Nuclear Strategy: the Case for a Theory of Victory

For good or ill, or even perhaps for some of both, 1979 is almost certain to see the most intensive debate over strategic postural and doctrinal issues since the days of the misprojected missile gap back in 1959-60. SALT II is bringing it all together: the state of the balance, predictions of trends, the relevance (or otherwise) of strategic forces to superpower diplomacy, developments in high technology, Soviet intentions and Soviet performance, and the character of a desirable strategic doctrine.

The great SALT II debate, when finally joined, will probably cast as much shadow as light because much of the argumentation will avoid reference to truly fundamental issues. Indeed, a similar problem besets the quality of debate over individual weapon and related program questions (i.e., does the United States need a follow-on [to Minuteman III] ICBM, and if so of what kind?—or, does the United States need a civil defense program?—and so forth). Much of the earnest and even occasionally rather vitriolic debate over SALT, the MX-ICBM, cruise missiles, and the like, is almost purely symptomatic of disagreement over basic strategy—indeed, so much so that if attention were to be focused on the latter, then the generic, though not detailed, solutions to the former problems should follow fairly logically. As a somewhat inelegant axiom, this author will argue that a defense community which has not really decided what its strategic force posture is for, has no business either engaging in strategic arms control negotiations, or in passing judgment on the merits of individual weapon systems.

A Need for Strategy

Notwithstanding the popular, and indeed official, nomenclature which classifies our centrally based nuclear launch systems as strategic, the fact remains that there is an acute deficiency of strategic thinking pertaining to those forces. To many people, apparently, it is not at all self-evident that there are any issues of operational strategy relevant to the so-called strategic nuclear forces. Strategic nuclear war, presumably, is deterred by the prospect of the employment of those forces; while, should such a war actually occur, again presumably, each side executes its largely pre-planned sequence of more and more punishing strike options in its Single Integrated Operational Plan.

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(SIOP) and then dies with the best grace it can muster. This author has difficulty seeing merit (let alone moral justification) in executing the posthumous punishment of an adversary's society, possibly to a genocidal level of catastrophic damage, and hence has some difficulty discerning the value of such an option brandished as an intended prewar deterrent.\(^1\) Of course, the U.S. Government has not been planning to execute even a rough facsimile of genocide for many years. But official, and even Presidential, language (and perhaps thinking),\(^2\) and war planning, have long been recognized to be somewhat different activities. This author is not confusing post-NSDM 242 nuclear weapon employment policy (NUWEP) guidance with assured destruction thinking,\(^3\) although he believes that both would prove fatal to the U.S. prospect of success in the event of war. In addition, this author does not accept the argument that U.S. war plans are in good order: the real deficiency lies in the strategic forces that have been acquired to attempt to implement them (though there is considerable merit in that argument).

Absurd and murderous though mutual assured destruction (MAD) reasoning is to a strategic rationalist, one has to admit that the world, perhaps fortunately, is not ruled by strategic rationalists. Readers should be warned that this author does believe that there is a role for strategy—that is, for the sensible, politically directed application of military power in thermonuclear war. However, it is entirely possible that politicians of all creeds and cultures are, and will be, deterred solely by the undifferentiated prospect of nuclear war—which may be translated as meaning the fear of suffering societal punishment at an unacceptable level. Even if one suspects that the politician,

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1. The actual execution of SIOP-level attacks upon Soviet population and economic targets, on the canonical scale advertised in the late 1960s, would be either an act of revenge (and without political purpose), or—as initiative—would likely trigger a Soviet response in kind. Assured destruction would leave an adversary's (presumably surviving) political leaders with nothing left to lose. Prominent among the political weaknesses of assured destruction reasoning is the consideration that just as not all credible threats need deter (if the threat is insufficiently awesome), so not all awesome threats need deter (if they are insufficiently credible).

2. President Carter, in his State of the Union Message for 1979, advertised the "overwhelming" deterrent influence that reposed in only one Poseidon SSBN (nominally bearing 160 reentry vehicles of 40 kt: 16 × 10). The President neglected to mention that although 40 kt warheads could destroy a lot of buildings, it was not obvious that one Poseidon SSBN could accomplish anything very useful by way of forwarding the accomplishment of U.S. war aims. "Transcript of President's State of Union Address to a Joint Session of Congress," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1979, p. A.13

a rank amateur in strategic analysis, will be deterred where a professional strategic analyst would advise that he should not be, there remain good reasons for listening to the cautionary words of the professional.

First, however unlikely the possibility from the perspective of American political culture, there could come to power in the Soviet Union a leader, or a group of collegial leaders, who would take an instrumental view of nuclear war. Whether or not such a group already is in place is very much a moot point. It could be profoundly imprudent simply to assume that strategic analysis has no bearing on the likelihood of occurrence of nuclear war. In a political context where a decision to act or not to act was finely balanced, military confidence and promises, or the lack thereof, could have a large influence on the political decision. One of the essential tasks of the American defense community is to help ensure that in moments of acute crisis the Soviet general staff cannot brief the Politburo with a plausible theory of military victory.

Second, it should not be forgotten that an important role for strategic analysis is the underpinning of a strategic doctrine which makes for the orderly management of, and choice between, defense programs. If sufficient deterrent effect is believed to repose simply in the undifferentiated threat of nuclear war (of doing a lot of damage in a short space of time), on what basis does one choose what to buy? The essentially arbitrary guidelines for the “required” levels of assured destruction make some sense on this reasoning. (i.e., nobody claims that some “magic fraction” of threatened damage is needed for deterrence—even if annual Posture Statements do lend themselves to being misread in that fashion—but, some doctrinal guidance, beyond simply doing a lot of damage, is required for the provision of rules of thumb and for the suggestion of appropriate measures of merit.) Unfortunately, arbitrary doctrinal guidance for force sizing (and even quality) devised for the convenience of orderly administration tends to acquire an aura of strategic authority that was not originally intended and which it cannot bear.


6. NATO’s 23/30 guideline is a case in point. For planning convenience, a baseline “threat” had to be identified in order to ensure that NATO did not underestimate its possible operational problems. It was assumed, as a guideline only—not as a strategic prediction—that the Warsaw Pact would take thirty days to mobilize for war in Europe and that NATO would identify the character of the threat only seven days into the Pact mobilization, thereby granting twenty-three days for countermobilization. The thirty-day assumption was never intended to stand as a
Third, and most important of all, it is sometimes easy to forget that a central nuclear war really could occur. Whatever the pre-war feelings, thinking, and even instincts, of a politician may have been, in the event of war it is safe to predict that he would demand a realistic war plan. The promise of imposing catastrophic levels of damage on Soviet society may, or may not, have merit as a pre-war declaratory stance, but the politician would find that his learning curve on nuclear strategy rose very rapidly indeed following a deterrence failure. Killing people and blowing down buildings, on any scale, cannot constitute a strategy—unless, that is, one has some well developed theory which specifies the relationship between societal damage, actual and threatened, and the achievement of (political) war aims. Unless one is willing to endorse the proposition that nuclear deterrence is all bluff, there can be no evading the requirement that the defense community has to design nuclear employment options that a reasonable political leader would not be self-deterred from ever executing, however reluctantly.

Several years ago, Kenneth Hunt argued that among NATO’s more important duties was the need to guarantee to the Soviet Union that it could not avoid having to initiate a “major attack” should it move westwards in Europe. NATO’s function, on this theory, is not to defend Western Europe (at least, not directly); rather, it is to impose a high threshold for military-political adventure—to compel Soviet leaders, of any degree of intelligence or rabid hostility, that there are no relatively cheap or risk-constrained military options available. A similar logic underlies the policy positions of a major school of thought on strategic nuclear issues: all that we should, or need to, ask of the U.S. strategic nuclear posture is that it be capable of inflicting a lot of punishment on Soviet society. Precisely how much punishment, and of what kinds, we need to promise, must be a matter for conjecture, but fortunately for the robustness of a nuclear deterrent regime, pre-

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judgment that the Soviet Union would attack only after such a lengthy period of mobilization, rather it was intended to generate a large, as opposed to a more modest, theater threat. Almost needless to say, 23/30 came to assume doctrinal significance.

7. As James Schlesinger once said: “[b]ut I might also emphasize, Mr. Chairman, that doctrines control the minds of men only in periods of non-emergency. They do not necessarily control the minds of men during periods of emergency. In the moment of truth, when the possibility of major devastation occurs, one is likely to discover sudden changes in doctrine.” Testimony in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, Hearings, 93rd Congress, 2nd session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 160.

cision is not required. Essential to this thesis are the beliefs that nuclear war cannot be won, that there is no way in which damage in such a war can be held down to tolerable levels in the face of an adversary determined to impose major damage, and that notwithstanding the many differences between the superpowers in strategic culture, each side should have no difficulty identifying, threatening, and, if necessary, effecting a level of damage that the other would find unacceptable.

