

TWO THE KOREAN WATERSHED

[The] cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake.
—NSC-68, April 1950¹

These two nations [U.S. and U.S.S.R.] are now, to all intents and purposes, engaged in war – except for armed conflict.

—Joint Strategic Survey Committee, June 1950²

American strategists viewed the Pacific apprehensively as 1950 began. Nuclear weapons had proven to be less useful than anticipated in shaping Soviet behavior in Europe, while the prospect of a united Sino-Soviet bloc in Asia-Pacific was ominous. The military services were squabbling over a shrinking military budget, while vying for the leading role in nuclear war. The U.S. had still not settled on a clear strategy to link its forward position in the Pacific with its military power, especially its nuclear weapons. Events in Korea soon forced the U.S. to decide its priorities. The services and their civilian commanders hammered out a new global strategic and military policy on the anvil of the Korean War. But even before the war, American strategists were skirmishing over U.S. military policy in the Pacific.

Drawing the Lines

As initially formulated by George Kennan, the State Department's leading strategic planner, containment was a sophisticated strategy

consisting of adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy.³ Kennan felt it was impossible to confront the Soviet Union and revolution everywhere, a stance reinforced by his view that U.S. relations with the Soviet Union should be based on *realpolitik*:

We should stop putting ourselves in the position of being our brothers' keeper and refrain from offering moral and ideological advice. We should cease to talk about vague – and for the Far East – unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.⁴

Kennan's doctrine clearly singled out the Soviet Union as the enemy, a view which was emerging even as Roosevelt embraced Stalin in the "grand strategy" to defeat the Nazis at the end of World War II. While Roosevelt was trying to involve the Soviets in a post-war great power scheme for the defeated Axis powers and the Third World,⁵ the U.S. Navy began contingency planning in 1943 for post-war confrontation with its ally. To keep the Army–Air Force in the dark, these plans were developed in utmost secrecy.⁶ While the Soviet Union loomed large as a candidate for "enemy", Navy strategists faced a double dilemma: the Soviets were an ally, and a landpower to boot.⁷ Suffering from acute career anxiety, the Navy was traumatized by its wartime battle against the Army for survival, and perplexed by the lack of a plausible enemy.⁸ In an attempt to construct an ideological base for naval resurgence, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal commissioned an official study in 1945 on "Dialectical Materialism and Russian Objectives." The study concluded:

Capitalist Democracies can expect no mercy if Communist philosophy prevails; it is equally clear that under these circumstances it is tantamount to suicide to strengthen the power of Communism or to weaken our powers to withstand it.⁹

After the war, Forrestal became the Secretary of Defense and led the anti-Soviet hardliners against the holdover appointees from the Roose-

vult era,¹⁰ his alarmism fuelling Truman's anti-Soviet instincts.¹² In July 1946, only eleven months after the end of the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had appraised the Soviet threat in the Far East, and concluded that the Soviets aimed to erect a perimeter of client states in the Far East, evict the U.S. bases, and threaten Alaska.¹³ The consensus for confrontation was building by the time Kennan focused on the Far East.

Viewing developments in Asia, especially the probable triumph of the Red Army in China, Kennan warned: "It is urgently necessary that we recognize our limitations as a moral and ideological force among the Asiatic peoples."¹⁴ Less ready to bend to the winds of revolution, the Joint Chiefs of Staff complained that: "Everywhere is weakness - weakness varying greatly in kind and degree from country to country; administrative and technical weakness; military weakness; economic weakness and, most seriously of all from our point of view, ideological weakness."¹⁵

From Realpolitik to Ideological Crusade

In the celebrated National Security Council Memorandum 68 (NSC 68) drafted by Kennan's successor Paul Nitze in April 1950, containment was transformed from *realpolitik* to an ideology of anticommunist militance. While Kennan saw containment as a process of selective engagement with the Soviet Union to avoid an overextension of U.S. resources, NSC 68 made an open-ended commitment against "Soviet aggression." Kennan saw in Third World nationalism openings for exploitation of differences between the Soviet Union and national liberation movements. NSC 68, by contrast, saw only a unified, global communist movement controlled by the Kremlin. Kennan preferred a U.S. foreign policy with no idealistic pretensions, whereas NSC 68 pro-

* Convinced that communists were in control of the White House and the Pentagon, that the American people had been duped by communists, and that he was their number-one target for liquidation, Forrestal jumped out of a sixteenth floor window in 1948, a few weeks after vacating the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Walking along a beach one afternoon shortly before his death, he pointed to a row of beach umbrella metal sockets in the sand and told his companion, "We had better not discuss anything here. Those things are wired, and everything we say is being recorded."¹¹

posed a policy which "must light the path to peace and order among nations in a system based on freedom and justice." "The only sure victory," claimed NSC 68, "lies in the frustration of the Kremlin design by the steady development of the moral and material strength of the free world and its projection into the Soviet world in such a way as to bring about an internal change in the Soviet system."¹⁶

Kennan and Nitze also differed over the place of military power as a means of effecting strategy. Whereas Kennan aimed to counter the Soviets primarily with diplomatic and economic influence aimed at the psychology of U.S. allies and the U.S.S.R. itself, the hardliners saw military force as the ultimate backstop of global power. Kennan advised Secretary of State Dean Acheson that the U.S. was at a crossroads in January 1950 with respect to nuclear weapons. "We may regard them as something vital to our conduct of a future war," wrote Kennan, "as something without which our war plans would be emasculated and ineffective - as something which we have resolved, in the face of all the moral and other factors concerned, to employ forthwith and unhesitatingly at the outset of any great military conflict." "Or we may regard them as something superfluous to our basic military posture," he continued, "as something which we are compelled to hold against the possibility that they might be used by our opponents. In this case, of course, we take care not to build up a reliance on them in our military planning."¹⁷ Kennan recommended the latter but Acheson ignored him. In contrast his successor, the author of NSC 68, Paul Nitze, saw the "powerful atomic blow" as integral to the U.S. capability "to conduct offensive operations to destroy vital elements of the Soviet war-making capacity, and to keep the enemy off balance until the full offensive strength of the United States and its allies can be brought to bear."¹⁸

The transformation of containment from selective engagement to a sweeping crusade was spurred by the "fall" of China in 1949. In his introduction to the controversial State Department "White Paper", Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that China went Communist mainly because the people had lost confidence in the corrupt regime of Chiang Kai-shek. The Democratic administration, he claimed, had followed an overly complicated China policy after World War II. While trying to mediate between Chiang's forces and Mao's Communists, the U.S. had tilted toward Chiang by helping him to regain territory previously under Japanese control, and providing massive military aid -

some \$2 billion since September 1945. Since the American people would not have countenanced either outright withdrawal or commitment of ground troops, this policy was, he argued, the only viable choice. Acheson concluded that the "ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the . . . United States . . . It was the product of internal Chinese forces, forces which this country tried to influence but could not."¹⁹

Acheson and Truman had wanted to focus on commitments in Europe. But Republicans, the powerful China lobby, and "Asia Firsters" succeeded in making China a bitter national issue, giving Secretary of State Acheson very little maneuvering space to implement a strategy of weaning Mao away from Stalin. And even that little space, the last remnant of Roosevelt's foreign policy, vanished with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950.

From Periphery to Pivot

The Korean War became a pivotal point in the Cold War. Ironically, prior to the onset of war, Korea had been excluded from the area considered vital for United States security. Right after Truman's famous containment speech in March 1947, when he promised aid to a conservative Greek government to crush a Communist-led revolution, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that if "the present diplomatic ideological warfare [in Korea] should become armed warfare, Korea could offer little or no assistance in the maintenance of our national security."²⁰ Thus, "the United States has little strategic interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea."²¹ Given the role MacArthur would later play in Korea, it was indeed ironic that in 1948 his island defense perimeter in Asia excluded Korea.

Acheson was simply following MacArthur when he stated, in his controversial National Press Club speech of January 1950, that America's line of defense in Asia "runs along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus [mainly Okinawa] . . . [and] from the Ryukyus to the Philippine Islands." As for places like Taiwan and south Korea, Acheson said that "it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack. Should such an attack occur . . . the initial reliance must be on the people attacked."²² The right wing never forgave Acheson for airing this consensus among military and State

Department pragmatists, and accused him of giving north Korea the “green light” to invade the south.*

Although the U.S. excluded Korea from its strategic defense zone, the Truman Administration used limited political and military measures to convert the peninsula’s southern half into a bastion of anti-communism. As historian Bruce Cumings explains in his seminal study of post-war Korea, General John Hodge, head of the U.S. military government, “sought to make the south a bulwark against communism in the north and revolution at home . . . a policy . . . [which] took precedence over the desires of Koreans.”²³ When U.S. troops left the south in August 1948, they left behind 400 military advisers for Syngman Rhee’s armed forces.

