

DILEMMAS IN MILITARY STRATEGY

Can the Pursuit of Military Advantage Lessen Our Security?

Donald S. Bussey

The classic conflict in society is between liberty on one hand and order on the other. The conflict has been made more acute by the challenges we face in the contemporary world, whether the challenge be that of automation, the explosion of the new nations, or the problems associated with national defense in the nuclear age.

I wish to discuss some of the dilemmas that we face in military strategy, where—just as in the classic conflict between order and freedom—we are forced to choose between conflicting and sometimes incompatible objectives. The problem in both cases is to achieve the proper balance between desirable ends. It is my hope that by examining some of these hard choices, it will be possible to provide some insight into the considerations that enter into the development of national security policy. While they are presented in black and white terms, in actuality what is involved are varying shades of gray.

In the field of international communication, we have, for example, a dilemma that is related to, but separate from, the problem of keeping your audience straight. This is usually referred to as the distinction between declaratory and action policy. A nation may wish in its policy, in its strategy, and in its planning, to provide for a given response in a particular set of circumstances. This is its action policy. But in its declaratory policy, it may be desirable to implant a very different notion of what is intended under the stipulated conditions. The difficulty here is twofold. First, it is very difficult, particularly in an open society, to maintain such a separation, not only because the real state of affairs is likely to become known, but also because actions often speak louder than words. The other difficulty relates to the problem of audience separation. What you may find desirable to declare to an enemy or prospective enemy may be misunderstood by other nations; and attempts to clarify the position can only serve to

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weaken the desired effect of the declaratory policy.

Another aspect of the communications dilemma is the general problem of interpreting correctly the motivations of another's actions. People act in terms of what they believe, and what they believe may not be based on actual facts. This suggests that international communication must strive for clarity, in order to avoid possible misinterpretation. And yet in certain situations, an element of ambiguity or outright deception may be necessary. But here again the difficulty is that one's friends may also be deceived.

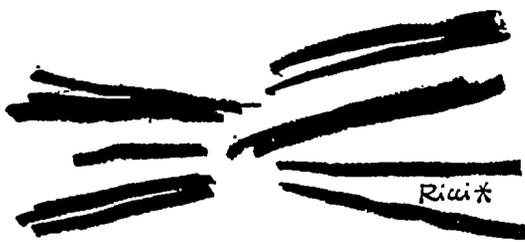
One of the long-standing objectives of U.S. policy in the field of arms control has been to create a more stable military environment. To this end, we have undertaken those diplomatic and military steps which seemed best calculated to stabilize the international situation. And negatively, we have sought to avoid taking steps which might tend to destabilize the military situation. It has seemed especially important to avert situations which might bring on a war through accident or miscalculation.

We are all familiar with actions that have been taken in support of this objective. First, there was the partial nuclear test-ban treaty. Among the reasons for engaging in this treaty was the hope of averting the further proliferation of national nuclear arsenals, because of its probable destabilizing effect. The so-called "hot line" between Washington and Moscow was instituted as a means of providing rapid communication when time might be of the essence in preventing possible miscalculation or misinterpretation of some particular action. Acceptance of the U.N. General Assembly Resolution to forego the placing of nuclear weapons in space indicates a common interest in avoiding steps likely to prove destabilizing. Finally, the announcement on a reciprocal unilateral basis of planned cutbacks in the production of plutonium by the United States and the USSR is another example of our mutual interest in bringing the so-called arms race under control in order to promote greater stability in the international environment.

Few would quarrel with the desirability of promoting such stability. Yet even here we face a dilemma. Let us assume, for example, that we were

to arrive at a situation where we had absolute stability at the strategic level. In other words, there was no possibility that any nation would under any circumstances initiate strategic nuclear attacks against targets located in the homeland of another. Presumably, this situation could prevail if every nation became convinced that to initiate such a war would mean its own destruction as well, and if every nation was equally convinced that all other nations felt the same way and would act accordingly.

Possibly the best way to conceive of such absolute stability is to imagine a situation in which there was either no advantage or perhaps even a disadvantage in making the first strike in a strategic nuclear exchange. If there were no premium on the first strike, neither side would rationally initiate such a war, and you would have absolute stability at the strategic level. The premium on a first strike is directly proportional to the vulnerability of a nation's strategic delivery system. Conversely, stability is promoted by invulnerability. So to the extent that stability at the strategic level is a desired objective, every nation would seek a situation in which all nations had invulnerable delivery systems.