Strategic debate of recent years on SALT and strategic forces' issues has become so polarized and has involved such a high level of polemical "noise" that the transmission of signals between contending camps has been difficult. It is a considerable oversimplification to assert that there are two schools of thought on nuclear deterrence—there are not: there are many. However, while admitting the many nuances that separate the exact philosophies and policy prognoses of individuals, it is useful to recognize that the impending major debate over SALT II is being nurtured by what amounts to a fundamental dispute over the requirements, and even the place, of a deterrent policy. It is argued that the premises of the two loose coalitions of policy contenders drive the debate that surfaces all too often with reference to specific defense and arms control issues9—at a level of detail where the policy action (or inaction) advocated can have integrity only if it is related to basic assumptions and explicit desiderata (it is analogous to discussing strategy without reference to war aims).

Assured Destruction and its Descendants: A Sickly Breed

The first school of thought,10 which currently holds policy-authoritative sway in Washington (though it is not unchallenged within the government), may be thought of as the heir to the assured destruction ideas of the mid- to late

9. The "two camps" premise is not defended in detail in the text because (a) it is very close to being a self-evident truth, and (b) such an exercise in description would divert the discussion away from ideas and towards a summary of debate—with details required that are really of secondary importance, at most, to the theme of the article. Opinion, of course, exists on a spectrum. However, this author predicts that if one designed a simple questionnaire containing, say, ten "litmus paper-type" test questions of an either/or character, and submitted this questionnaire to 100 members of the U.S. national security community, inside and outside of government, there would be little cross-voting by individuals between "liberal" and "conservative" replies. Moreover, if one knew what an individual's final judgment was on SALT II, yea or nay, that fact would be extremely helpful in predicting his/her position on a wide range of other security issues.

10. In some important respects, it is more accurate and more satisfactory, at least for the limited purposes of this article, to talk of two schools, really loose coalitions of functional allies, of thought, than it would be to attempt to design a sophisticated multi-dimensional categorization
1960s. In 1964-65, the U.S. defense community substantially abandoned the concept of damage limitation. It was believed that strategic stability (the magic concept—far more often advanced and cited than defined),\textsuperscript{11} largely by virtue of a logic in technology (a truly American theme), could and should repose in what would amount to a strategic competitive stalemate. Each side could wreak unacceptable damage on the other’s society, and neither could limit such prospective damage through counterforce operations or through active or passive defenses. Ballistic missile defense (BMD), in principle if not in contemporary technical realization, did of course pose a potentially fatal threat to this concept. A good part of the anti-ABM fervor of the late 1960s, which extended from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to local church and women’s groups, can be traced to the strange belief that the goals of peace, security, arms control, stability and reduced resources devoted to defense preparation, could all flow from a context wherein societies were nearly totally vulnerable and strategic weapons were nearly totally invulnerable. It is important to note both that U.S. operational planning never reflected any close approximation to the assured destruction concept,\textsuperscript{12} and that the legatees of MAD reasoning in the late 1970s have made some adjustments to the doctrine for its better fit with contemporary reality.

The adjective “strange” was applied to MAD reasoning in the paragraph above from the perspectives of the historian of strategic ideas and of the sociologist of strategic culture. A detached observer might well ask and observe as follows:

—Is MAD a matter of a logic in technology (wherein offense-dominance is a physical law), or is it more in the nature of a self-fulfilling prophecy?
—If one side to the competition pursues the assured destruction path, how great a risk is it taking should the other side, for whatever blend of reasons, choose differently?

of attitude and opinion. The latter implies a commitment to an accuracy in personal detail that verges upon the trivial and yet which could never really be complete. Probably the most satisfactory attempt at the categorization and analysis of strategic attitudes was Robert A. Levine, \textit{The Arms Debate} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963). However, even this excellent book suffered from the vices of its virtues. The very comprehensiveness of its coverage compelled the author to take at least semiserious note of opinions that are of no policy relevance.\textsuperscript{11} See Edward Luttwak’s contribution to “The Great SALT Debate,” \textit{The Washington Quarterly}, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1979), particularly pp. 84-85.

12. U.S. strategic nuclear planning was essentially unrevised from the Kennedy years until the early 1970s. See Desmond J. Ball, \textit{The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963}. Unpublished manuscript (no date), Part 3, Chapter 2. For a definitive judgment we will have to await the eventual publication of the war plans (SIOPs), of the 1960s under the auspices of the Freedom of Information Act.
—MAD and its variants assume a noticeable measure of functional convergence of strategic ideas. But, strategic sociology tells us that each security community tends to design unique solutions to uniquely defined problems.  

—History may not tell us much with assurance, but certainly it suggests that technology cannot be frozen through arms control regimes: some qualitative boundaries upon its inventory expansion may be accomplished, but the slender historical arms control record suggests that politicians are as likely to freeze the wrong, as the right (i.e., stabilizing!), developments, and that prohibitions in one area serve to encourage the energetic pursuit of capabilities in other areas.  

—Although the existence of nuclear weapons encourages nuclear-armed states to be extremely careful in their mutual dealings, the fact of nuclear weapons has yet to be transcribed into some absolute injunction against war. The late Bernard Brodie has offered the thought that "if it is not yet an established fact it is at minimum a strong possibility that, at least between the great powers who possess nuclear weapons, the whole character of war as a means of settling differences has been transformed beyond all recognition." Notwithstanding some recent claims by Raymond Garthoff, it is not at all certain that Brodie was correct with respect to the

13. The concept of strategic culture is a fascinating one and is as obvious as it has been neglected. For a brief and interesting introduction to the subject, see Jack L. Snyder, The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations, R-2154-AP (Santa Monica, California: Rand, September 1977). The protracted SALT history has served to diminish enthusiasm for the strategic intellectual convergence thesis, but the U.S. Government is only at the beginning of attaining a due appreciation of the policy implications of the distinctive strategic culture thesis. This is one of those cases of rediscovery of the wheel. Most American strategic thinkers have always known that there was a uniquely "Soviet way" in military affairs, but somehow that realization was never translated from insight into constituting a serious and enduring factor influencing analysis, policy recommendation, and war planning.

14. Naval arms limitation by treaty in the 1920s and 1930s (with its heavy focus upon battleships and, eventually, cruisers, should stand as a classic lesson for all time). Also, it is worth recalling Bernard Brodie's judgment on the complex naval competition of the last decades of the Nineteenth Century. "It is very likely that a more costly and politically more dangerous competition was avoided because the Powers permitted the building to go on steadily, subject only to self-imposed restraints, which in a period of such rapid obsolescence of new material were certain to be very real." Sea Power in the Machine Age (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 254. A brilliant contemporary analysis of the unintended damage that can be wrought through the (mis)-control of technology is Edward N. Luttwak, "SALT and the Meaning of Strategy," The Washington Review of Strategic and International Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1978), pp. 16-28.


Soviet Union, while—even if he were correct—it remains the case that a nuclear war could occur. Mutual assured destruction, whatever its (highly dubious) merits as a pre-war deterrent declaratory stance, clearly has no appeal as operational guidance. Indeed, MAD is the antithesis of strategy—it relates military power to what?—to the punishment of a society for the sins or misjudgments of its rulers.

—That the pre-war deterrent focus of MAD reasoning is appealing, but the historian in him/her is distressed by the realization that the advent of nuclear weapons has affected, but has not transformed the character of, international politics. Insane, drugged, or drunk American chief executives might seek to punish Soviet society, but a more responsible leadership has to be presumed to be likely to wish to adhere to an ethic of consequences (rather than revenge).

Pre-War Deterrence: A Misleading Focus?

The second school of thought embraces a coalition of people who are convinced: that Soviet strategic-nuclear behavior is difficult to equate even with a very rough facsimile of MAD reasoning; that the technical-postural basis for the American MAD thesis of the late 1960s has been eroded severely; and that the theory of mutual assured destruction, even as amended officially in the 1970s in favor of greater flexibility, appears to have little of merit to offer as an operational doctrine. To state the central concern of this article, U.S. official thinking and planning does not embrace the idea that it is necessary to try to effect the defeat of the Soviet Union. First and foremost, the Soviet leadership fears defeat, not the suffering of damage—and defeat, as is developed below, has to entail the forcible demise of the Soviet state. The second school of thought is edging somewhat tentatively towards the radical thesis that the theory of nuclear deterrence espoused, for example, by Bernard Brodie from 1946 until 1978, a theory which stressed the “utility in

17. Assured destruction may have residual merit today in the strict context of deterring a Soviet counter-societal assault, but U.S. strategic forces have the same formal extended-deterrent duties that they have always had. As the Soviet Union has cancelled the more obvious U.S. strategic nuclear advantages, and as the U.S. continues to decline to seek to secure some measure of strategic superiority, so the attempt has been made to design “strategy offsets” for the adverse trend in the basic weapons balance. Very selective nuclear strike options, counter-economic recovery targeting, selective counter-military (and perhaps, in the 1980s, counter-political control) targeting, are all—to some degree—endeavors to effect an end run around the logical implications of an eroding military balance. This problem is well described with reference to the probable needs of NATO-Europe in Lawrence Martin’s contribution to “The Great SALT Debate,” pp. 29-37.
nonuse [of nuclear weapons], 18 has had extremely deleterious effects upon the quality of Western strategic thinking and hence upon Western security. Above all else, our attention has been directed towards the effecting of pre-war deterrence, at the cost of the neglect of operational strategy. 19 Incredible though it may seem, it has taken the United States' defense community nearly twenty-five years to ask the two most basic questions of all pertaining to nuclear deterrence issues: these are, first, what kinds of threats should have the most deterring effect upon the leadership of the Soviet state?—and, second, should pre-war deterrence fail, what nuclear employment strategy would it be in the United States' interest actually to implement?