The Korean War, then, can be seen as one phase of a civil war that began with the defeat of the Japanese occupation government in 1945. The U.S. had intervened on one side of that war and added to the polarization by encouraging the permanent partition of the peninsula.

Whatever its origins, the Korean War rushed the decline of Roosevelt’s internationalism and the parallel rise of “containment militarism” within the U.S. leadership. NSC 68 represented the views of those Cold War Democrats who would use the Korean War to batter down public opposition to the new militarism. “A large measure of sacrifice and discipline will be demanded of the American people,” warned NSC 68. “They will be asked to give up some of the benefits which they have come to associate with their freedoms.”²⁴

Korea, in short, solved the contradiction between the vast global commitments demanded by NSC 68 and limited American military resources and political will. The Korean War became one means of channelling some “benefits of freedom” toward military expansion.

Containment Versus Rollback

Domestic opposition to large increases in defense spending and new international commitments was not the only obstacle that the Cold

* As north and south Korea are not recognized as legitimate states by the United Nations and as there remains only one Korean people despite the political division, we refer throughout this book to the Republic of Korea as south Korea and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea as north Korea.

Warriors had to surmount. During the Blair House conference called in response to the outbreak of conflict in Korea, General Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared that the "Korean situation offered as good an occasion for action in drawing the line as anywhere else . . ." ²⁵ While Bradley's metaphor reflected the dominant view, others approached containment from different perspectives. Indeed, the emerging containment policy represented a compromise among New Deal internationalists, proponents of "realism" in dealing with Soviets, and advocates of "rolling back" Communism. It was not the question of ends but means which separated these three schools. As Cumings notes, containment "was a low-risk strategy which left open the possibility either of accommodating communism in a new global order or pushing it back." ²⁶ NSC 68 itself combined rollback rhetoric with the realists' more limited goals:

The mischief may be a global war or it may be a Soviet campaign for limited objectives. In either case we should take no avoidable initiative which would cause it to become a war of annihilation, and if we have the forces to defeat a Soviet drive for limited objectives it may well be to our interest not to let it become a global war. Our aim in applying force must be to compel the acceptance of terms consistent with our objectives, and our capabilities for the application of force should, therefore, within the limits of what we can sustain over the long pull, be congruent to the range of tasks which we may encounter. ²⁷

The Korean War consolidated containment as America's basic foreign policy, but not before the proponents of containment successfully blunted a strong challenge from the rollback school. Its advocates had scored a major victory when Truman allowed General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of U.S. forces in Korea, to cross the 38th Parallel and "reunify" the peninsula. When MacArthur's forces reached the Yalu River and provoked China's entry into the war, however, the fragile consensus began to collapse. Instead of withdrawing, the imperious commander proposed bringing the war to China itself by blockading its coast, bombing its industries, and sponsoring a "counter-invasion against vulnerable areas of the Chinese mainland" ²⁸ by Chiang's nationalist troops in Taiwan. His cable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on December 30, 1950 revealed MacArthur's agenda. Attacking China via Korea and Taiwan, he claimed, "could severely cripple and

largely neutralize China's capability to wage aggressive war and thus save Asia from the engulfment otherwise facing it."²⁹

MacArthur's scheme rested upon nuclear and radiological warfare. In his biography of MacArthur, William Manchester sketches out the general's nuclear strategy:

The enemy's air would first have been "taken out" by nuclear attacks on Manchurian air bases. Then he would have enveloped the enemy with "500,000 of Chiang Kai-shek's troops, sweetened by two United States Marine divisions" and landed behind Chinese lines . . . In little more than a week, he said, the starving Chinese and North Koreans would have sued for peace. Sowing a belt of radioactive cobalt from the Sea of Japan to the Yellow Sea, he would have prevented another land invasion of Korea from the north for at least sixty years.³⁰

The radioactive cobalt belt was pure fantasy since the U.S. had no such weapons. But MacArthur's vision of destroying the "Asiatic hordes" with nuclear warfare would inspire the imaginations of many U.S. military men over the next two decades.

In 1950, MacArthur's call to "roll back" Communism above the 38th Parallel and aim for "total victory" unified conservative forces opposed to almost twenty years of Democratic control of foreign policy – the old isolationists and Asia-Firsters, an alliance that Arthur Schlesinger called the "Asialationists." Their main aims were reduction of military commitments to Europe, the use of unilateral military action unrestrained by allies, and a focus on Asia as the principal field of U.S. expansion. MacArthur stirred these passions in 1952: "The communist conspirators," he wrote, "have elected to make their play for global conquest in Asia – here we fight Europe's war with arms while the diplomats there still fight with words."³¹

With its appeal to bold and sweeping action, the rollback rhetoric was far more attractive to conservatives than a "long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."³² Townsend Hoopes, former Under-Secretary of the Air Force, explains the psychological appeal of the rollback formula:

[A] potential difficulty was that the strategy [of containment] required endurance, steadiness, patience, and resistance to the temptation of "all-out" response, qualities that tended to run against American temperament in war.

Moreover, it showed itself, both as formulated by Kennan and as orchestrated by Truman and Acheson, to be a doctrine oriented primarily toward Europe and lacking the same confident clarity when applied to the less familiar terrain and conditions of Asia. As the profound dislocations in China produced the traumatic collapse of Chiang's armies and brought to power a regime that many thought was a direct agent of the Kremlin, the cold war seemed to spread relentlessly despite effective containment in Europe. Troubled, impatient Americans began to view it as a negative, overly defensive policy, a treadmill going nowhere, yet at the same time absorbing vast amounts of national attention, energy, and resources.³³

MacArthur was eventually sacked for his defiance of President Truman in April 1951, and the policy current he represented was soundly defeated as a solution to the Korean question. Rollback did not vanish, however, as an alternative to liberal containment policy. Always strident, its supporters would shout from the sidelines until 1981, when they rode into power with Ronald Reagan.

Global Military Buildup

Although they prevented the Korean conflict from sparking a global war, the containment liberals still used it as a lever to reshape the global political order. Indeed, the Korean War gave the U.S. the opportunity to rearm Germany, commit a huge permanent garrison of troops in Europe, and impose the creation of SHAPE*, the integrated military command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Moreover, it allowed the containment liberals to reverse demobilization, triple defense spending, and create a global military machine. In just two years, 1950 to 1952, annual U.S. military expenditures increased four-fold from \$13 billion to \$50 billion. Simultaneously, personnel in the armed forces doubled to almost three million, naval ships increased from 671 to over 1,100, and Air Force wings rose from 48 to 108.³⁴

The Korean War enabled the political and military components of the containment strategy in Asia to fall into place. The U.S. returned in force to the peninsula itself, with its troop strength topping 225,000 by the time the armistice was signed in 1953. While U.S. troops were scaled

* Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe.

down after 1953, two army divisions remained to garrison the 38th Parallel until 1972, when President Richard Nixon withdrew one.

The war did more than bring Korea into the American "defense perimeter." Beleaguered in Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek's forces were taken under U.S. military protection. In 1954, the 7th Fleet was sent to the South China Sea to block the Red Army from invading the nationalist-held islands. A spurt of treaty-making formalized U.S. political and military influence in other strategic areas. The U.S. concluded a peace treaty with Japan, which gave it almost unrestricted military rights in Japan proper and continued U.S. administration of Okinawa. "Mutual defense" pacts were signed with the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand.

Korea also allowed the United States to experiment with "collective effort" to promote its national interests behind a facade of internationalism. From among the Asian and Pacific countries, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, and New Zealand contributed contingents to the war effort in Korea, under the convenient flag of a "United Nations" command.

The Korean War sparked the remilitarization of Japan. Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, General MacArthur ordered the formation of the "Self Defense Forces" to take over security duties from American troops being assigned to Korea. Former Japanese troops were used as military engineers in Korea, and Japanese ships were used in combat operations, such as minesweeping Wonsan Harbor.³⁵ As Japanese historian Seizaburo Shinobu has stated, the Korean War "made Japan into a counterrevolutionary base in all senses of that expression."³⁶

The Korean War also allowed the U.S. to cement Japan into place as the cornerstone of its strategic program for the Pacific region. As the heart of the U.S. military presence in the Far East and the only available potential balance to Soviet and Chinese economic and military influence in the Pacific, U.S. strategists decided to revive Japan as the industrial "workshop" of Asia.³⁷ This vision entailed separating Japan from its "natural" raw material suppliers and markets in Communist China, and integrating Southeast Asia into Japan's economic sphere.³⁸ Military procurement of Japanese goods and services to support U.S. forces based in Japan and to fuel the Korean War effort were key ingredients in the success of this strategy.