But immediately we run into a dilemma. To the extent that you achieve stability at the strategic level, you may produce instability at the non-strategic level. As one analyst has observed, if you have absolute stability at the strategic level, you may increase the likelihood of lesser wars; theoretically, no limited war would escalate to general war, and thus the possibility of general war would no longer operate as a deterrent to the initiation or expansion of a limited war. And here we have the cruelest dilemma of all. For while it is imperative that everything possible be done to rule out the likelihood of general war, whether as a deliberate choice or through accident or miscalculation, to rule out the possibility of general war would be to sacrifice the significant role of the strategic deterrent with respect to war generally.

Reference has been made to certain specific arms control measures such as the partial test-ban treaty, the "hot line," the undertaking not to place nuclear weapons in space, and the cutback in plutonium production. But beyond these more formalized arms

control measures, there is another whole category of measures which, in their effect, amount to arms control. Included in this category are the military measures we adopt because they are judged to reduce the likelihood of conflict, and above all, the measures we decline to adopt because any perceived military advantage is judged to be outweighed by the over-all detriment to our security, for whatever reason. We have not, for example, built anything like the military force we could support, if we felt it necessary. We have not done so because we have recognized that our over-all security is dependent upon many considerations which reach beyond mere military might.

This kind of generalized restraint is an important element of arms control. But more important for my purposes today are the arms control considerations which enter into the adoption or rejection of a particular strategy or weapons system. For it is here that we can identify a number of significant dilemmas, particularly at the strategic level of conflict. Let me single out just a few.

First, a historical example may help to illuminate the kind of problems involved. The first generation of intercontinental and intermediate range ballistic missiles which the United States developed and deployed were what are characterized as "soft" missiles, meaning simply that they were very vulnerable. By contrast today, our missiles are relatively invulnerable. They cannot be easily targeted for attack, either because they are mobile or are concealed, or they would be difficult to destroy because they have been hardened by being positioned in concrete emplacements.

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What was the dilemma with respect to "soft" missiles? On the one hand, long-range missiles were judged to be necessary, and yet initially only "soft" missiles were available. On the other hand, the deployment of "soft" missiles might prove to be destabilizing because they might be misinterpreted as portending a first strike. Quite apart from the considerations which would argue in favor of actually firing these weapons first in a period of international tension, the really significant impact of "soft" missiles is that in time of crisis, it might be believed that you were about to strike first, and thus invite preemptive attack. And this is precisely why in succeeding generations of missiles the emphasis has been on invulnerability, whether through hardening, concealment, or mobility.

In the strategic category, there are a number of similar dilemmas. Imagine if you will, for example,

a situation of relative strategic parity between two powers, in which both sides are powerfully dissuaded from initiating a general war or taking actions judged likely to lead to general war, and each judges that the other is in the same position. Now into this situation, introduce certain new factors. Suppose one side suddenly embarks on a massive civil defense program. The purpose of the program might be no more than insurance against the failure of deterrence, with the government only exercising its bounden duty to aid in the protection of the citizenry against a common hazard. Unfortunately, such a massive civil defense program might be misinterpreted by another as the precursor of an aggressive move, and thus tend to introduce an element of instability in the military environment. This does not necessarily argue against such a civil defense program, but it does suggest that any such program should be handled in a way which lessens the likelihood of possible misinterpretation. In designing a civil defense program, consideration must also be given to the possible psychological consequences, both at home and abroad. Moreover, civil defense may be very costly; and as with all programs, its contribution to over-all security must be measured against alternative expenditures, a subject we will consider generally when we examine the dilemmas associated with resource allocation.

Or take the case of active defense. It has been widely observed that the development of a perfect or near perfect defense against aircraft and missiles would be profoundly destabilizing. Imagine what effect the prospective development of a near 100 per cent effective defense would have on the strategic equation. In the situation of relative strategic parity that we are examining, one side might be forced to conclude that it was better to accept the risks of war in the near term, rather than await the greater risks involved in conceding the absolute strategic advantage which would follow if a prospective enemy were to achieve a virtually complete defense against retaliation. Imagine further, if you will, that a nation were to achieve a true defensive breakthrough of this kind and felt there was little prospect of keeping the development secret. Would that nation be prepared to accept the risks of exploiting the breakthrough? Or might it judge such a course to be unacceptably risky because of its destabilizing effect on the strategic environment?