The debate has yet fully to be joined, but this revisionist school of strategic theorists sees little merit in contemporary official U.S. deterrent policy (though the trend, as is discussed below, is mildly encouraging). The argument launched in public in late 1973 by then Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger concerning selective nuclear targeting 20 served, in retrospect at least, more to encourage persuasive fallacies than it did to focus attention upon the real problem. Our real problem, according to this view, is that the United States (and NATO-Europe) lacks a theory of victory in war (or satisfactory war termination). If, basically, one has no war aims (one has no image of enforced and favorable war termination, or of how the balance of power may be structured in a post-war world), on what grounds does one select a strategic nuclear employment policy, and how does one know how to choose an appropriate strategic posture? The answer, in this perspective, is that one does not know. 21 The answer provided by the first school of thought is that one chooses an employment policy (at least at the declaratory level), with roughly matching equipment, that has little if anything to do

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19. Note the scorn which Brodie pours upon the idea of "war-winning strategies" in "The Development of Nuclear Strategy," op. cit., p. 74. Nonetheless, a little earlier Brodie did observe that civilian scholars have "almost totally neglected" the question of "how do we fight a nuclear war and for what objectives?"—if deterrence fails (ibid., p. 66).
21. The strategic flexibility theme was much criticized by representatives of the first school of deterrence theory (see Herbert Scoville, "Flexible MADness", Foreign Policy, No. 14 [Spring 1974], pp. 164-177, and Barry Carter, "Nuclear Strategy and Nuclear Weapons," Scientific
with the intelligent conduct of war. By definition it is assumed that nuclear war cannot be waged intelligently for rational political ends: the overriding function of nuclear weapons is the deterrence, not the waging, of war.

The second school of thought objects to the above reasoning on several grounds. First, the heavy focus upon nuclear threat, as opposed to nuclear execution, has encouraged a basic lack of seriousness about the actual conduct of a nuclear war—which feeds back into an impoverished deterrent posture and doctrine. Second, although peace may be its profession, one day—arising out of political circumstances that no one could foresee with any confidence—SAC might discover that war is its business, and it would be better for our future if, in that event, SAC were guided by some theory of how it should wage the war to a tolerable outcome. As noted earlier, the somewhat irresponsible ideas that pass for orthodox nuclear deterrent wisdom, with their bottom-line focus upon damaging Soviet economic assets, would (as a prediction) evaporate in their official appeal in the event of a deterrence failure. Fundamentally, they are not serious. SAC does, of course, have plans to wage a central war in a fairly serious way. But, and it is a very large but, (1) U.S. strategic weapon acquisition policy (under four Presidents) has failed to provide SAC with the means to prosecute the counter-military war very effectively, and (2) our counter-military planning (however well or poorly it could be executed) continues to be deprived of the overarching political guidance that it needs—a definition and a concept of victory.

Superficially at least, Schlesinger’s strategic flexibility, as reflected in NSDM 242 and eventually in actual nuclear employment plans, marked a noteworthy improvement in the quality of U.S. deterrent policy. A richer menu of attack options, small and large, would provide a president with less-than-cataclysmic nuclear initiatives, should disaster threaten, or occur, in Europe or elsewhere. Selectivity of scale and kind of attack, it was and is still argued, enhances deterrence because it promotes the vital quality of

American, Vol. 230, No. 5 [May 1974], pp. 20-31), but those representatives—reasonably enough, from their perspective—did not offer the most telling line of criticism: namely, that strategic flexibility, however desirably and of itself (a view which Scoville and Carter did not share), does not constitute, or even approximate, a strategy.

22. See Lynn E. Davis, Limited Nuclear Options: Deterrence and the New American Doctrine, Adelphi Paper No. 121 (London: IISS, Winter 1975/6); and Desmond Ball, Déjà Vu: The Return to Counterforce in the Nixon Administration (Los Angeles: California Seminar on Arms Control and Foreign Policy, December, 1974). The Davis characterization, with its focus upon limited nuclear options (LNOs) is very substantially misleading as to the basic thrust of NSDM 242.

credibility. As far as it goes, that line of thought has much to recommend it. Few would deny that a president should feel less inhibited over the prospective dispatch of (say) thirty (or even 130) reentry vehicles, than he would over the dispatch of one to three thousand—particularly when the targets for those thirty to 130 reentry vehicles had been chosen very carefully with a view to inflicting the minimum possible population loss on the Soviet Union. This theme of restraint, selectivity, and usability—all in the interest of enhancing credibility for the improvement of deterrence—attracted predictable negative commentaries from quarters prone to argue that a more usable nuclear deterrent was a nuclear deterrent more likely to be used (similar arguments surfaced in connection with the protracted debate over enhanced radiation weapons). As Herbert Scoville explained: "[a] flexible strategic capability only makes it easier to pull the nuclear trigger."25

The second school of thought has no quarrel whatsoever with the ideas of flexibility, restraint, selectivity, minimal collateral damage and the rest. But, it does have some sizable quarrel with strategic selectivity ideas that are bereft of a superordinate framework for the conduct and favorable termination of the war. Against the background of a fairly steadily deteriorating strategic nuclear balance,26 the selectivity thesis simply adds what could amount to bigger and slightly more effective (i.e., the Soviets pay a higher military price) ways of losing the war. With a healthy strategic (im)balance in favor of the United States on the scale of, say, 1957 or 1962, one can see some logic to strategic flexibility reasoning. However, in the late 1970s and the 1980s, there are many reasons why a Soviet leadership might be less


25. Ibid., p. 2.

than fully impressed by constrained U.S. strategic execution, and might well respond with a constrained nuclear reply that would (and indeed should) most likely impose a noteworthy measure of escalation discipline upon the United States.27 Selective nuclear options, even if of a very heavily counter-military character, make sense, and would have full deterrent value, only if the Soviet Union discerned behind them an American ability and will to prosecute a war to the point of Soviet political defeat.

**Targeting the Recovery Economy**

Of very recent times, much of the nuclear strategy debate has narrowed down to a dispute over the validity of the thesis that the real (and ultimate) deterrent to Soviet risk-taking/adventure is the threat that our strategic nuclear forces pose to the Soviet recovery economy. Orthodox assured destruction thinking has evolved since the late 1960s. Notwithstanding the worthy deterrent motives of their authors, it is a fact that the last several annual Posture Statements of Robert McNamara endorsed a mass murder theory of nuclear “war” (to stretch a term). In the event of a central nuclear war, our declaratory policy was to kill tens of millions of Soviet citizens and destroy Soviet industry on a heroic scale.28 Fortunately, under Presidents Nixon and Ford, killing people and blowing down buildings per se ceased to be strategic objectives (though, to repeat, this is not to impugn the motives of the MAD theorists of the 1960s—they wished to deter war: a highly ethical objective—it is only their judgment that is challenged here). Instead, it was noticed (belatedly—though welcome for all that) that recovery from war was an


integral part of the Soviet concept of victory—*ergo*, the United States should threaten the post-war recovery of the Soviet Union.

The counter-recovery theory was not a bad one, but in practice several difficulties soon emerged. First, and most prosaically, American understanding of the likely dynamics of the Soviet post-war economy was (and remains) far short of impressive. In the same way that arms controllers have been hindered in their endeavors to control the superpower strategic arms competition by their lack of understanding of how the competition "worked," so our strategic employment planning community has found itself in the position of being required to be able to do that which nobody apparently is competent to advise it how to do. To damage the Soviet recovery economy would be a fairly elementary task, but to damage it in a calculable (even a roughly calculable) way is a different matter. Furthermore, the discovery, year by year through the mid- to late 1970s, of more and more Soviet civil defense preparation, threw into increasing doubt the "damage" expectancy against a very wide range of Soviet economic targets.