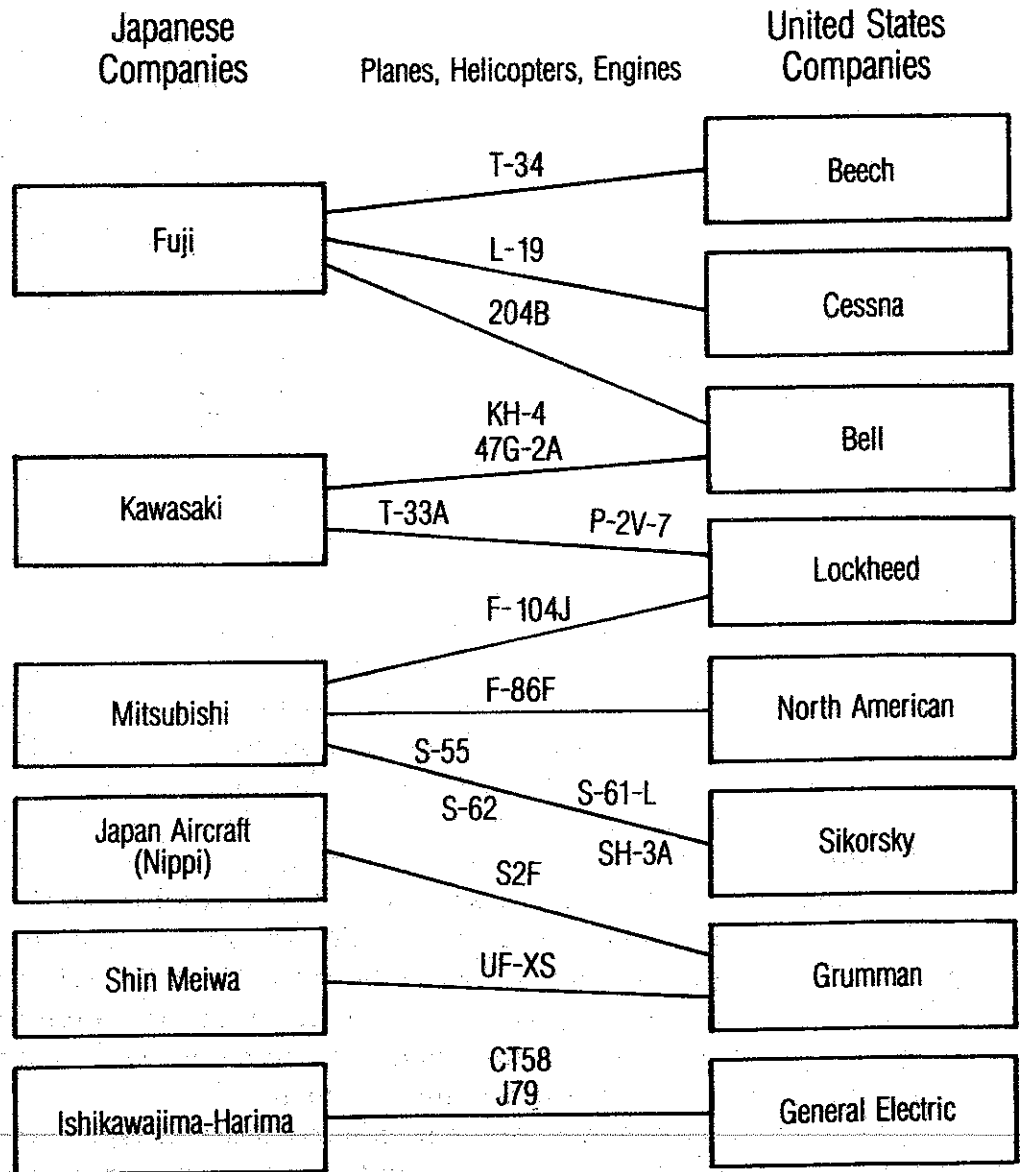
The U.S. spent \$6.8 billion in aid, special procurement, and troop expenditures in Japan between 1947-1958, equal to nearly 50 per cent

of Japan's exports over the same period. Indeed, the Korean War put Asia on the global map as far as U.S. security aid is concerned. Military and economic aid to Asia jumped from less than 10 per cent of the U.S. total before the War to above 60 per cent in 1955.³⁹ In 1953 alone, the U.S. pumped \$825 million into the Japanese economy for textiles, metal products, fuels, and munitions for the war effort.⁴⁰ Military orders in 1952 alone provided foreign exchange earnings equal to 64 per cent of Japan's pre-Korea War exports and 37 per cent of all foreign exchange receipts.⁴¹ As Japanese economist Takafusa Nakamura concludes, the "prodigious impact" of the Korean War boom freed the Japanese economy from its crippling balance-of-payments deficit. By driving up international prices and demand for Japanese exports due to war-engendered shortages, and by direct procurements in Japan, Takafusa estimates that "war dollars" rose to 60-70 per cent of Japan's exports, enabling key sectors to import technology and raw materials, and embark on rapid economic growth.⁴²

The Korean War and the post-war procurement program also transferred advanced U.S. technology to Japan by co-financing Japanese production of aircraft, missiles, jet engines, and communications equipment. Produced under license from U.S. firms, these products were procured by the U.S. military. Out of the many aircraft-related agreements, a key deal struck in 1954 between Kawasaki and Lockheed for jet engine and air frame overhaul led to the assembly of advanced jet aircraft in 1955. Transfer of technical information, tools, jigs and other components of modern industrial techniques followed soon after.⁴³ In a report to the Pentagon, Daniel Spencer estimated that Japanese firms thereby obtained access to 50-60 per cent of the latest U.S. research and development capability in these sectors.⁴⁴ The resulting web of relationships between Japanese and U.S. aircraft firms is shown in Figure 2.1. "These procurements," stated Spencer, "laid the technical groundwork for the modern growth miracle of Japan. At minimum, they opened Japan to contact with American companies with whom they served to initiate or renew commercial tie-ups."⁴⁵

The short- and long-run effects of the military bases in Japan were thus immense. In addition to strategic and economic reverberations regionally and in the U.S., the American military presence had profound social impacts inside Japan itself. Military procurement helped to resuscitate the big *zaibatsu* firms which had profited from World War II. Under the benign guidance of the Ministry of International Trade and

Figure 2.1:
Principal Japanese–United States Aircraft License Relationships, 1956



Source: D. Spencer, "Military Transfer of Technology, International Techno-Economic Transfers Via Military By-Products & Initiative Based on Cases from Japan & Other Countries," (Mimeo report to US Department of Defense), Howard University, Washington DC, March 1967, p. 96.

Industry⁴⁶ and with the blessing of American Occupation officials, the *zaibatsu* teamed up with U.S. firms, stomped on small Japanese firms competing for military procurements⁴⁷ and bulldozed textile merchants seeking trade with China. The *zaibatsu* and their political allies also circumvented a wave of popular opposition to the U.S. bases themselves in the 1950s.⁴⁸ The way was cleared for Japan to serve on the frontline of nuclear war in the 1950s (see Chapter 5).

Pacific Garrison

The Korean War had a major impact on the U.S. military posture in the Pacific, fostering what was, in effect, a transnational garrison state of U.S. bases beyond the control of their host countries. Scores of bases in Japan served as the springboard for the American war effort in Korea. U.S. planes, for example, took off directly from Japan on bombing missions in Korea, while a fleet of over 400 warships of the U.S. naval forces, Far East, operated out of Yokosuka and Sasebo.

Okinawa, the central "island bastion" in MacArthur's "offshore island chain" became the base for B-29 bombing runs over Korea.⁴⁹ In only five years, a vast military expansion program converted 40,000 acres, or 13 per cent of the total land area of the island, into interlocking Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force bases, including storage areas for nuclear and chemical weapons.⁵⁰ It was the strategic value of Okinawa, apparent in the Korean War, which made the Americans insist on retaining administrative control of the island during the Japanese peace treaty negotiations.

The Korean conflict also led to a major new base in the Philippines, Cubi Point, to support naval air operations in the Asian mainland. The two vast bases in the country, Subic and Clark, became logistical centers for Filipino troops and military supplies headed for Korea, as well as stop-over points for troops from Australia and Singapore *en route* to Korea.⁵¹

The Rise of the Regional Policeman

Of all the armed services, it was the Navy which reaped the benefits of the Korean War. With its destruction of the Imperial Japanese Navy

during the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944, the U.S. fleet achieved maritime supremacy, a cherished goal of the Navy's foremost strategist, Alfred Mahan, a half century earlier. The Navy thus emerged from World War II as a service in search of a mission. The immediate post-war years were a time of discontent for the admirals, who had to fight off the Air Force's drive to reduce the Navy to a minor service in a nuclear strategy that relied on long-range bombers and missiles.

Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers were among the first combat units to respond to the outbreak of war in Korea, as military historian David Rosenberg notes, thereby "vindicating the Navy's claims about the value of mobile, flexible carrier striking forces."⁵² Thus, only a year after he had cancelled the order for the super-carrier U.S.S. *United States*, Defense Secretary Louis Johnson told Admiral Forrest Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations: "I will give you another carrier when you want it."⁵³ By the end of the war, the fleet had grown from seven to twelve attack carriers, and from eight to fifteen light and escort carriers. Beginning with the *Forrestal* in 1952, a new super aircraft carrier was included in each annual defense budget.⁵⁴

The build-up was just one of the Navy's gains. Korea proved that not all conflicts would escalate to global nuclear war as the Air Force had anticipated. The bloody stalemate on the ground between the north Korean-Chinese and U.S. infantry neutralized U.S. superiority in naval, air, and amphibious forces, and made the Navy wary of any future support role in another of the Army's land wars. Admiral Sherman, then Navy member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote that he had been uneasy about the Korean War from its inception. "It was unavoidable," he said, "but I was fully aware of the hazards involved in fighting Asiatics on the Asiatic mainland, which is something that, as a naval officer, I have grown up to believe should be avoided if possible."⁵⁵ Such distaste for protracted land warfare would re-emerge fifteen years later in the battle over strategy in the Vietnam War.

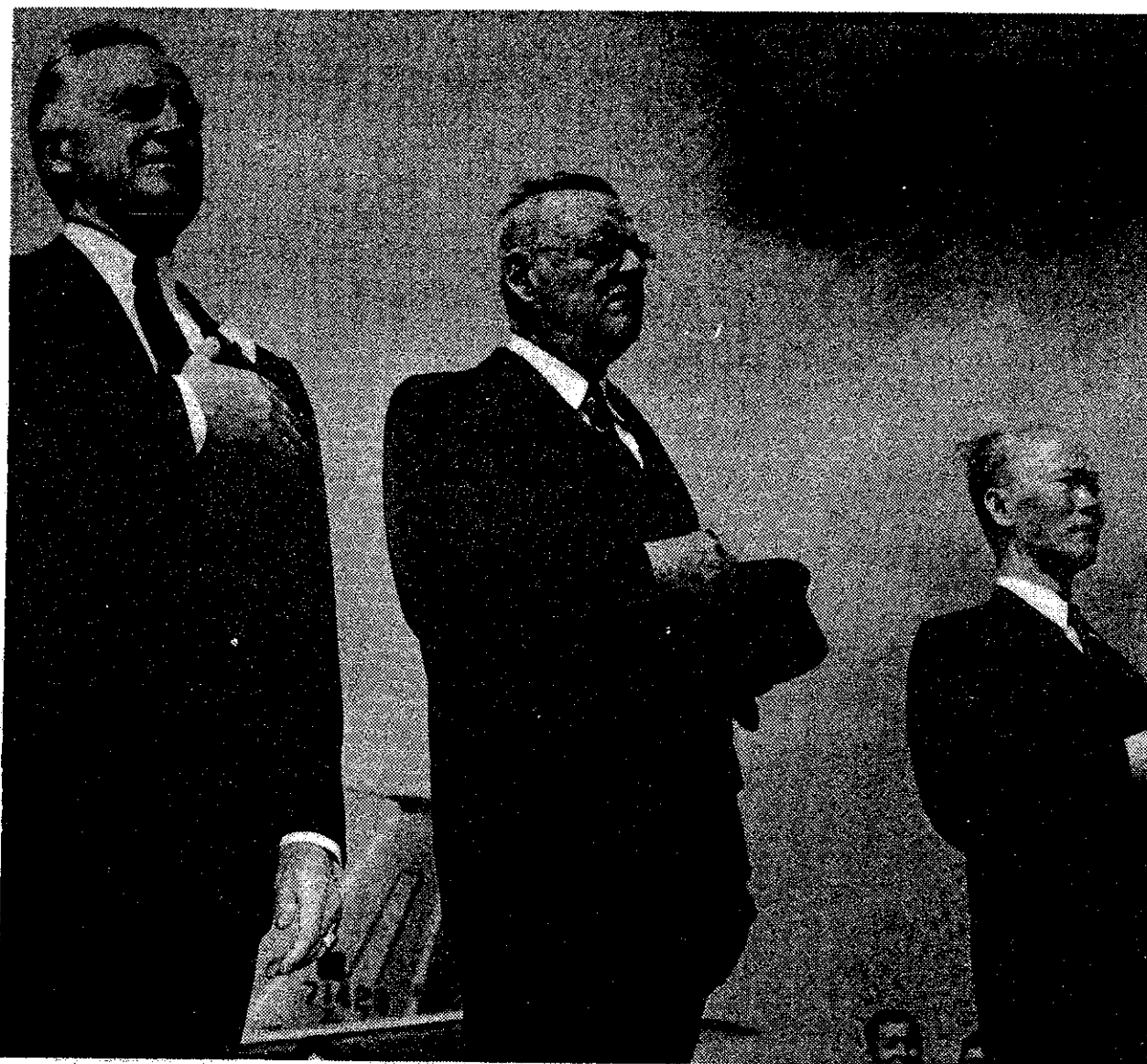
Meanwhile, the Navy moved quickly to stake out a key role in the "limited war" situations favored by containment strategists. During Korea and later Pacific crises, notes U.S. naval analyst Francis West, the Navy "demonstrated its 'new' concept of warfare, the use of carrier-based air to project power over the land on the enemy's homeland."⁵⁶ In other words, the Navy's fast-carrier task forces lent themselves to quick intervention in local conflicts. The aircraft carrier mission was

particularly apt for the Asia-Pacific region, where revolutionary movements threatened pro-American elites. As West states:

Though there were U.S. ground and air forces in various countries of the region, the primary burden fell on naval forces both as the unifying link between all the bilateral agreements and because the carrier's air power provided a rapid means of responding to conflict or crisis with significant potential to persuade or punish.⁵⁷

The 7th Fleet as the regional police force, the Navy as a rapid intervention force - this was a face of American power which would become familiar to peoples in Asia-Pacific for the next thirty years.

U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (center) at his arrival in Taipei, October 1958
(Pentagon Archives)



THREE NEW LOOK AT THE NUCLEAR BRINK

You seldom see a cowboy, even in the movies, wearing three guns. Two is enough.

—Admiral Arleigh Burke,
Chief of Naval Operations, 1960¹

General Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidential candidacy in 1952 was a compromise between the Europe-centered, eastern wing of the Republican Party and its "Asialationist" wing based in the West and mid-West. Unsympathetic to alliances with Europe, the "Asialationists" championed the unrestrained use of U.S. power in the Far East. The compromise, however, was built on the false assumption that Eisenhower would adopt a "rollback" posture against Communism. The Republican right, headed by Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, pinned its hopes on John Foster Dulles, who was expected to be named Secretary of State in an Eisenhower administration. Before the election Dulles had proclaimed his belief in rollback, which he styled "a liberation policy which will try to give hope and a resistance mood inside the Soviet Empire."²

While the new administration retained the Truman-Acheson emphasis on a defensive alliance in Europe, the right was not totally disappointed. Eisenhower combined rollback rhetoric with a strong military and political offensive in the Asia-Pacific region. "Brinkmanship" aptly captured the stance of the new administration, particularly

its dealings with the People's Republic of China, which competed with the Soviet Union for primacy in U.S. policymakers' demonology.

Close examination, in this and succeeding chapters, of Eisenhower's military posture and new reliance on nuclear weapons will make clear just how close the United States came to launching a nuclear war in the 1950s. More important than the incendiary rhetoric, a bitter inter-service rivalry over control of nuclear weapons nearly pushed the U.S. military over the brink of the nuclear precipice.

Brinkmanship in Korea

In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower threatened China and north Korea with the use of atomic weapons to force an armistice in Korea. In his memoirs, Eisenhower revealed that "One possibility [to bring about an agreement] was to let the Communist authorities understand that, in the absence of satisfactory progress, we intended to move decisively without inhibition in our use of weapons, and would no longer be responsible for confining hostilities to the Korean peninsula."³

This was not idle talk. Advised by the U.S. Joint Strategic Planning Committee, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already considered numerous proposals to attack Korea and China with nuclear weapons during the early 1950s. The Committee had proposed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended, and President Truman had approved the establishment of U.S. nuclear delivery capability.

