

UNLIMITED WAR: A Non-Nuclear Strategy

Tactical atomics are impractical, says Marine Maj Sparks. Not only practical but indispensable, says AF Gen F. H. Smith on Page 32. Who's right? Read on—and draw your own conclusions.

By Maj Michael Spark

☛ TO BE ARMED WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS ALONE IS TO be defenseless. In the words of former President Eisenhower, "In a nuclear war there can be no victors, only losers . . . general nuclear war will bring catastrophe to both sides." Simply stated, planning based primarily on the use of atomics invites national disaster. Many Americans find this fact difficult to accept.

Following WWII, atomic superiority replaced geographic distance as the cornerstone of our strategy. Now that superiority is gone. Further reliance on it can be the gravestone of our nation. When we had a decisive advantage, nuclear deterrence was the easy way out for soldier and civilian alike. The theory of the "big bang" or "no bang" permitted a now intolerable evasion of our strategic responsibilities.

What is our situation today? If attacked with atomics we must reply in kind. But what is our answer to non-atomic attack?

Our strategy will lose touch with reality if it doesn't adjust to the fact that weapons held equally by both sides can be decisive for neither. Our lost atomic advantage was formerly so comforting to us that we seem unable to comprehend the strategic import of its passing. We continue to run hither and yon, from one super nuclear weapon to the next, looking for a philosopher's stone that will turn the brass of mutual deterrence back into the gold of a one-way capability.

At the same time we fail to see the advantages we still possess. The West is supreme at sea and is still stronger than the Soviet bloc economically. These tools of power

are the key to regaining our strategic initiative. Why do we neglect them?

To understand, we must examine the history of massive retaliation. After WWII, the really great surviving powers were the United States and Russia. Both had powerful armies; possibly Russia's was larger. We had unchallenged air and naval superiority. A still strong Great Britain was our close ally. Lastly, we had the first atom bombs and, in the B-29 bomber, we had a means to deliver them. In armed strength we were greatest.

Expediency and moral weakness robbed us of this position. Public clamor for demobilization inspired the break-up of our army. For purely political considerations, a strategy which did not require major national effort had to be developed. In attack against Soviet cities with atomic bombs, a strategy of minimum sacrifice was found. Massive retaliation was born.

As a strategy it stood on two legs—one fact, the other theory. The fact was that because of our rapid demobilization the Red Army quickly became supreme. The theory was that we would continue to enjoy a permanent advantage delivering nuclear weapons.

For a time, the strategy worked. Western Europe remained free. So long as the Soviets lacked the ability to strike back in force, we were safe from major war.

Events, however, found us unprepared for "small wars" and subversion. Greece, Malaya, and Indo-China experienced Communist-supported conflict. We could not use our atomic strength to control this new type of aggression.

Then came the shock of Korea. We had nuclear weapons but were unprepared otherwise. In 1950, five years after the first atom bomb, we fought a war without it. At that very time, the Soviets were rushing their own nuclear development. With the growth of their stockpiles, the theoretical foundation of massive retaliation—the illusion of our permanent atomic superiority—began to crumble.

As these events unfolded, the theory of limited war developed. First brought to broad public notice in separate books by Henry Kissinger and Robert Osgood, the new theory rationalized massive retaliation with the facts of the middle 1950's. Both authors observed that the Russian capability to strike us was continuing to grow. As it did grow, a state of mutual deterrence set in. Osgood held that, in light of this fact, the probability of small-scale conflicts increased and that of a major war correspondingly receded.

Now the situation has again changed. Both sides today probably have an atomic overkill capability. ICBM's lend speed and certainty to nuclear attack. To answer any ground thrust with strategic bombing has become a tactic of utter desperation. No non-atomic provocation is worth our own nuclear destruction. Mutual deterrence has buried massive retaliation.

Certainly we still need long-range atomic weapons. They function as armor on a battleship. As defensive