Second, it appears that the counter-economic recovery theme is yet another attempt to evade the most important strategic question. Should war occur, would the United States actually be interested in setting the Soviet economy back to 1959, or even 1929? Such an imposed retardation might make sense if it were married to a scheme for ensuring that damage to the American economy were severely limited. However, no such marriage has yet been mooted in policy-responsible circles. Third, it is possible that the posing

29. Counter-recovery targeting was not, of course, invented in the 1970s. In 1967, Robert McNamara said that "it seems reasonable to assume that in the case of the Soviet Union, the destruction of, say one-fifth to one-fourth of its population and one-half to two-thirds of its industrial capacity would mean its elimination as a major power for many years." (Emphasis added). *Statement . . . on the Fiscal Year 1968-72 Defense Program . . ., op. cit., p. 39.* Counter-recovery targeting has come, in the 1970s, to imply attacks on a more discrete character than those suggested in McNamara's words.

30. General George Brown, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was very explicit on this subject. "We do not target population *per se* any longer. What we are doing now is targeting a war recovery capability." Quoted in *The Defense Monitor*, Vol. VI, No. 6 (August 1977), p. 2.

31. On the contrary, the current Secretary of Defense has written as follows: "I am not persuaded that the right way to deal with a major Soviet damage-limiting program would be by imitating it. Our efforts would almost certainly be self-defeating, as would theirs. We can make certain that we have enough warheads—including those held in reserve—targeted in such a way that the Soviets could have no expectation of escaping unacceptable damage." *Department of Defense Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1979, op. cit.,* p. 65. Of course the United States *could* impose unacceptable damage upon the Soviet Union, but there is no good reason to believe that the current administration (1) knows what unacceptable damage means in Soviet terms; (2) would be willing to fund a U.S. strategic posture capable of imposing truly unacceptable damage; or
(even credibly posing) of major economic recovery problems to the Soviet Union might be insufficiently deterring a prospect if Soviet arms could acquire Western Europe in a largely undamaged condition to serve as a recovery base; if the stakes in a war were deemed by Moscow to be high enough; and if the Soviet Union were able, in the course of the war, to drive the United States back to an agrarian economy. It is difficult to disagree with Henry Kissinger's comment on massive counterpopulation strikes.

Every calculation with which I am familiar indicates that a general nuclear war in which civilian populations are the primary target will produce casualties exceeding 100m. Such a degree of devastation is not a strategic doctrine: it is an abdication of moral and political responsibility. No political structure could survive it.

Targeting the Soviet State

Nonetheless, the counter-recovery theme of the 1970s has prompted an interesting line of speculation. Namely, perhaps the recovery that should be threatened is not economic in character, but rather political. Some revisionists of the second school of deterrence theorists argue that any kind of counter-economic strategy is fundamentally flawed because it leads into Soviet strength. The Soviet Union, like Czarist Russia, knows that it can absorb an enormous amount of punishment (loss of life, industry, productive agricultural land, and even territory), recover, and endure until final victory—provided the essential assets of the state remain intact. The principal assets are the political control structure of the highly centralized CPSU and government bureaucracy; the transmission belts of communication from the center to the regions; the instruments of central official coercion (the KGB and the armed forces); and the reputation of the Soviet state in the eyes of its citizens. Counter-economic targeting should have a place in intelligent

(3) would be capable of understanding that our offensive strategy will avail us very little if our domestic assets are totally at risk.

32. This author sees some merit in Bernard Brodie's comment (on the targeting of war recovery capability) that "[w]hatever else may be said about this idea, one would have to go back almost to the fate of Carthage to find an historical precedent." The Development of Nuclear Strategy, op cit., p. 79.

33. "Kissinger's Critique of SALT II", The Economist, February 3, 1979, p. 18. Kissinger watchers should note that their subject traditionally has been as poor a strategic theoretician as he has been a strong foreign policy analyst.

34. This idea has had some U.S. official status for at least five years, but its detailed meaning has never been probed rigorously.
U.S. war planning, but only to the extent to which such targeting would impair the functioning of the Soviet state.

The practical difficulties that would attend an endeavor to wage war against the Soviet state, as opposed to Soviet society, have to be judged to be formidable. However, one would at least have established an unambiguous and politically meaningful war aim (the dissolution of the Soviet political system) that could be related to a post-war world that would have some desirable features in Western (and Chinese) perspective. More to the point perhaps, identification of the demise of the Soviet state as the maximum ambition for our military activity, encourages us to attempt to seek out points of high leverage within that system. For examples, we begin to take serious policy note of the facts that:

—The Soviet peoples as a whole have no self-evident affection for, as opposed to toleration of, their political system or their individual political leaders.

—The Soviet Union, quite literally, is a colonial empire—loved by none of its non Great Russian minority peoples.35

—The Soviet state has to be enormously careful of its domestic respect and reputation, so fragile is the system deemed to be (evidence of Soviet official estimates of this fragility is located in the very character of the police state apparat that is maintained, and in the extreme sensitivity historically displayed in response to threats to Soviet authority in Eastern Europe).

—The entire Soviet political and economic system is critically dependent upon central direction from Moscow. If the brain of the Soviet system were destroyed, degraded, or—at a minimum—isolated from those at lower levels of political command who traditionally have been discouraged from showing initiative, what happens to the cohesion, or pace of recovery, of the whole?

—The peoples of Eastern Europe and the minority republics in the Soviet Union itself, respect the success and power of the Soviet state. What happens in terms of the acquiescence of these peoples in Soviet (and Great Russian) hegemony if Soviet arms either are defeated, or are compelled to wage a long and indecisive struggle?36


36. It is one thing if the Soviet state is able, as in The Great Patriotic War, to assume the mantle
Improbable though it may seem to many, this discussion is beginning to point towards a not-implausible theory of victory for the West. The alternative theory of deterrence/war waging proposed by some people within the second school, by way of contrast to the mass murder, punishment theme of the first school, comprises essentially, the idea that the Soviet system be encouraged to dissolve itself. We resist the external military pressure of the Soviet Union, and effect carefully selected kinds of damage against the capacity of the Soviet state to function with authority at home. Soviet leaders can reason as well as Western defense analysts that large-scale counter-economic strikes would not serve Western interests (if only because of the retaliation that they would invite), whereas a war plan directed at the destruction of Soviet power would have inherent plausibility in Soviet estimation.

The Decline (but not Fall) of Assured Destruction

The essential backcloth to this counter-political control strategy has to be the ability to deny the Soviet Union any outcome approximating military victory in a short war. No matter how intelligent our ultimate goals may be for World War III, if the Soviet Union can (or believes that it can) win a rapid campaign against NATO-Europe and, if need be, could escalate to do unmatchable damage to U.S. strategic forces, while holding virtually all American economic assets at nuclear risk, then the second school would have failed to think through the totality of the deterrence problem. Needless to say, scarcely less significant a weakness in orthodox deterrence thinking than the fact that it focuses upon the threat of effecting the kinds of damage to the Soviet Union that should not be of interest to American policy makers actually to execute, is the fact that it discounts totally the intra-war self-deterrent implications of the vulnerability of American assets. Foreign policy, in good part, is about freedom of action. Mutual assured destruction think-

ing, which still lurks in our declaratory policy and, presumably, in our war plans, virtually ensures self-deterrence and denies us the freedom of strategic-nuclear action that is a premise of NATO’s strategy of flexible response.38

It is no exaggeration to claim that still-orthodox punishment-oriented deterrence thinking stemmed to a notable degree from a group of theorists who tended to think of the superpowers as though they were two missile farms: the attainment of an assured destruction capability by both sides would encourage the establishment and endurance of a technologically imposed peace.39 The idea was fundamentally apolitical, astrategic, and was contrary to what the Soviet Union discerned, very sensibly, as its self-interest. Overall, as John Erickson has observed, American thinking on mutual deterrence, with its technological premises, reflects a “management” approach by way of contrast to “the Soviet ‘military’ inclination.”40 This author has difficulty understanding how a country like the United States, which has accepted obligations to project power at great distances in support of forward-located allies, could have seen any noteworthy attractions in the mutual hostage theory of deterrence. Of all countries, the United States needs a credible strategic force posture married to a theory of feasible employment. The catastrophic retaliation thesis, whether or not preceded by very selective nuclear employment options, is an idea it would be hard to improve upon were one seeking to minimize the relevance of (American) strategic weapons to world politics. It is probably appropriate largely to dismiss the deterrence-through-punishment ideas of the 1960s (or, at least, as formalized and codified in the 1960s) as the products of a defense community that was neither trained nor inclined to think strategically.41 After all, the codification of the

41. Policy makers in Washington might profit from frequent reminders of Clausewitz’ definition of strategy. Strategy teaches “the use of engagements for the object of the war” (emphasis in the original). On War, op. cit., p. 128.
mutual punishment theory of deterrence as explicit policy—between 1964 and 1968—coincided exactly, and scarcely totally by chance, with gross strategic mismanagement in, and concerning, Vietnam. The same Department of Defense policy-making hierarchy that could not (or would not) design a theory of victory for Vietnam, 42 similarly abandoned such an apparently extravagant notion in the realm of strategic nuclear policy.