In March 1951, a Johns Hopkins University research group, under contract to the Far East Command in Tokyo, submitted an immense report to General MacArthur entitled *Tactical Employment of Atomic Weapons*.⁴ The newly declassified study noted that:

The Korean War has offered an excellent opportunity for the study of the tactical employment of atomic bombs in support of ground forces. It has been possible to consider the war a kind of laboratory within which everything was at hand in the most realistic proportions, except the bomb itself and the means to deliver it.⁵

A covering memorandum from the Far East Command in July 1951 reveals that the study, while not yet adopted as Army policy, was far from academic. "This headquarters," stated General Doyle Hickey, "is continuing study of [the] report with a view to taking any actions that

may be indicated to prepare the Far East Command offensively and defensively for possible employment of nuclear weapons.”⁶

The report revealed, however, that Far East Command faced major obstacles to conducting nuclear war in Korea. Applying the “Hiroshima Death Function”^{*} to a variety of actual battle situations in the Korean War, the study demonstrated that there were many “lucrative” military targets for nuclear attack. One such attack would have employed ten 40 kiloton nuclear bombs dropped just 6.5 km apart to “neutralize” the “Pyongyang-Chorwon-Kumhwa Triangle”⁷ - that is, to destroy the north Korean capital city and surrounds. The authors noted that such nuclear attacks would kill many civilians, which they termed a “distorting consideration”. They suggested that destroying 10,000 enemy troops with a nuclear attack was worth killing 500 “friendly civilians”, although they were “reluctant” to recommend killing 50,000 civilians for the same gain.⁸

Aside from relatively immobile targets such as cities and towns occupied by Chinese forces, the report considered the possibility that problems might arise from the Chinese tactic of dispersing their troops to counter American mechanized columns:⁹

The heavy padded cotton uniform of the Chinese soldier would offer him substantial protection from thermal radiation. In a dry condition, this uniform would require for ignition about 10 to 12 calories per square centimeter. His fur cap would be more readily ignited, but it could be discarded readily. His uncovered face, neck, and ears would be subject to serious burns at about 5 calories per square centimeter. His feet in canvas shoes with padded soles would have been subject to injury at about 15 calories per square centimeter. The overall effect of thermal radiation on a Chinese soldier in the open can thus be seen to depend a great deal upon his posture with respect to the bomb as well as his distance from ground zero.¹⁰

The report also found that U.S. forces in Korea were ill equipped for

^{*} The “Hiroshima Death Function” was an algorithm developed in the report to calculate mortality as a function of distance from ground zero of an airburst nuclear explosion; the function is:

$$D(r) = 0.93 \text{ Exp } \{-0.693 [(r-800)/850]^2\}$$

where D = Deaths and r = slant distance in yards from point of burst for r greater than 800.

nuclear warfare. Few American soldiers and practically no allied forces had received "atomic indoctrination" in safety and radiological protection, and by January 1951, only two radiological defense officers had been trained.¹¹ Furthermore, the lack of adequate roads and bridges precluded the use in Korea of Army nuclear artillery which moved on cumbersome, heavy equipment.¹²

Nuclear-capable aircraft carriers, moreover, had not yet arrived off the Korean coast. Only the 70 B-29s in the Far East Air Force – flying from Yokota in Japan and Kadena in Okinawa – could deliver nuclear bombs.¹³ And the estimated time between target identification and B-29 nuclear bomb drop was 12 hours¹⁴ – far too long in the rapidly shifting frontlines of the Korean War.* This delay was primarily attributable to poor intelligence capability, indicating that it was "probably the least prepared of any branch of the U.S. Army to cope with the problems of atomic warfare."¹⁶ Effective nuclear bombing was also hampered by poor ground-air coordination in the final approach of the B-29 bombers to the target.¹⁷

Deterred by these obstacles from actually using nuclear weapons in the ground war in Korea, the report recommended staff training to "perform all the *real* staff work required to plan and execute *simulated* atomic attacks on targets as they develop."¹⁸ The staff training was to be matched with combat training for B-29 delivery of nuclear bombs, "to fly simulated atomic sorties against real enemy targets . . . as a part of an actual bomber or fighter strike with conventional weapons or immediately after such a strike." The report recommended: "These test sorties should be made as realistic as possible in all details except that conventional rather than atomic explosions would be used."¹⁹

Accordingly, from late September to October 15, 1951, several simulated nuclear strikes were conducted as *Exercise Hudson Harbor* in Korea.†²⁰ These exercises laid the groundwork for the May 15, 1953 National Security Council meeting where Eisenhower argued that nuclear weapons were cheaper in Korea than conventional weapons.

* While the B-29s in the Far East were not then nuclear-capable, the report notes that one week sufficed to deploy into the Far East Command an especially trained crew capable of nuclear bomb assembly, backed by complete, assembled sets of ground equipment for advance base operations to support the B-29s.¹⁵

† Whether these nuclear mock attacks were conducted as part of actual conventional bombing attacks is unknown.

To make the threat clear, the 92nd B-36 Bomb Wing flew to Japan, Okinawa, and Guam for a month-long exercise, *Operation Big Stick* in August–September 1953. The official Strategic Air Command history states that *Big Stick* “demonstrated the U.S. determination to use every means possible to maintain peace in the Far East.”²¹ Not to be outdone, the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Champlain* with four nuclear bombers aboard cruised off the Korean coast, waiting for the attack order.²²

The threats continued even after the Armistice was signed in July 1953. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Department of State recommended in January 1954 that if hostilities were renewed in Korea, the U.S. should employ “atomic weapons . . . against military targets in Korea and against those military targets in Manchuria and China which are being used by the Communists in direct support of these operations in Korea, or which threaten the security of U.S./U.N. forces in the Korean area.”²³

President Eisenhower’s threat was not too different from the advice General MacArthur gave him soon after his election as President. The rollback advocate had urged Eisenhower to inform the Soviet Union that “should an agreement not be reached, it would be our intention to clear North Korea of enemy troops . . . through the atomic bombing of enemy military concentrations and installations . . . and the sowing of fields of suitable radio-active materials . . . to close major lines of enemy supply and communication.”²⁴

Nuclear weapons were not used during the Truman–MacArthur phase of the Korean War (June 1950 to January 1953) because American leaders were dismayed by the universal outcry after Truman off-handedly referred to using nuclear weapons in Korea at a press conference in November 1950.²⁵ And as the Johns Hopkins study demonstrated, the military was unprepared for such escalation.

The reasons for American restraint later in the war are less clear. The fact that Eisenhower finally withheld approval for nuclear attacks in 1953 may have been due to the opposition of U.S. allies, alarmed by U.S. nuclear threats; the lack of suitable urban–industrial targets (which were already destroyed by conventional bombing); and/or the continuing inability of the U.S. to obtain necessary intelligence and targeting capability for a nuclear attack on Chinese and north Korean troops.

Just how close Eisenhower came to using his nuclear option is revealed in the record of a National Security Council meeting on May 20, 1953. Eisenhower’s “only real worry” about the Joint Chiefs’ view that

“more positive action” would entail nuclear attack on China was the possibility of Soviet intervention. “He feared the Chinese much less,” stated the record, “since the blow would fall so swiftly and with such force as to eliminate Chinese Communist intervention.”²⁶

Eisenhower’s nuclear threats in Korea were part and parcel of “massive retaliation” – the defense doctrine of his administration. This meant, as Dulles put it, that the U.S. would “depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our choosing.”²⁷ Retaliatory capacity meant, in the first instance, that the Strategic Air Command would be able to deliver an overwhelming hail of nuclear bombs.

The “New Look” Strategy

Limited war, nonetheless, had its place in the Eisenhower-Dulles strategy. Learning from Korea, a meatgrinder for conventional forces, the administration felt that limited war required the liberal use of tactical nuclear weapons. Atomic weapons, insisted Dulles, were “becoming more and more conventional.” Eisenhower himself argued: “Where these things are used on strictly military targets and for strictly military purposes, I see no reason why they shouldn’t be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else.”²⁸ The “bullets” Eisenhower had in mind were about as powerful as the bombs used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁹

In limited war conditions, ground forces could not be totally dispensed with. But in the view of Admiral Arthur Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. ground commitment would be restricted to Marine units and “small atomic task forces” from the Army.³⁰ The bulk of the ground fighting would be done by U.S.-equipped and trained “indigenous troops.”³¹ Conceived as a way to avoid the massive defense spending of Korea in future conflicts, the “New Look” strategy was “intervention on the cheap.” As American strategist Townsend Hoopes wrote, it was essentially “an approach to warfare based on an acceptance of greater destructiveness in war in return for a lower cost in the preparation for war.”³²

Asian Contingencies and Nuclear Threats

In the eyes of Eisenhower’s strategists, Asia was the arena where tac-

tical nuclear weapons and surrogate troops – the New Look’s strategy for Third World intervention – could be most effectively applied to meet “localized Communist aggression.” Indeed, it was here that Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff went to the brink of nuclear war.