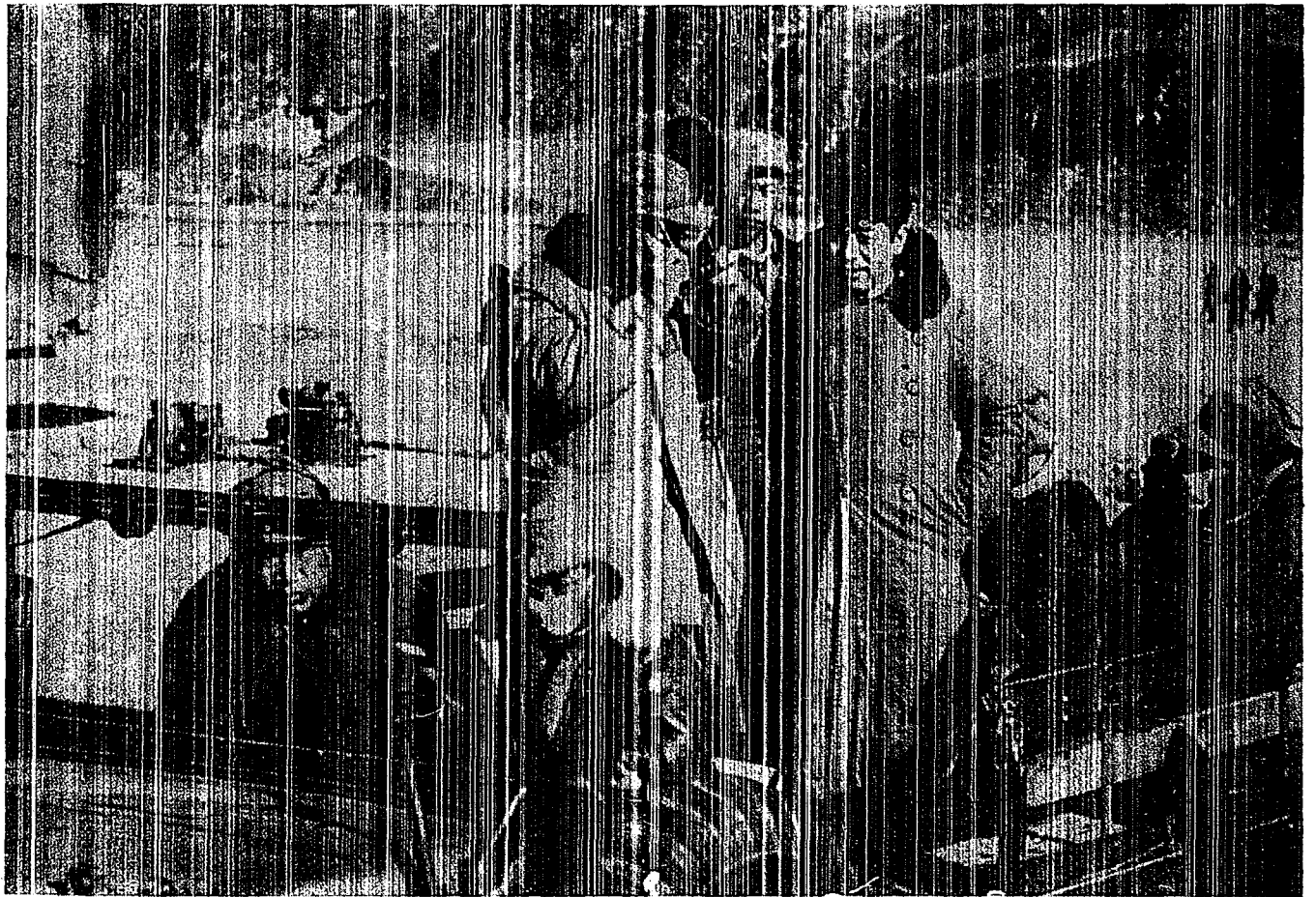
weapons, deterring a Soviet try for nuclear knockout, they are an essential part of balanced forces. *Unused*, they permit us to develop our other capabilities. Once used, they have failed.

Recent technical developments have robbed even surprise attack of strategic value. ICBM's can now be detected in flight and the alarm given. Little warning time is needed to launch an atom-tipped missile reply. Should warning fail, the mobility, concealment, and hardening of the other side's striking forces make effective retaliation a certainty. There is no gain in surviving your opponent by 20 minutes.

Defense against nuclear missile attack appears infeasible. Atomics are not the "ultimate weapon," but they are a "finite" weapon. That is to say, it takes just so many megatons to destroy a nation. The potential atomic yield packaged in missile warheads increases every day. As it does, the attacker's delivery and accuracy requirements drop while the defender's problems multiply. However good mechanically, no missile defense system conceivable today can really succeed. To stop ten missiles, perhaps; to stop ten thousand, never.

If strategic atomics cannot continue to redress a military imbalance, what about the tactical use of atomic weapons? There is some reason, at least, to hope that tactical atomics would not trigger a world wide exchange. Unfortunately, here again parity confounds us.

The first user would certainly gain some tactical ad-



Wide World

Communist Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai (hands in pockets) and top military commanders in the field. They don't "appear to fear an atomic war and in some circumstances might welcome one."