The choice is not likely to be presented in any such terms, but the dilemma remains. The unrelenting pursuit of military advantage may lessen rather than enhance security. The fact that there may be such a dilemma with respect to active defense does

not argue against the most vigorous possible research and development program with respect to defense against aircraft and missile-delivered weapons. On the contrary, it is only by keeping ahead in this field that one can avert the reverse form of this dilemma; for what if a prospective enemy were to achieve such a defensive capability before our own? The only way to preserve stability is to avert such a one-sided breakthrough.

As a final illustration of the kind of dilemmas that may be involved in preserving stability at the strategic level, I would simply cite a recent issue of the Soviet publication, *International Affairs*. After discussing the so-called "no cities" doctrine in which strategic fires would be delivered only against military targets, sparing the cities, the article pointed out that "if these rules are to be followed, the United States and its European allies should start to remove all their military installations from cities. However, . . . if such a move were carried out [and here the article quotes from the Western press] ' . . . the USSR would draw the conclusion that the United States was preparing to attack.' " Without developing this theme in detail (and there are many factors left out of account), the Soviet article does at least put its finger on the kind of dilemma we have been discussing. The fact that analysts in the USSR are cognizant of and interested in matters of this kind is in itself significant.

There is, of course, a more general dilemma here which I will only suggest and not develop, and that is the problem of being strong without being aggressive, of being prepared without being provocative, of being alert while striving to ameliorate tensions. Suffice it to say that as with all of the dilemmas we have been examining, it is necessary to strike a proper balance between what may be conflicting objectives. It is not beyond the wit of man to strike this happy medium, and the first step in the process is to define the problem.

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Let us turn now to another category of dilemmas—those that arise out of the conflicting requirements on the one hand and defense on the other. Deterrence means to hinder or prevent from action by fear of the consequences. More specifically, deterrence seeks to limit an adversary's freedom to choose among hostile moves which he has the capability of making but from which he is deterred by threat of counteraction.

Now, much could be said about the requirements of deterrence. For one thing, the threatened counteraction must be credible. It is imperative, for exam-

ple, that the adversary believe that the threat will actually be carried out in the defined circumstances; otherwise, he is unlikely to be deterred. To draw a parallel from the field of penology, a criminal is unlikely to be deterred by threatened punishment if he thinks that he won't be caught, or that even if he is caught, he can "beat the rap"—that is, the threat won't be carried out. Similarly, a nation is unlikely to be deterred from a given course of action by fear of another's threat of counteraction if it is incredible that the threat would actually be carried out. An incredible response cannot be made credible simply by reiteration. The response must bear some relationship to the magnitude of the transgression and the issue at stake. And this is the dilemma we face.

For the foreseeable future, the United States must continue to carry the principal burden of providing for the security of the free world. Presumably, our basic objective will be to deter aggression of all types. To deter means to threaten to use force, including, if necessary, nuclear force. And yet, if the deterrent fails, and the threat is carried out, the consequences may be such as to render meaningless the very concept of security. The medicine may be worse than the disease. This is the dilemma.

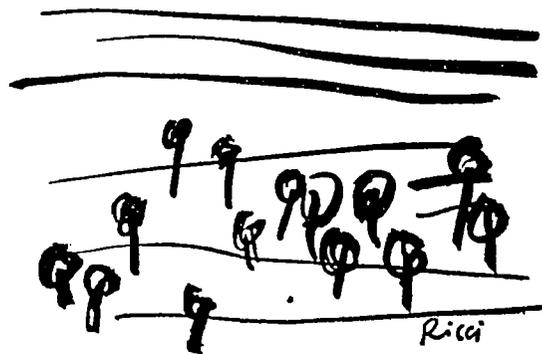
Let me move now to a consideration of another dilemma in military strategy—one to which I have already alluded—and that is the relationship or interface between general and limited war. For any war to remain limited, a number of preconditions must be satisfied. This is not the occasion to analyze these preconditions in detail; but for our purposes today, one of these preconditions is essential. Namely, both sides must be deterred from either deliberate recourse to general war or actions likely to lead to general war. This condition is commonly referred to as one of mutual deterrence.

Yet as was noted earlier, an absolute stalemate at the level of general war may be interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as justifying highly provocative actions under the umbrella of mutual deterrence. Such actions might include major aggression or the expansion of limited hostilities to major proportions, both of which tend to be deterred in some measure for fear that general war will ensue either by design or by accident.