In the spring of 1954, French forces at Dien Bien Phu were entrapped by nationalist guerillas as the first Indochina War moved to a climax. Abandoning the post-war U.S. policy of anti-colonialism, the administration and the Joint Chiefs proposed to help the French by blasting the Vietnamese guerillas with tactical atomic bombs. *Operation Vulture*, the American plan to save the French, involved delivery of nuclear bombs either by B-29 Superfortresses flying out of Clark Air Field in the Philippines, or by Navy fighter-bombers launched from Seventh Fleet carriers. Indeed, two carriers were cruising offshore, ready to intervene on behalf of the French.^{*33}

Freeing the French garrison, however, was not the only American aim. As JCS Chairman Arthur Radford later admitted, the “real purpose was to provoke a military reaction from Peking, bringing the United States and China to war before China had a chance to become strong enough to threaten U.S. interests in the future.”³⁴ According to one account, *Operation Vulture* was approved by “President Eisenhower, the Secretary of State, and four of the five members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.” The plan was aborted only by British opposition and French fears that their forces would be annihilated along with the Vietnamese.^{† 35}

The Dien Bien Phu nuclear scenario was not an aberration. It flowed from an official posture of limited war in Asia – nuclear attack on liberation forces to avoid what would be a domestically unpopular alternative of committing ground troops. In 1954, Admiral Radford summarized the “New Look” thinking on Southeast Asia in a Joint Chiefs Memorandum: “Committing to the Indochina conflict naval forces in excess of a fast carrier task force and supporting forces as necessary in accordance with developments in the situation . . . will

* There is, however, no evidence that preparatory deployments of nuclear weapons occurred to support *Operation Vulture*.

† In 1971, the *Washington Post* reported that the French Premier accepted a U.S. offer to sell the French four nuclear bombs for the last-ditch defense of Dien Bien Phu, but that the commander rejected the nuclear tactic for fear of frying his own forces.

involve maldeployment of forces and reduce readiness to meet probable Chinese Communist reaction elsewhere in the Far East." However, these constraints did not bar offensive operations "employing atomic weapons, whenever advantageous . . . against selected military targets in China, Hainan, and other Communist-held offshore islands which are being used by the Communists in direct support of their operations, or which threaten the security of U.S. allied forces in the area." These tactical nuclear strikes would be supported by "French Union Forces augmented by such armed forces of the Philippines and Thailand as may be committed."³⁶

After Dien Bien Phu, the next opportunity for the United States to flex its nuclear muscles against China appeared in May 1954, when crisis erupted near Taiwan over the Tachen and Kinmen (Quemoy) Islands. When the People's Republic asserted its sovereignty over the Nationalist-occupied islands, the U.S. Navy sent five 7th Fleet carriers to the area.³⁷ The U.S. quickly deployed fighter-bombers from Japan and the Philippines to cover the Nationalist evacuation of the Tachen Islands, 475 km north of Taiwan. To block any future moves against the Nationalists, the U.S. began a massive build-up of conventional and nuclear weaponry on Taiwan itself.³⁸

In March 1955, Admiral Robert Carney, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, revealed that the Eisenhower administration was seriously considering taking advantage of the crisis to solve "the Communist Chinese problem." He told the press that the administration was discussing a plan of action "to destroy Red China's military potential and thus end its expansionist tendencies."³⁹ Moving towards the brink, the Strategic Air Command subsequently increased the strength of its "ground alert" forces in Guam and readied several bomber wings "for possible contingency operations in the Pacific."⁴⁰

A recently released study shows that after the 1954 crisis, the Air Force ordered the Tactical Air Command to develop a "Mobile Composite Air Strike Force with an atomic capability, to be used in small localized wars."⁴¹ Codenamed *Double Trouble*, this unit drew on fighters, bombers, reconnaissance planes, troop carriers, communication and supply units – in short, the full paraphernalia required to launch a nuclear strike.⁴² Although assigned to a U.S.-based wing, the Strike Force was available "on loan" to Pacific Command, and, in the *Mobile Zebra* exercise of November 1957, it practised deploying to the Far East.⁴³ The Strike Force reinforced Pacific Air Force fighter-bombers

which had been "organized, trained, equipped, and positioned for the primary mission of nuclear strikes in general war."⁴⁴

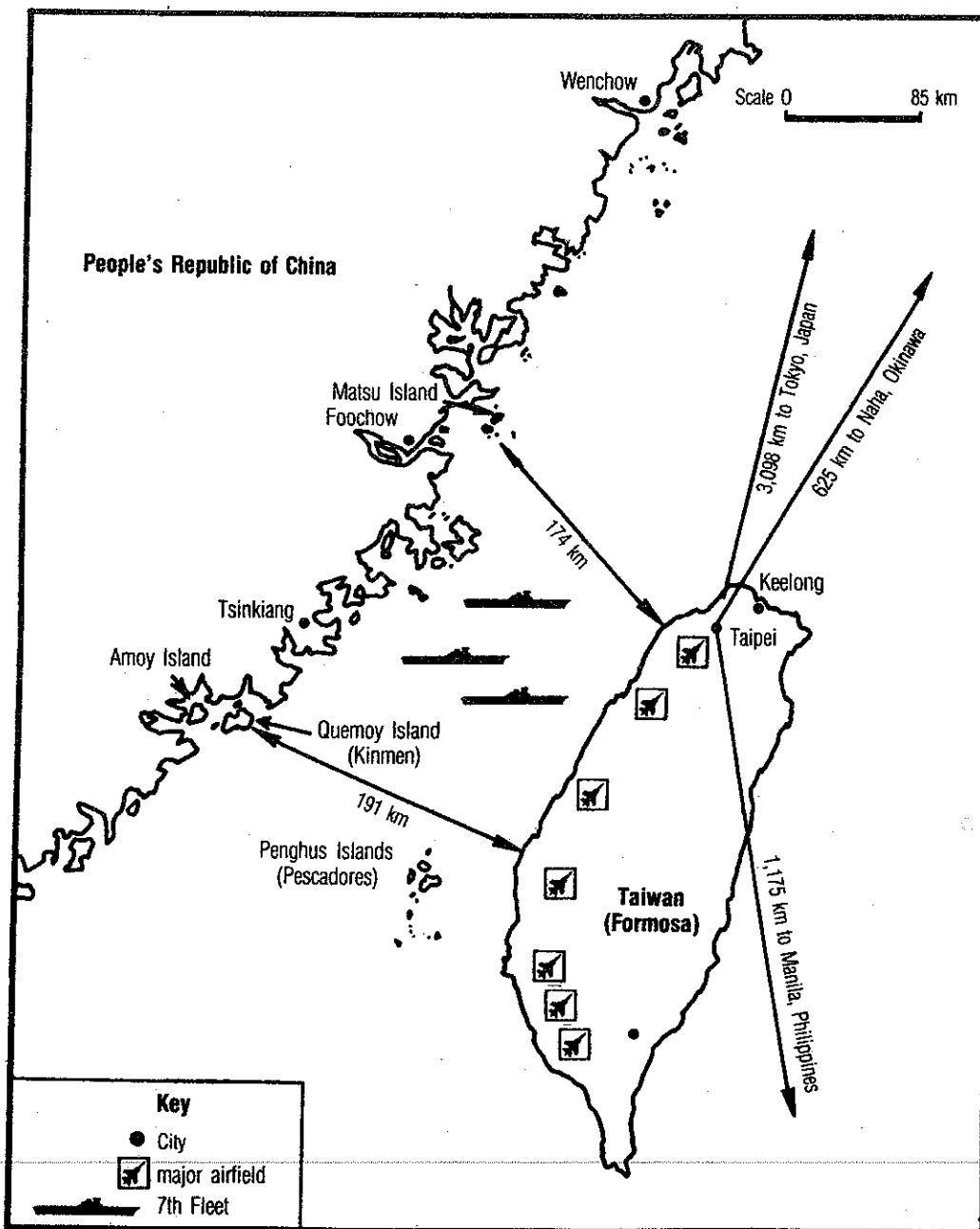
In August 1958, regional tensions increased rapidly as Chinese fighters appeared on mainland airfields in Fukien Province opposite Taiwan. Although on alert in Europe over the Lebanon crisis, the Air Force diverted advanced F-100D fighters from NATO to reinforce the Taiwan garrison. On August 6th, General Kuter, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Air Force, distributed to his staff his portion of CINCPAC's May 1958 three-phase war plan, known as *Ops Plan 25-58*.^{*} The first phase, already under way, required U.S. patrol and reconnaissance of the Taiwan Straits and the China mainland. The second phase called for defeat of a Chinese offensive with nuclear strikes by the Pacific Air Force - amended shortly after to include six Guam-based Strategic Air Command B-47 bombers with Mark 6 nuclear weapons to give SAC a role in "limited nuclear war." Phase III involved SAC nuclear strikes against China's urban-industrial areas to destroy the Chinese Communist capability to make war.⁴⁵ "Initial atomic strikes," reports the official history, "would be launched from Clark Air Base in the Philippines and Kadena Air Base in Okinawa"⁴⁶ (see Map 3.1).

