self. Nowhere in his paper does Mr. Thibault allow for the possibility that an enemy might not hold his ethnocentric opinions about rationality, war, policy, peace, and victory. Nowhere is the possibility admitted that the policies pursued by adversaries do not mirror one's own nor that an adversary's policy often strongly influences what policies can, and indeed *ought* to be pursued.

This flaw is pervasive in his article. It is not peculiar to Mr. Thibault, however, for many of the so-called "elites" in the making of strategic policy evince the same syndrome. A growing body of literature—most notable in the recent writings of Colin Gray in the journal

Foreign Policy and two new books: Carl G. Jacobsen, *Soviet Strategy—Soviet Foreign Policy* and Mathew Gallagher and Karl Spielmann, Jr., *Soviet Decision-Making for Defense*—is exposing this mirror-image theorizing about arms races, limited war, bargaining and negotiating, and strategic weapons doctrine as specious.

Mr. Thibault ends his article by quoting favorably from J.F.C. Fuller to the effect that Clausewitz's greatest failing was his inability to distinguish that "the true aim of war is peace and not victory." I offer this excerpt from Aron's *Peace and War* as a synthesis of my criticism:

The West tends to recognize, albeit unconsciously, the primacy of peace; also, faced with a conflict it looks for a peaceful solution of settlement. The Marxist-Leninists, on the other hand, until the permanent and total spread of the socialism, recognize the (beneficial) inevitability of conflict. The former are ready to be satisfied with a peace without victory . . . The Soviets, on the other hand, cannot even conceive of what a peace without victory might be.