Until the mid-1960s, it is probably true to say that the quality of American strategic thinking concerning central war execution was a matter of relatively little importance: defeat for the Soviet Union was virtually implicit in the sheer scale of the strategic imbalance (i.e., even if the United States, in the event of war, had executed a foolish strategy, it would have done so on so massive a relative basis that the Soviet Union could not possibly have emerged from such a conflict with any net profit). But, as the capabilities of the two sides approached rough equivalence in the early to mid-1970s, the quality of strategic thinking, as reflected in actual plans, could easily make the difference between victory and defeat, or recovery and no recovery. 43

The strategic debate referred to repeatedly in this article thus far is in a curious condition—with neither side quite sure of which positions are really

42. As Alexis de Tocqueville and many lesser commentators have observed, the conduct of foreign policy is not, and (given its political structure) cannot be, an American forte. For a sense of perspective, it is worth noting that very few countries can wage long, losing (or perpetually inconclusive) wars and emerge with little, if any, domestic damage. If Americans feel ashamed, in different ways, over their Vietnam record, they should consider what the war in Algeria did to France. Admittedly, Algeria was a true colonial war, but still it was a case of a democracy attempting to cope with the consequences of military success and political defeat. Any American president should know that the only kind of war his country can fight, and fight very well, is one where there is a clear concept of victory—alogically, the marines raising the flag on Mt. Suribachi is the way in which a president should think of American wars being terminated. The more distant the Mt. Suribachi analogue from the case at hand, the more doubtful a president should be over committing U.S. forces to action. The U.S. public could have understood, and almost certainly would have approved, the U.S. Marine Corps seizing Hanoi (intact or rubble—no matter) in 1965 or 1966, and compelling Ho Chi Minh (or a successor—again, no matter) to sign a peace treaty. That would be victory. American academic theorists of “limited” (and “sublimated” war in the late 1950s and early 1960s) simply failed to understand their own country. Most Americans believe that if wars are not worth winning (in fairly classical terms), they are not worth fighting.

43. See T. K. Jones and W. Scott Thompson, “Central War and Civil Defense,” Orbis, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Fall 1978), pp. 681–712; and Director of Central Intelligence, Soviet Civil Defense (Washington, D.C.: CIA, July, 1978). This latter study claims that Soviet casualties (only half of which would be fatalities) could be held to “the low tens of millions”, though only under the most favorable conditions for the Soviet Union (p. 4). Some Boeing civil defense studies have suggested, by way of contrast, that under the most favorable conditions Soviet population fatalities would be less than ten million. Most commentators agree that a proper mix of offensive and defensive programs should make a dramatic difference to the prospects of early post-war recovery.
worth defending. Notwithstanding the high polemical noise level, there has been a very notable narrowing of real differences of opinion over the past three to four years. For prominent examples:

—There is now widespread endorsement of the thesis that Soviet strategic thinking differs markedly from American. Indeed, recognition of what in the West we term a “war-fighting” focus (on the part of the Soviet Union) has helped greatly to promote insecurity in the minds of many over either the inherent wisdom, or the practical advisability (or both), of a punishment-oriented theory of nuclear deterrence. It is many years since commentators in the United States have written about “raising the Russian learning curve.”

—Today, there is virtually universal agreement that, notwithstanding the many and accelerating weaknesses in the Soviet system, most of the major military balances have been moving to the disadvantage of the West. There is no consensus over whether or not those trends will continue into and through the 1980s, nor as to whether or not those adverse trends constitute cause for alarm as opposed merely to concern.

—To the knowledge of this author, in the United States’ defense and arms control community today there are no strong adherents to anything approximating the pure theory of mutual assured destruction. But, those who have disengaged from the arguments of Robert McNamara’s Posture Statements for 1968 and 1969 seem to be uncertain as to what other doctrinal haven there might be available, while many of those who have rejected MAD reasoning outright are less than confident that they have identified any superior alternative.

A Catalogue of Confusion

The admittedly unsatisfactory designations, “first school” of thought and “second school” of thought, have been employed here because there is a considerable danger of unintended misrepresentation and undue simplifi-

45. It is beginning to be fashionable to concede that the West will have to endure several years of unusual peril in the early 1980s, in terms of military balances considered narrowly, but that that condition will be transformed in the latter half of the decade as the U.S. strategic force posture accommodates cruise missiles, a follow-on ICBM and, eventually, the Trident 2 SLBM. A similar phenomenon is claimed for the trend in the theater balance in Europe: NATO’s long-term defense program should have a very noticeable cumulative impact by the mid- to late
cation should any less neutral titles have been chosen. At this stage in the article, it may be safe to introduce the claim that the “first school” corresponds roughly to a focus upon “deterrence through punishment,” while the “second school” tends to focus upon deterrence through the expectation of a militarily effective prosecution of war. Alas for neatness of description, neither group closely approaches its ideal type.  

The first school has recognized the immorality, inflexibility and plain incredibility of having a strategic force posture pre-programmed to deliver only massive strikes against Soviet economic assets per se. However, because it rejects any thoroughgoing “war-fighting” alternative as being certain to stimulate the arms competition, perhaps to render war more likely (through the believed consequent increase in strategic instability), and to make the prospects for negotiated measures of arms control far less encouraging, it has endeavored to design what might be termed “assured destruction with a human face.” In place of the grisly (though superficially anodyne) prose of 1967-68 vintage McNamara, we are told about the deterrent virtues of strategic flexibility and the ultimately dissuasive merits of impairing Soviet economic recovery to a catastrophic degree. However, as observed above, the first school has yet to cope adequately with the rather obvious critical point that strategic flexibility and counter-recovery targeting are options that two can exercise. An intelligent strategy, if feasible, would be to design nuclear threats and employment options that the adversary either cannot or dare not match (or overmatch). Also, the first school has been increasingly overtaken by developments both in American weapon laboratories and, above all else, in the force posture that the Soviet Union is deploying. There is no logical reason why one should shift from a selective punishment thesis as a consequence of observing the Soviet strategic developments of recent years (if one endorses the punishment thesis); but it does appear that many commentators have been uneasy and defensive in a context where the Soviet Union is apparently challenging every major tenet of the American theory of strategic stability.  

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1980s. This author grants the possible validity of this theory, but is disturbed by the fragility of almost all of its premises. Henry Kissinger has commented persuasively on the early to mid-1980s being “a period of maximum peril” in “Kissinger’s Critique,” op. cit., p. 20.  
46. The U.S. Department of Defense, in its declaratory policy, and even more in its actual operational planning (though not in its force acquisition), stands squarely between the two schools. DoD planning looks as though it is about the serious prosecution of war, but (a) the proper means are lacking, and (b) (to repeat a now familiar refrain) there is no theory of Soviet defeat to be discerned.  
47. Soviet offensive-force development will, on current trends, pose an unacceptably high threat to the pre-launch survivability of the U.S. ICBM force by the early 1980s (for contrasting analyses
First-school adherents are obliged by the contemporary climate of opinion in the United States to endorse the proposition that there should be an "essential equivalence" in strategic prowess between the superpowers, but what can this mean when there are very large asymmetries in strategic doctrine? Does it mean that the United States should invest in strategic capabilities that it deems to be destabilizing (say, hard-target counterforce and civil defense), solely in order to provide a perceptual match with Soviet capabilities? In practice, first school theorists are finding it very difficult to resist venturing into program regions which really have no place in their philosophy. The result, as may be seen in the curious mix of half-heartedly promoted programs and ill-assorted ideas that constitute current strategic policy, is something for nearly everybody. Because the official theory of nuclear deterrence is so uncertain, one sees the following:

—A new commitment to civil defense, qualified near-instantly by assurances that the new commitment will be neither very expensive nor so serious as to pose a threat to strategic stability.

—A commitment to preserve a survivable ICBM leg to the strategic forces triad, but one that will pose as little (and as late) a threat to fixed site Soviet assets as the domestic SALT-related traffic will permit.

—A commitment to the devising of a new strategic nuclear employment doctrine, but not one which challenges any of the basic premises of the deterrence through punishment thesis.

—A commitment to second-strike hard-target counterforce prowess, on a scale which should fuel little first-strike anxiety in Moscow.48

—A commitment to a SALT process, and to a SALT II outcome, that has no reference to a stable strategic doctrine that has political integrity.49

As the period of intense debate over SALT II begins, it is fair to note that the United States Government sees merit in strategic flexibility, in some


50. It is difficult to tell a convincing story in support of SALT II, when the strategic doctrine that provides the political meaning in the strategic force posture is very uncertain. On what basis can one assess adequacy?
counterforce, in some degree of direct protection for the American public (though not much), and in the ability, in the last resort, to blow down large sections of the urban Soviet Union. This may be sufficient for deterrence, but a defense community should be capable of providing strategic direction that has more political meaning.