U.S. war planners in the Pacific, in short, assumed they would drop nuclear bombs from the very beginning of a war with China. As then U.S. Commander-in-Chief Pacific Harry Felt recalled in 1974: "It is true that at that time [in the 1958 crisis] we had plans for use of tactical nuclear weapons. Most of us believed in those days that the use of tactical nuclear weapons wouldn't key off the big war, and *we didn't have any plan to do it any other way*."⁴⁷ General Kuter of the Pacific Air Force argued vehemently for the use of nuclear weapons. In 1957, the Air Force had ordered him to give first priority to improving "capability to deliver conventional [sic] atomic weapons," and last priority to "development of the capability to develop obsolete [non-nuclear] weapons."⁴⁸

On August 23, 1958, mainland Chinese forces began intense shelling of Quemoy (Kinmen) Island, 113 km to the west of Taiwan. In response, General Kuter requested deployment of the nuclear-armed Composite Air Strike Force. The Air Force supplied the so-called X-Ray Tango units by September 12, giving the Pacific Air Force 183 nuclear-capable strike aircraft. The Air Force was so anxious to demonstrate nuclear

^{*} Prepared by then CINCPAC, Admiral Felix Stump.

Map 3.1:
Taiwan Straits Crisis, August 1958



prowess that it took the wings off California-based F-104 fighter-bombers lacking trans-Pacific range, and flew them to Taiwan in giant air transports.⁴⁹ In September, the Navy's attack carriers arrived with another 66 nuclear-capable strike planes, and in mid-September, a Nike-Hercules nuclear missile unit was on duty in Taiwan.⁵⁰

The U.S. Army, according to Commander-in-Chief-Pacific Admiral Harry Felt, also transferred nuclear-capable 8-inch howitzers to Taiwan in late August.* Felt explained in 1974: "We provided [them] to our friends in Taiwan and they managed to get them over onto Quemoy. It seems kind of a silly exercise when you think back on it, but there we were thinking perhaps we might be authorized to use these kinds of weapons."⁵¹

That Washington commanders might block the use of nuclear weapons in August 1954 caused Admiral Felt "much anxiety", according to an Air Force history. On August 25, Felt told his subordinates "that his original plan envisaged the employment of nuclear weapons and that the *accompanying logistical systems would be inadequate for non-nuclear operations.*"⁵² Felt later recollected that when "the Joint Chiefs [realized], 'Gee, this might break out into a full-scale war here, with the United States right in the middle of it, we can't use those weapons,' . . . they directed me to draw up a plan for use of conventional ones. And that took some doing."⁵³ Only on September 11, after soliciting appraisal of his conventional capabilities for the first time, did Felt issue a non-nuclear "Annex H" to the war plan. If full-scale war with China had broken out between August and early September 1954 - and Chiang Kai-shek was straining to draw the U.S. into such a war⁵⁴ - Pacific Command's war plans and forces to defend Taiwan were designed *solely* for nuclear strikes in China.

On the command side in Washington, D.C., the Pentagon and the State Department were pressuring Eisenhower to clarify his role in commanding nuclear forces and to authorize Pacific Command's nuclear warplans to defend the islands.⁵⁵ On August 25, the President approved an order to CINCPAC and the U.S. Taiwan Defense Command which approved the general nuclear thrust against China, but reined in the military. While the military were told to "*prepare to use atomic weapons to extend deeper into Chinese Communist territory if necessary,*" they were first to try a non-nuclear defense.⁵⁶ It was still

* Felt replaced Stump in July 1958.

unclear on September 3 if Eisenhower would approve a general escalation to nuclear weapons, and how tightly he would control their battlefield use.⁵⁷ Three days later, he finally ordered that only he could authorize specific nuclear attacks in a war with China. At the same time, he delegated authority to the Joint Chiefs of Staff to use nuclear weapons when time did not permit securing his specific approval.⁵⁸

Even after U.S. forces in the Taiwan area had adopted conventional strategies by mid-September, the Pacific Air Force commanders estimated that they had less than fifteen days supply of bombs and fuel. Local commanders believed that the Air Force and the Navy could have sustained no more than three days of operations. After only three days of conventional warfare, the U.S. would either have to withdraw or escalate to nuclear war.⁵⁹ The U.S. thus came perilously close to *obliging* itself to fight a nuclear war against China, whether the national command willed it or not. Furthermore, high-level military commanders in the Pacific viewed the order to defend Taiwan with conventional weapons, issued by the Joint Chiefs on August 29, to be a backward step in the art of warfare.⁶⁰

The non-nuclear presidential/JCS directive aimed to keep the Soviets out of the conflict. Secretary of State Dulles on the other hand, later claimed that he flexed American nuclear muscle to force China "to demand more from Russia . . . thereby placing additional stress on Russian-Chinese relations."⁶¹ This effort to split the Communist alliance bore fruit after 1958, when Soviet failure to counter renewed American nuclear threats against China soon alienated the Chinese and may have contributed to the Sino-Soviet split.⁶²

It is significant that all these nuclear threats were aimed at exploiting political and military advantage, not the defense of U.S. territorial integrity. The potential for inadvertent nuclear war at this time was great. If the Chinese had misjudged American resolve in 1958, or if the Americans had misinterpreted Chinese action - or both - it is likely that the U.S. would have used nuclear weapons. Indeed, the U.S. took the world to the nuclear brink to thwart what even some senior administration officers considered the legitimate right of China to self-defense. As the crisis erupted, Secretary of State Dulles wrote to his staff:

I do not feel that we have a case which is altogether defensible. It is one thing to contend that the CHICOMS [Chinese Communists] should keep their hands off the present territorial and political status of Taiwan, the Penghus, Quemoy, and

Matsu, and not attempt to change this by violence which might precipitate general war in the area. It is another thing to contend that they should be quiescent while this area is used by the CHINATS [Chinese Nationalists] as an active base for attempting to foment civil strife and to carry out widespread propaganda through leaflets, etc., against the CHICOMS regime. We are, in effect, demanding that these Islands be a "privileged sanctuary" from which the CHINATS can wage at least political and subversive warfare against the CHICOMS but against which the CHICOMS cannot retaliate.⁶³

Racism and Restraint

A deep racism underlies these nuclear threats against China and Korea. The 1951 Johns Hopkins study provides a particularly telling example in its analysis of the psychological impacts of U.S. nuclear attack in Korea. The report first notes that many of the civilian casualties from U.S. nuclear attacks would be "friendly" rather than the "enemy" civilians who were the casualties in past wars, posing special problems for U.S. relations with the "friendly" government. The study then reviews the effects of nuclear attack on enemy troops: "Given the general disregard of death among Asiatics compared with Americans, it [nuclear attack] might come to be accepted as a normal hazard of war." The analysts quickly add that "Before such acceptance, however, there might be local or temporary fear reactions that would pay off largely in terms of the ratio of defeated to destroyed."*

The authors felt, however, that intimidating Asian communists would not be so easy:

The impact on the enemy's leading cadres of political type, that is, government and party, would be one of embitterment. The cadres of world Communism have now had three decades in which to adjust themselves to fighting against superior material. They have what amounts to preconditioned reactions to such events as a defeat imposed through superior enemy material, mixed reaction of masochistic pride in their own suffering and magnified hatred of their enemy . . . Such reactions do not make them incapable of calculation or

