

1969

The Barometer

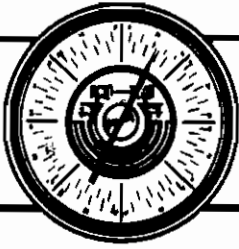
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THE BAROMETER

Readers' Comments

This section has been established to provide a forum for the useful exchange of ideas between *Naval War College Review* readers and the Naval War College.

Unofficial comments by the readers on articles which appear in the *Review* are encouraged and will be considered for publication in subsequent issues.

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In his provocative article on "U.S. Naval Policy" (September issue of the *Naval War College Review*), Dr. Arthur C. Herrington challenges naval strategists to review and redefine their objectives in light of the present overall national interest and to use cost-benefit analysis in carefully calculating the expense of meeting such objectives. His argument, however, assumes that policymaking can—and should—be rational. While this assumption might represent a commendable ideal, it reflects only a part of reality.

The policymaking process is complicated by a variety of nonrational as well as rational factors. People, organizational structures, and bureaucratic politics have a significant impact on policy outcome. When people and institutions with different perspectives, self-interests, and conflicting responsibilities negotiate in a process characterized by inadequate information and a fragmen-

tation of power, it is unlikely that the outcome will be objective or calculated rationally.

Some analysts contend that these political (i.e. nonrational) factors are the primary explanation of policymaking. Charles Lindbloom, for example, argues in his essay "The Science of Muddling Through" (p. 215 in *Readings in American Political Behavior* edited by Raymond E. Wolfinger) that: 1) selection of value goals and empirical analysis of needed actions are not distinct; 2) means-ends analysis is often inappropriate or limited; 3) the test of a "good" policy is that various policymakers find themselves directly agreeing on it (without their necessarily agreeing that it is the most appropriate means to an agreed end); and 4) important possible outcomes, alternatives, and affected values will always be neglected. Lindbloom further implies that efforts to increase the "rationality" of policy are not only futile but also a misuse of time and energy.

NSC-68 is an outstanding example of Lindbloom's contentions. Drafted by the National Security Council, NSC-68 was a brilliant and rationally calculated analysis of what U.S. strategic policy should have been in the early 1950's. Since it was formulated in an ivory tower isolated from the real administrative world of bargaining and negotiating for concrete interest, it was ignored until the Korean war forced it back into the main policymaking arena. (See *Arms and the State: Civil-Military*

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Elements in National Policy by Walter Millis, et al.; and see "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament" by Paul Y. Hammond in *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* by Warner Schilling, et al.)

Theorists such as Lindbloom, Millis, Hammond, and Schilling provide valuable insights into the nature of policy-making. Yet their assumptions about how strategic policy is formulated conflict with Dr. Herrington's thesis. Can

these different theoretical perspectives be reconciled or fused? *How* can policy-makers use their knowledge and understanding of the realities of policymaking to develop and implement a more rational calculated policy that is still realistic and relevant? Naval strategists should answer these questions before accepting Dr. Herrington's challenge.

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And now the old ships and their men are gone; the new ships and the new men, many of them bearing the old auspicious names, have taken up their watch on the stern and impartial sea, which offers no opportunities but to those who know how to grasp them with a ready hand and undaunted heart.

Joseph Conrad, 1857-1924