Maj Sparks got his commission in the Marine Corps and a BA in history at Dartmouth through the V-12 program. Among other things in his 17 years as a Marine, he has been seagoing, was wounded three days before Christmas in 1951 while he was a platoon leader with the 5th Marines and he was graduated from the Naval War College in 1958. He is now ExO, Marine Corps Institute, having gone there from his previous job as S-3 of the 9th Marines. He says, "I felt this article was something I wanted to say."

vantages. Surprise and some local success would be his. He would also, however, receive a quick counter blow and the hatred of much of mankind. For us, there are other factors to consider:

- The West, with smaller forces, can least afford the accelerated casualties of the atomic battlefield.
- In Eurasia we depend on easily-bombed ports and bases.
- Since the West will fight only if attacked, the atomic battlefield would be on friendly soil.

On balance, we are the losers if atomics are used tactically. If we are hit first, so be it. Then we should reply. To initiate their employment, however, would be serious error. Like their ICBM big brothers, tactical atomics pay off only when the enemy cannot answer in kind. They cannot cure a weakness in non-atomic strength.

Our big problem today is how to win a war without using nuclear weapons. We have two powerful potential adversaries, Russia and China. Of the two, China is currently the more aggressive. First, then, consider her.

Nukes a Bad Gamble

A waking colossus, China shakes all Asia. She does not appear to fear an atomic war and in some circumstances might welcome one. Her huge population provides the basis for a large army. Industrializing rapidly, China still remains on the brink of famine. A marginal food supply and an overburdened transport system are her great weaknesses.

Against China, resistance at the point of attack may not suffice. Wherever possible, a vigorous ground defense is of course necessary, but in some areas we are severely limited. We could not have given Tibet substantial support. To reach Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan, neutral India must be crossed. Burma, Laos, and India herself are threatened deep inland along their northern borders. Only in Viet Nam and Korea would the front be near the sea. China can strike where we cannot field large armies.

Deployment and resupply of air units would also be difficult. More significant, an air effort restricted to the area invaded cannot succeed. Under optimum conditions in Korea, aircraft were unable to isolate the battle-

field. Even permitted targets in China herself, it is doubtful that non-nuclear strikes could stop the movement of a Chinese army.

Unfortunately, atomic attack against China seems the worst kind of gamble. While it is doubtful that China has atomics today, Russia could not and would not deny her the means to reply. Such an exchange with China would mean that:

- (1) Our few Far Eastern bases would be destroyed.
- (2) We would suffer heavy personnel and material losses from Chinese attacks.
- (3) The nations we were trying to defend would suffer terrible destruction.
- (4) We would face unprecedented world hostility and the possible collapse of our system of alliances.
- (5) An undamaged Soviet Union would watch from the side-lines and would reap immeasurable military and diplomatic advantages.

Another more realistic way to counter Chinese aggression appears open to us. We could make China's weaknesses our target, striking with our sea and air power at her critical food and transport. Intensive mining, general blockade, and non-atomic strikes against her irrigation and flood control projects can shake the very foundations of the Chinese regime's existence. An inexorable campaign of economic attrition will gradually paralyze her.

Attack the Food Supply

Mines, air strikes, and naval units can destroy China's fishing fleets. Lacking meat, China depends on the sea for much of her protein needs. At the same time this food source is eliminated, conventional attacks against dams and canals can disrupt the water supply of her rice fields. China does not have the surpluses to long tolerate a two-pronged attack on her food supply.

Food aside, China's ability to move goods of any kind can be greatly hampered. Her considerable waterborne coastal trade is completely vulnerable.

Even more important is China's river commerce. Without her rivers China is a nation with a broken back. Her primitive transport system depends on them. We cannot hope to close them all, but means exist to greatly restrict their use. Attack aircraft and air-laid mines can be employed as far inland as water flows. With these weapons we can give unheard of depth to a blockade.

Tremendously successful in the last great war, the influence mine is today's forgotten weapon. Magnetic, acoustic, and pressure varieties can all be laid by air. Relatively cheap, they can be built to fit the size of their target. Even Germany found them virtually impossible to sweep.

Against these tactics China cannot mount a similar response. With them we can shift the battlefield to China herself. Once this is done, we can take from her any possible profit from aggression.

Probably less likely now than a Chinese attack, but far more dangerous, would be aggression by the Soviet Union. Miscalculation or design may yet start her marching. Russia can strike directly at either Europe or the Middle East.

The greatest prize of all would be Western Europe.

Loss of Europe would be disastrous for us. Without our NATO allies we would become an island in a hostile sea. Europe is the key to Communist world domination.