Revisionist Claims: Myths and Reality

The second school of deterrence theory waxes eloquent on the absence of strategy in official policy, and indeed on the rarity of strategic thinking within the defense community,51 but remains slightly abashed at the boldness, and even apparent archaism, of the logic of its own position. Today’s revisionists are challenging the mature judgment of the finest flowering of American strategic thought. In policy terms at least, “The Golden Age” of American strategic thought extended roughly from 1956 until (at the outside) 1965.52 The author of probably the single most highly regarded book to appear in this period53 has written as follows in the pages of this journal:

The main war goal upon the beginning of a strategic nuclear exchange should surely be to terminate it as quickly as possible and with the least amount of damage possible—on both sides.54

Of course, the best prospect of all for minimizing (prompt) damage lies in surrendering preemptively. If Bernard Brodie’s advice were accepted, the

51. For examples, see Daniel O. Graham, “The Decline of U.S. Strategic Thought,” Air Force Magazine, Vol. 60, No. 8 (August, 1977), pp. 24-29; and Luttwak, “SALT and the Meaning of Strategy”, op. cit. The scope for strategic thinking may, of course, be reduced if one discerns no, or hardly any, political value in military action at the level of nuclear operations. In the words of Fritz Ermarth: “For many years the prevailing U.S. concept of nuclear war’s consequences has been such as to preclude belief in any military or politically meaningful form of victory.” “Contrasts in American and Soviet Strategic Thought,” op. cit., p. 144. One might reformulate Clausewitz’ definition of strategy so as to read “the use of [the threat] of engagements for the object of the war” (On War, Op. Cit., p. 128, my addition in brackets) in order to accommodate the strategy of deterrence and compellence, but there is grave danger in the judgment offered by Bernard Brodie in 1946: “Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose,” The Absolute Weapon, op. cit., p. 76. This is a prime example of a good idea becoming a poor idea when it is taken too far: at worst, it is a doctrinal formula for losing wars. 52. Two as yet unpublished manuscripts discuss the rise of (civilian) nuclear-age strategic theorizing in great detail. These are James King, The New Strategy; and my own Strategic Studies and Public Policy: The American Experience. 53. Bernard Brodie, Strategy in the Missile Age (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959). 54. Brodie, “The Development of Nuclear Strategy,” op. cit., p. 79.
West would be totally at the mercy of a Soviet Union, which viewed war in a rather traditional perspective. The second school of nuclear deterrence is concerned lest its debating adversaries, neglecting the degree to which their ideas rest upon an unacknowledged measure of U.S. firepower (if not strategy) superiority, which no longer exists, may mislead American policy makers into ignoring the possibility that nuclear age crises and wars can be lost, in a quite unambiguous fashion.

The various arguments of the second school (really a loose coalition) of strategic theory do, it must be admitted, lend themselves fairly easily to grotesque misrepresentation. For example, responsible theorists of this persuasion do not claim:

—That the Soviet Union believes that it will win a thermonuclear war (instead, it is claimed that there is an impressive apparent consensus among Soviet authorities to the effect that victory [and defeat] is possible);  
—That the Soviet Union either wants or expects to have to wage a central war with the United States. Military power can be most useful, and cost-effective, when the mere promise of its exercise achieves desired deterrent and compellent outcomes. It is very likely indeed that the Soviet Union sees its strategic forces largely in a counterdeterrent role—functioning to seal off local conflicts from influence by U.S. strategic forces. However, any Soviet skepticism over the likelihood of central war does not (to the best of our knowledge) spill-over into defense programs and doctrine in the form of weapons and ideas that make little or no military sense. Because war is possible, one prepares sensibly for it. 
—That the Soviet Union anticipates achieving ultimate victory in war at little cost (much, though by no means all, of the argument of recent years in the United States concerning Soviet civil defense is really beside the point). Cautious committeeemen in the Politburo could not afford to assume that T. K. Jones’ optimistic studies (in Soviet perspective) were even close to the mark.  

Second-school theorists, by and large, anticipate Soviet expectation of the necessity of accepting human and industrial loss on a catastrophic scale. However, catastrophic loss need not be intolerable

loss—and may indeed be loss of a kind that the Soviet Union is willing to absorb, if the political stakes in the conflict are high enough (and if the alternatives to extreme measures of military action are very unattractive in their likely returns). It is fundamental to the Soviet theory of victory that the essential (and as much else in the) homeland be preserved. It is a sobering thought that the loss of 30 or 40 million people might well be compatible with a context defined by a Soviet leadership as victory: it would depend very much on who was among that 30 or 40 million.57

—Any certain knowledge concerning the requirements of deterrence or the proper conduct of thermonuclear war for a politically acceptable outcome. What is claimed is that the ideas of the 1960s (the assured destruction of people and industry) and the 1970s (small- and large-scale attack options of a carefully constrained nature, counter-economic recovery targeting, and the currently increasing interest in even more counter-military options [than in the past—which was fairly extensive]) cannot withstand critical examination, given the adverse evolution of the major East-West military balances, and the more mature Western understanding of the Soviet approach to the waging of war.

**Counter-Military Targeting**

Newspaper reports in late 1978 and early 1979 suggested that the Department of Defense was attracted to the idea of a substantially counter-military targeting doctrine, in contrast to the counter-economic recovery theme.58 However, intra-governmental opposition to this idea is substantial, in part for reason of its budgetary implications, and in part because it offends some still fairly authoritative notions pertaining to the sacrosanct concept of stability. In 1978, a State Department publication claimed that “it is our policy not to deploy forces which so threaten the Soviet retaliatory capability that they would have an incentive to strike first to avoid losing their deterrent force.”59

59. The next sentence is intriguing. “However, this policy is contingent on similar Soviet
Counter-military targeting is not, of course, even close to being a novel idea in U.S. war planning. Indeed, one may speculate to the effect that counter-military targeting already comprises the lion’s share of strategic resource allocations in SIOP planning—a thought supported amply by the bevy of official commentaries offered in 1974–75 in support of the “Schlesinger shift” in targeting, largely following the guidance provided by NSDM 242 (of 1974). If there is a shift impending in favor of (still more) large counter-military strike options in the SIOP, one can speculate that such a shift might imply the paying of heavier attention to Soviet projection forces or, at a more basic level, a commitment to purchasing the ability to neutralize a far higher fraction of really hard Soviet military (and political) targets than is the case at present.

For the U.S. Government to endorse a full-fledged war-fighting doctrine in the strategic realm would constitute a doctrinal revolution. Such a doctrine would deny the validity of the stability theory that has informed U.S. defense and arms control policy since the mid-1960s. Strategic stability, in the standard formula, requires that societal assets (people and industry) be near totally vulnerable, while strategic weapons be invulnerable. The Soviet Union has always believed in the value of the assured destruction option vis-à-vis the United States, but not in mutual assured destruction. It is too early to be certain, but even if the United States under President Carter might be willing to shift its declaratory focus (and eventually its actual targeting plans)—and to invest in actual military capability—more toward military targets than is the case at present, it is unlikely that it will be able to overcome its fundamental skepticism over the wisdom of approaching a central nuclear war as one should approach (or did approach, in pre-nuclear days) non-nuclear war. Pending the occurrence (and resolution in favor of change) of a sophisticated debate over the worth of still-fashionable ideas concerning crisis and arms race instability, American strategic policy will be shifted at the margin rather than rewritten. Also, a particular strategic posture, even one as large

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as that to be maintained in the 1980s by the United States (with the blessing of SALT II), is not omni-competent.

At the present time the United States does not have a strategic posture capable of seeking a military outcome to a war in which Western political authorities could place any confidence. Moreover, on the record extant, the interest of the Carter Administration in purchasing such a posture rapidly has to be judged to be distinctly lukewarm. Carter's record on the character and timing of the MX ICBM program, on the B-1 bomber (aborted), and on civil defense, would have to fuel incredulity over the likely postural matching for any proclaimed new strategic doctrine with a war-waging, as opposed to a pre-war deterrent, orientation. If, as (almost certainly over-) reported, the U.S. Government should inch towards a very heavily counter-military strategic nuclear employment doctrine, it will need to understand the requirements and limitations of such an approach. A non-defense professional might be somewhat puzzled by this discussion. As a general rule, he might observe, U.S. war planning surely has always been oriented most heavily towards Soviet military targets (strategic forces, projection forces, command and control targets, and war-supporting industry and transport networks)—so what is new? The answer lies in the scope of the military targeting, in its ability to cope with a much harder target set than before, and in its design for separation from civil society. Anybody who sought to argue that the United States suddenly had discovered counter-military targeting as an interesting option, would of course be guilty of misleading his audience. For example, Richard Burt of The New York Times wrote recently that:

The Carter Administration has revised the United States strategy for deterring nuclear war by adopting a concept that would require strategic forces to be capable of large-scale precision attacks against Soviet military targets as well as all-out retaliatory blows against cities.