Yet, as has frequently been noted, we have here the theoretical dilemma that the very fact of preparedness to conduct war on a limited scale may suggest to an enemy or potential enemy that he can, with immunity from general war, contemplate operations of a higher intensity, than would otherwise be the case. In other words, the deterrent effect

that the possibility of general war has on war generally may be somewhat weakened by the mere fact that preparedness for limited war opens up other options.

For a great many reasons, it is imperative that those options be available, and that there be alternatives between an all or nothing response. If the all-out response were credible or automatic, no matter what the level of aggression, it would constitute a powerful deterrent to all aggression. It is the fact that such a response is not universally credible and that an automatic response in the form of a doomsday machine is irrational that leaves us no other course than the building of intermediate options. The fact that we have these options may, however, tend to narrow the range of conflict within which the massive deterrent is operative. There is no avoiding this theoretical dilemma, and we must take account of it in our planning. But equally, we must have—for a whole host of reasons—alternatives to general war for dealing with limited conflict situations. As with the other dilemmas we have examined, the problem again is arriving at a prudent balance, taking into account all relevant factors.



As pointed out throughout this discussion, dilemmas in military strategy do not present themselves in black and white terms. It is a matter of balance, and of making choices between conflicting requirements or desirable objectives.

We come now to the final category of dilemmas which I would like to consider—those that are wrapped up in the classic means-ends dilemma. Here again, the subject is much too big to do more than scratch the surface. Consider first the matter of the end—the objective. Presumably, the objective in war, and therefore the purpose of military strategy, is to win, in some sense. What does it mean to win? What is the meaning of victory? Are there dilemmas in the very concept of winning?

It has frequently been noted, for example, that if the fortunes of either side in the cold war were to shift sharply and unfavorably, the prospects of

hot war, with all of its fateful consequences, might correspondingly increase. Or consider hot war, specifically limited war. How do you keep a successful limited war, limited; or for that matter, how do you keep an unsuccessful limited war, limited? The appetite tends to grow with success, sights are raised, more ambitious objectives may seem within reach. Popular governments are particularly prone to this tendency. We are faced, therefore, with the dilemma of winning too big, of overreaching in establishing our objectives, where to win all may be to lose all.

There are, moreover, dilemmas in relating the means we use to the ends we seek. As a nation, our policy is directed toward encouraging the development of a world community of independent nations, characterized by free institutions, with governments responsive to popular aspirations. In pursuit of this objective, however, we may find it necessary to work with governments that have very different goals; indeed, their goals may be antithetical to our own. Yet there is normally no alternative but to deal with other governments as they are, not as you might like them to be. The name of the game then becomes diplomacy, with the object of fostering such changes as may be necessary to bring another country's objectives into harmony with our own, or, at the very least, not incompatible with ours.

The means-ends dilemma may be even more immediate. The means we use to defend freedom may, in certain situations, leave us no alternative but to

restrict certain freedoms. Or still another dilemma: while we wish to foster the independence of nations, any action we take to strengthen the capacity of free nations to solve their internal and external problems involves some degree of intervention in their internal affairs. Indeed, it can be argued that even inaction on our part may amount to such intervention. Or how do you counter guerrilla methods, characterized as they are by terror and torture, without adopting these same methods? And finally, one of the most basic dilemmas of all: whereas the people, in a democracy, have the most to defend, they are at the same time, because of the very freedoms they enjoy, less well prepared in certain respects to join the battle in the defense of those freedoms.

These are only a few of an imposing catalog of operational and strategic dilemmas and any one of them would merit extended discussion. The issues involved do not represent dilemmas in the sense that all of the options available are unacceptable. Rather, some of these issues in military strategy present dilemmas only in the sense that the choices are not easy ones to make.

Ultimately, the preservation and extension of human freedom is dependent upon the entire range of public policy and private practice. Military force, subject to proper and necessary control, constitutes the essential—though not sufficient—precondition for defending freedom from external attack. Military strategy must be tailored to this end.

"The problems posed by the threat of nuclear war are no different for the Catholic Church than they are for other Churches or for any religious community that attempts to cope with them. In its initial debate on nuclear weapons, the Vatican Council revealed sharp differences of attitude and opinion that have their parallel in communities around the world. But that debate revealed in a special public way not only the responsibility and burden religious groups must bear but the temptations and dangers to which they can so easily succumb. As the essays in this volume make clear, not every informed critic views these dangers in the same way."

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