Consider the Soviet position should she decide to destroy the NATO powers. If our atomic forces are ready she is unlikely to seal her own fate by trying nuclear blows. Once completely confident of her own atomic capabilities, however, she will feel free to attack with any other means at any target.

Our old policies will only encourage such a Russian move. Defenseless against missile attack, the European powers know their fate is sure in a nuclear exchange. As long as massive retaliation is our strategy, these thickly-populated, highly-industrialized nations must avoid war at any price. The weakness of their ground forces today testifies to a feeling of futility. The nations that raised 300 divisions in WWII can't field 30 now.

Europe's capacity for her own defense will never be realized until our strategy offers her a practical chance to survive a war. The illusion that Europe cannot be defended has been fostered in large part as an excuse to justify the lack of effort to do so.

The Western powers, including the US, outnumber Russia two to one in population, Soviet manpower is half tied up in agriculture and is badly needed for industrial expansion. Neither China nor the European satellites can greatly assist a drive to the West. Soviet forces themselves would have long and vulnerable supply lines which would have to be guarded against both air and guerrilla attack.

The NATO powers, defending their own soil, would not need equality in numbers. Fifty-odd good divisions probably would be sufficient. If the US and her European allies can't hold NATO's borders we have no right to survive.

Move Over the Sea

Second to Europe in importance is the Middle East. Petroleum and access to Africa combine to make it an attractive target. Against Russian attack its defense is a vexing problem. Excepting Turkey, no strong ally presents itself to us here. Unstable and ambitious "new states" may well provide excuses for Soviet intervention.

Tactical atomics in the Mid-East would be disastrous for us. Suez, the few airfields, and the great Western oil properties would quickly disappear in any atomic exchange. Our advantage in this area lies in our ability to move over the sea and quickly concentrate amphibious forces. Soviet troops, on the other hand, would need to be nourished over the Caucasus and the wastes of northern Mesopotamia.

In both Europe and the Mid-East, defense against the Soviets can be a practical proposition. Aside from

the casualties a successful defense would inflict, we have in economic war another means to injure them. Russia is certainly less vulnerable to this tactic than is China, but we should not under-rate our capacity to do her harm. In far more primitive times, Napoleonic France, then ruler of Europe, was seriously weakened by British blockade.

The Soviets have a growing foreign trade. Excepting that with the Red bloc, we could eliminate it. Tin, rubber, sugar, and many other products could be denied her. Her dependence on the water is often overlooked. She has a vast, new, deep sea fishing fleet. This we could sink or bottle up. The polar sea route can be closed by sinking a few ice breakers. The Baltic, Black and Caspian seas can all be mined, as can the Volga and Don rivers. Serious interruptions in the supply of oil and other products would result.

No Easy Way

Unlike China, Russia could strike back with her submarine fleet. The advantage, however, would be ours. Without seizure of Denmark and the Dardanelles, most Russian submarines would be trapped in the Baltic and Black seas. Neither her Arctic nor Pacific facilities are sufficient to sustain a great naval effort. We, on the other hand, have the ships, geography, and surplus capacities with which to outlast Russia in an economic campaign. Once stopped on the ground and increasingly injured by a vigorous blockade, the Soviets would have to settle.

Our strategic situation today demands balanced forces. These divide into five principal categories:

- (1) Modern nuclear striking forces—air, missile, or submarine—to prevent atomic attack.
- (2) Tactical air forces for ground support, interdiction, and air transport.
- (3) Naval forces capable of both enforcing a close blockade and protecting our own commerce.
- (4) Strong ground forces for the defense of Western Europe.
- (5) Amphibious forces for use in other areas, since we cannot garrison the world.

Each of the forces listed is vital if we intend to maintain our world position. Unlike strategic atomics, no single means of projecting power can now be a panacea. There are *no* panaceas in these days of nuclear parity. God has not so favored the United States that any one capability or weapon is sufficient to insure our continued existence.

The basic strategy we propose is one of unlimited war, using our great maritime and economic advantages to the full. Atomic war is in truth limited war, limited to one weapon and one result—mutual destruction.

US & MC



Accelerating the Positive

☛ THE ONLY GRIPE OUR WWII Seabee Bn had about training with the Marines was the short interval between the end of a long training day and the departure of the first liberty bus. A complaint to our CO was passed along to the NCO in charge of our training. With typical Marine aplomb he solved the problem. We were *double-timed from the field to the barracks—a mile and a half away—arriving* in plenty of time to prepare to catch the bus but too tired to care.

\$15.00 to F. J. Hynes