The new strategy, which has emerged after months of debate in the Pentagon, represents a significant departure from the long-held concept that the United States needs only to threaten all-out retaliation against Soviet cities to deter Moscow from launching a nuclear attack.61

Clausewitz wrote of war that "[i]ts grammar, indeed, may be its own [i.e., war should be waged in a way that makes military sense, given its unique dynamics], but not its logic."62 A U.S. SIOP oriented towards different kinds

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of military targets should be guided by a political logic—what are our war aims? A rewriting and recomputing of the SIOP in an even more heavily counter-military direction than is the case at present could place the United States in a somewhat worse position than that occupied by the (major) allied politicians of World War I—there could be a determination to do military damage to the enemy (which is very sensible), but a lack of commitment to the idea of prosecuting the war to the point where the enemy is defeated militarily (unlike World War I). The question of just how the military damage to be wrought is to be translated into political advantage could easily be evaded.

It may be ungenerous to proffer such a negative (or, at least, skeptical) verdict, but it does seem that the official (at least in the Department of Defense) redirection of U.S. strategic nuclear targeting preferences continues to neglect factors that bear upon the issue of desired war outcomes. As noted earlier, a counter-political control strategy cannot succeed unless a Soviet military offensive, at the theater and/or intercontinental levels, is thwarted. However, it would be foolish to wage the military war without taking proper prior account of the Soviet perspective upon Soviet vulnerabilities. There is considerable danger that the United States, looking to the damage promise of an inventory of cruise missiles and (much later) MX ICBMs, will neglect the very important political criteria for strategic targeting. A theory of victory over the Soviet Union can be only partially military in character—the more important part is political. The United States and its allies probably should not aim at achieving the military defeat of the Soviet Union, considered as a unified whole; instead, it should seek to impose such military stalemate and defeat as is needed to persuade disaffected Warsaw Pact allies and ethnic minorities inside the Soviet Union that they can assert their own values in very active political ways. It is possible that a heavily counter-military focused SIOP might have the same insensitivity to Soviet domestic fragilities as may be found in the counter-economic recovery orientation of the 1970s.

In important respects, a heavily counter-military SIOP would be the kind of war plan that the Soviet Union is well equipped to counter. Notwithstanding its apparent war-waging focus, the American authors and executors of such a doctrine would be unlikely to have considered the conduct of war as a whole: really they would still be seeking, very substantially, to be responsive to pre-war deterrence needs. With a clear political war aim—to encourage the dissolution of the Soviet state—much of the military war might not need to be fought at all. The apparently resolute determination of the Amer-
ican defense community not to think through its deterrence needs, which would involve addressing the question of war aims, promises to produce yet another marginal improvement in doctrine (after all, U.S. strategic forces have always been targeted against Soviet military power—whatever annual Posture Statements may have said). It may be worth reminding American policy makers in 1979 that the United States had a counterforce doctrine in Vietnam. A focus upon counter-military action, bereft of an overarching political intent, save of the vaguest kind, is unlikely to serve American interests well, except by unmerited luck.

The war-fighting theme which now has limited, though important, official support in Washington, comprises no more than half of the change in thinking that is needed. It is essential for pre-war deterrent effect that Soviet leaders not believe they could wage a successful short war. But, for reasons that none could predict in advance, war might occur regardless of the pre-war theories and the postures of the two sides. In that event, it will be essential that the United States has a theory of war responsive to its political interests. Because a counter-military focus in the SIOP is not informed by a clear goal of political victory against the Soviet state, the United States is unlikely to be able to wage an intercontinental nuclear war in a very intelligent fashion. In World War II, American wartime leaders declined to attempt to look beyond the battlefield, so long as the war as still in progress, with results of impressive negative educational value for succeeding generations. How much more intelligent it would be to have explicit war aims that should, in and of themselves, have considerable pre- and intra-war deterrent value.

One hesitates to criticize the reported current trend in official thinking, so healthy a change is it in its war-waging focus from the murderous and impolitic counter-economic themes of the 1960s and (most of the) 1970s. Nonetheless, the point has to be made that there continues to be an absence of political judgment overseeing U.S. strategic nuclear employment policy and, ergo, there is a neglect of strategy. A possible change in the 1980s in

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63. In his valuable study of the counterforce debate of the early 1970s, Desmond Ball quotes an Air Force general as claiming (in February 1973) that the SIOP was “never reworked under (President) Johnson. It is still basically the same as 1962.” Déjà Vu: The Return to Counterforce in the Nixon Administration, op. cit., p. 17.

64. Such a war might not be tripped by a military accident that related to political intention on neither side. It might pertain to matters of vital interest to both sides. In short, the U.S. defense community might discover that it did have political goals that far transcended Brodie’s prediction that the earliest possible war termination would likely be the superordinate objective (see Footnote 54).
strategic employment orientation towards the counter-military, is fully compatible with a U.S. defense community which would not be able to bring itself to think of thermonuclear war in terms of victory or defeat. The U.S. defense community, substantially coerced in its thinking by the adverse trends in the major East-West military balances, has progressed from a counter-economic, to a counter-military focus in its nuclear employment reasoning (although the mechanical details of war planning may well have focused more upon Soviet military assets than the U.S. defense community generally understood to be the case), but it has yet to accept a strategic focus and advance to a counter-political control thesis. Unlike Soviet defense analysts, Western commentators continue to be bemused by the reality-numbing concept of “war termination.” Wars are indeed terminated, but they are also won or lost. Moreover, if the U.S. defense community envisages (as it must, realistically) the sacrifice (presumably unwilling) of tens of millions of Americans in a thermonuclear war, that sacrifice should be undertaken only in a very worthwhile cause. If there is no theory of political victory in the U.S. SIOP, then there can be little justification for nuclear planning at all.

Stability and the Need for Defense

The principal intellectual culprit in our pantheon of false strategic gods is the concept of stability. For more than fifteen years, influential members of the U.S. defense and arms control community have believed that it is useful, or even essential, that the Soviet Union have guaranteed unrestricted strategic access to American societal assets. Such unrestricted access was believed to have a number of stabilizing consequences. In and of itself it should limit arms competitive activity (such activity as remained would stem from “normal” modernization and from efforts to offset counterforce-relevant developments on the other side), while—more basically—it should promote some relaxation of tension, in that the Soviet Union would, belatedly, be assured of its ability to deter (through punishment) the United States. (This

66. Strange to note, the theory of arms race dynamics that featured as its centerpiece the proposition that each side acts and reacts in a fairly mechanistic fashion in pursuit of a secure assured destruction capability, has now been discredited pretty well definitively by the historical
theory has some features in common with the view that the four-fold rise in oil prices in 1973-74 was “good for us”—compelling us to confront the implications of our own profligacy in the energy consumption field.

Analysts of all (or perhaps most) doctrinal persuasions have come at last to accept the view that the Soviet Union does not relax as a consequence of its achieving a very high quality assured destruction capability: the excellent reason for such continued effort is that the assured destruction of American societal assets plays no known role in Soviet deterrent or wartime planning—save as a threat to deter American counter-economic strikes. In addition, Soviet planners probably see considerable political coercive value for a post-war world in a very large counter-societal threat. Backward though it has seemed to some, the Soviet Union has provided unmistakable evidence of believing that wars, even large nuclear wars, can be won or lost. The mass-murder of Americans makes a great deal of sense in terms of the authority structure of a post-war world (since the Soviet Union cannot consummate a victory properly through the physical occupation of North America), but such a grisly exercise has little or nothing to do with the prosecution of a war (save as a counter-deterrent threat).

American strategic (and arms control) policy, since the mid-1960s, has been misinformed by stability criteria which rested (and rest) upon a near-total misreading of Soviet phenomena. Soviet leaders are opportunists with a war-waging doctrine as their strategic leitmotiv. Supposedly sophisticated self-restraint in American arms competitive activity, designed so as not to stimulate “destabilizing” Soviet responses, has simply presented the Soviet Union with an upcoming period of strategic superiority of uncertain duration. The American stability theorem held only for so long as both sides endorsed it. There is legitimate dispute today over the quality of Soviet strategic programs, but no one, to the knowledge of this author, disputes the contention that the Soviet Union is seeking both to protect its societal assets (assured survival, not mutual assured destruction) and to pose the maximum threat to American strategic forces, compatible with the adequate manipulation of Western hopes and fears for the future for the purpose of discouraging a

facts, but the strategic policy premises that flow from that flawed theory have not been overhauled thoroughly. Since virtually all U.S. commentators agree that the Soviet Union is not attracted to MAD reasoning, the long-familiar “instability” case against urban-area BMD and non-marginal civil defense provision, is simply wrong. We are still in search of an adequate explanatory model for the strategic arms competition. See Colin S. Gray, The Soviet-American Arms Race (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington, 1976).
strong American competitive response. Unlike the Soviet Union, the United States has declined to recognize (courtesy of its still-authoritative stability theory) that an adequate strategic deterrent posture requires the striking of a balance between offensive and defensive elements. There is a painful irony of several dimensions in this American intellectual failing.

First, among the more pertinent asymmetries that separate the U.S. from the Soviet political systems, is the acute sensitivity of the former to the personal well-being of its human charges. It is little short of bizarre to discover that it is the Soviet Union, and not the United States, that has a serious civil defense program.67 Second, potentially the strongest element in the overall Western stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union is its industrial mobilization capacity. Reasonably good American BMD carries healthily terminal implications for Soviet opportunism or adventure. A BMD system that works well enables the United States to wage a long war and to mass produce the military means for eventual victory. So great is American mobilization potential, vis-à-vis the extant strategic posture, that U.S. defense policy, logically, should endorse a defensive emphasis. Such an emphasis is the guarantor of strategic forces in overwhelming numbers tomorrow.

Third, if U.S. strategic nuclear forces are to be politically relevant in future crises, the American homeland has to be physically defended. It is unreasonable to ask an American President to wage an acute crisis, or the early stages of a central war, while he is fearful of being responsible for the loss of more than 100 million Americans. If escalation discipline is to be imposed upon the Soviet Union, even in the direst of situations, potential damage to North America has to be limited. Damage-limitation has to involve both counterforce action and active and passive defenses. The claim that actually to protect (even very imperfectly) Americans and their industry would be destabilizing, is a doctrinal cliché whose shallowness merits uncompromising exposure. Since virtually all Western commentators recognize that the Soviet Union is not moved in its strategic policy by assured destruction criteria, and since no one can deny that an American President could not threaten, or implement, even highly intelligent strikes against the Soviet body politic if American society is totally open to Soviet retaliation, the stability concept is in need of fundamental redefinition. As long as American society is essentially unprotected by BMD, air defense, and civil defense, the United States

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67. To have a serious civil defense program does not mean that a country is preparing for war, any more than equipping a ship with lifeboats means that the shipping line is preparing to operate the ship in a dangerous manner.
will have to lose any process of competitive escalation against the Soviet force posture anticipated for the 1980s.

Fourth, even if the arms controllers' argument were correct, that a defensive emphasis would stimulate the Soviet Union into working harder so as to be able to overcome it through offensive force improvement,68 so what? Generically, the claim that this or that American initiative will catalyze Soviet reactions tends to be accorded far too respectful a hearing. Certainly it is sensible to consider adversary reactions and to take a full systemic look at possibilities, but a country as wealthy (and as responsible for international security) as the United States should not be deterred by the mere prospect of competition from undertaking necessary programs. (For example, an MX ICBM, deployed in a multiple protective structure [MPS] mode, will certainly have some noteworthy impact upon Soviet arms competitive activity, but such recognition does not constitute proof of the folly of deploying MX/MPS).69 Crude though it may sound, the United States would probably achieve more in the field of arms control if it decided to achieve and sustain a politically useful measure of strategic superiority,70 than if it continues its endorsement of the elusive quality known as essential equivalence.

Superiority for Stability

If it is true, or at least probable, that a central war could be won or lost, then it has to follow that the concept of strategic superiority should be revived in

68. An argument central to the case against urban-area ABM defense was that its banning by treaty would break the action-reaction cycle of the arms race: the Soviet Union would not need to develop and deploy offensive forces to overcome such an American deployment (in order to preserve their assured destruction capability). It is a matter of history that the ABM treaty banned the ABM defense of U.S. cities, but Soviet offensive force improvements have marched steadily onward. The action-reaction thesis was logical and reasonable; it just happened to be wrong (it neglected the local color, the domestic engines of the arms competition).
69. If U.S. MX/MPS should induce the Soviet Union to proceed down a similar path, then stability (by anyone's definition) would be promoted. Rubles spent on MPSs are rubles not spent on missiles and warheads. It is true that an MPS system in place might attract the Soviet Union to producing large numbers of missiles, undetected, to be surge-deployed in a period of acute need. However, the Soviet Government can produce ICBMs secretly now—in the absence of an MPS system they could be fired from pre-surveyed "soft" sites. The verification argument against MX/MPS is not a telling one, but—as a hedge—deployment of a fairly thin (preferentially assigned) ballistic missile defense system around the MPS could purchase an extraordinary degree of leverage vis-à-vis any secretly (or suddenly) deployed Soviet missiles. See Colin S. Gray, The MX ICBM: Multiple Protective Structure (MPS) Basing and Arms Control, H1-2977-P (Croton-on-Hudson, New York: Hudson Institute, February, 1979).
popularity in the West. Superiority has a variety of possible meanings, ranging from the ability to dissuade a putative adversary from offering resistance (i.e., deterring a crisis), through the imposition of severe escalation discipline on opponents, to a context wherein one could prosecute actual armed conflict to a successful conclusion. There is certainly no consensus within the United States defense community today over the issue of whether or not any central war outcome is possible which would warrant description as victory. However, a consensus is emerging to the effect that the Soviet Union appears to believe in the possibility of victory, and that the time is long-overdue for a basic overhaul of our intellectual capital in the nuclear deterrence field. 71 At the very least, most defense analysts would endorse the proposition that it is important for the United States to be able to deny the Soviet Union victory on its own terms.

There is a need for Western strategic thinkers to address and overcome the emerging tension between the (probable) requirements of high-quality deterrence, and the still-authoritative and inhibiting ideas of crisis and arms race instability which have directed the U.S. defense community away from programs that speak to Soviet reality. A false choice has misinformed the structure of our thinking. The historical record of the arms competition since the mid-1960s shows that the choice has not been between, on the one hand, a measure of U.S. restraint which would facilitate Soviet acquisition of an assured destruction capability—an achievement that would promote the prospects of arms control negotiations intended to codify a more stable strategic environment—and, on the other hand, an absence of American restraint which would serve to stimulate Soviet countervailing programs and which would be doomed to failure anyway. Instead, the choice has been between a measure of American restraint which facilitated the Soviet drive to achieve a not implausible war-winning capability, and a relative absence of restraint which would greatly complicate the life of Soviet defense planners. Overall, the evidence suggests that the Soviet Union has not been

71. Noteworthy endeavors since the mid-1970s include: Robert Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2 (January, 1979), pp. 289-324; Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, California: SAGE, 1977); and Richard Rosecrance, *Strategic Deterrence Reconsidered*, *Adelphi Paper No. 116* (London: IISS, Spring 1975). Even well-considered judgments published as recently as 1975 can look a little fragile in 1979. Consider these words of Professor Rosecrance: “Thus it is possible to say that although the deterrent requirements that were deemed necessary to protect Europe in the 1950s are probably not currently being met, they may not have to be met. An improvement in the Soviet-Western relationship makes them less necessary now than they were then.” *Ibid.*., p. 36.
seeking a deterrent, as that concept and capability has been (mis?)understood in the West for nearly twenty years. The choice the United States confronts today is whether or not it will tolerate Soviet acquisition, unmatched, of an emerging war-fighting capability which might, with some good judgment and some luck, produce success in crisis diplomacy and in war.

The instability arguments that are leveled against those who urge an American response (functionally) in kind are somewhat fragile. For example, there is good reason to believe that the Soviet Union would be profoundly discouraged by the prospect of having to wage an arms competition against an American opponent no longer severely inhibited by its long-familiar stability theory. In addition, an American war-fighting-oriented strategic posture, if well-designed, should not contribute to crisis instability. The fact that the United States might pose a theoretical first-strike threat to much of the Soviet strategic posture, should not give aid and comfort to the “use them or lose them” argument. A central purpose informing U.S. strategic posture would be its denial of any plausible Soviet theory of victory. Why the Soviet Union would be interested in starting a war that it would stand little, if any, prospect of winning is, to say the least, obscure.

The contemporary debate over strategic doctrine, whatever its eventual effect may be upon U.S. war planning and declaratory policy, has registered a qualitative advance over most of the strategic thinking of the past fifteen years. The debate has focused upon what might be needed to deter Soviet leaders, qua Soviet leaders, and some (still unduly limited) attempt has been made to consider operational, as opposed to pre-war declaratory, strategy. Theories of pre-war deterrence, however sophisticated, cannot guarantee that the United States will never slip into an acute crisis wherein a president has to initiate strategic nuclear employment or, de facto, surrender. In such a situation, a president would need realistic war plans that carried a vision of the war as a whole and embodied a theory of how military action should produce desired political ends. In short, he would be in need of strategy. Fortunately, still orthodox wisdom notwithstanding, there is no necessary tension between a realistic wartime strategy (and the posture to match) and the pre-war deterrence of undesired Soviet behavior.