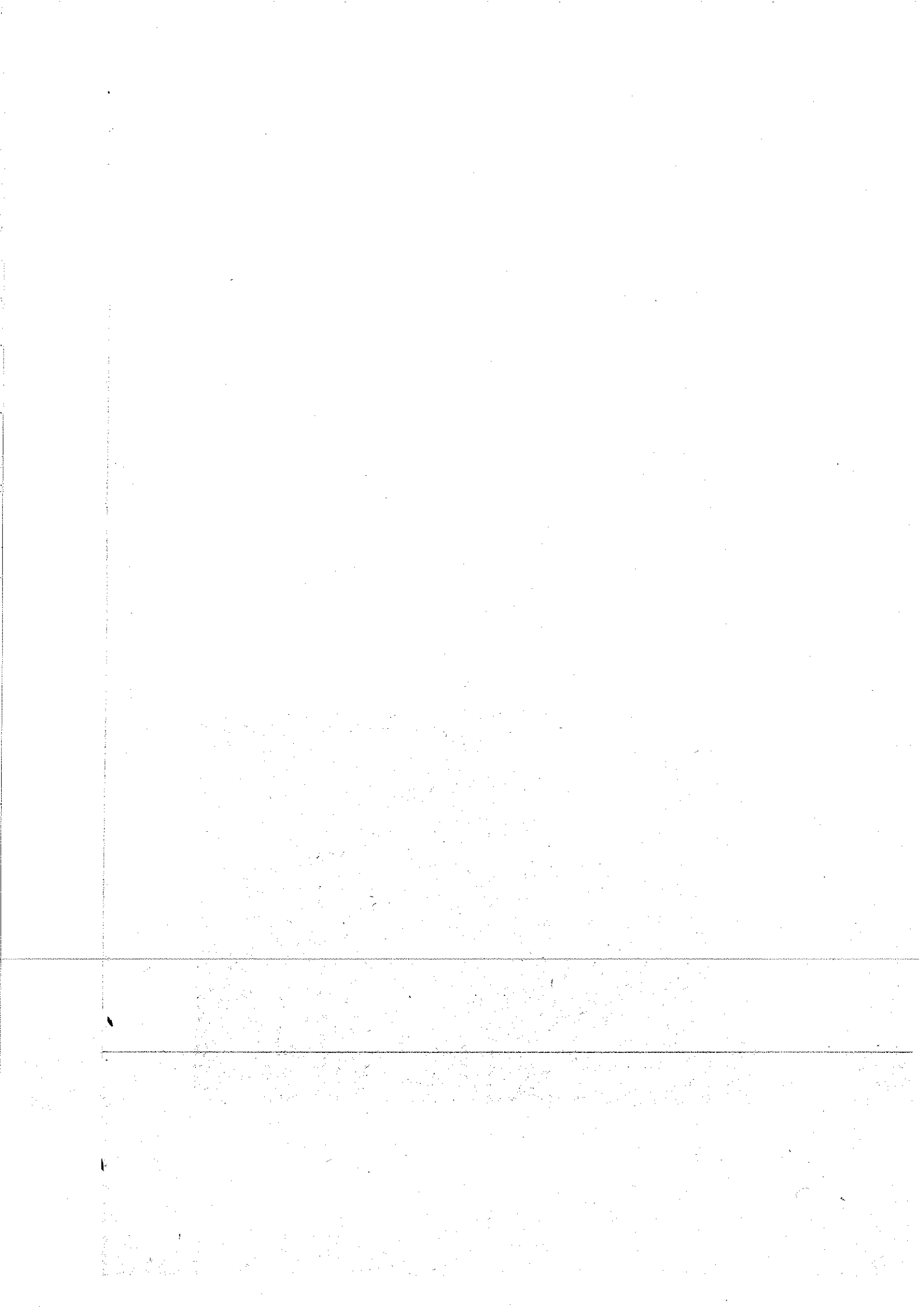
* That is, U.S. nuclear attack might increase the ratio of psychologically defeated enemy troops to those physically destroyed, relative to the same ratio achievable with conventional attack.

caution. They are quite capable, of course, of adopting the tactics of a general political retreat, or an intensified offensive, on the cold-war front. The world communist system of which they are a part has many means and methods ready for either line.⁶⁴

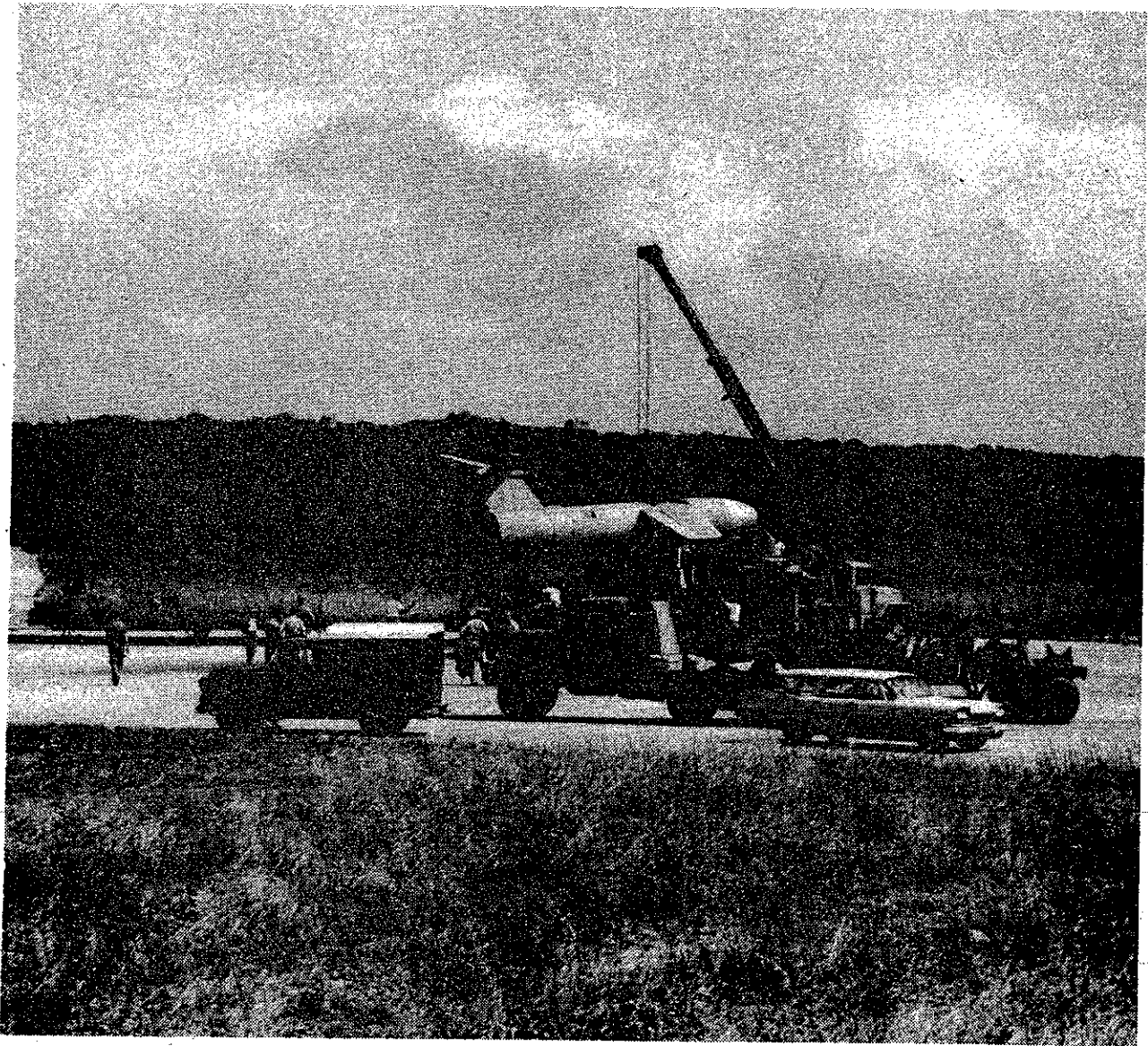
Accustomed to losing, Communists were as likely to advance as to retreat in the face of nuclear attack, according to these eminent American scholars. With academics feeding military commanders such pseudo-scientific nonsense, it is remarkable that the U.S. did *not* use nuclear weapons in Korea.

Indeed, the primary restraints on escalation in each of these near-nuclear wars were not moral or military qualms, nor even the prospect of domestic or international popular revulsion, but the reaction of America's allies. The threats against China in 1958, for example, led to the almost total diplomatic isolation of the United States. One can only imagine the reaction of a British diplomat, assigned to protect his country's commercial interests in Hong Kong, when Dulles told him that a U.S. nuclear attack on China would be "no more than small airbursts without fallout. That is of course an unpleasant prospect, but one I think we must face up to."⁶⁵

Similarly, the U.S. Ambassador in Japan had cabled to Washington in 1958 that the Japanese government might object to the use of American bases in Japan in a war against China.⁶⁶ The air build-up in Taiwan had drawn on the 5th Air Force units from Japan for the Composite Nuclear Strike Force, including airlift C-130s from Ashiya.⁶⁷ The U.S. kept the Japanese government well enough informed about its use of the bases to avoid the need to request permission. But the uncertainty over Japan's response - already embroiled in a domestic debate over the renewal of the U.S.-Japan security treaty - cast doubt over the feasibility of implementing the nuclear attack plan in 1958.⁶⁸ Such uncertainty may have played a crucial role in the plan's ultimate abandonment.⁶⁹ As Edwin Reischauer, U.S. Ambassador to Japan from 1961 to 1966, commented recently, "We were walking along a dangerous precipice the whole time."⁷⁰



Matador nuclear cruise missile being prepared for launch, Andersen
Air Force Base, Guam, January 1961
(Pentagon Archives)



FOUR NUCLEAR OVERKILL

To my mind, the question to be decided is not whether we should or should not use atomic weapons . . . the question is rather when and how such weapons should be used. Should we, for example, in the event of war, begin by bombing major centers of population in enemy territory or start with smaller centers important for transportation or specific industries? This question should be answered not so much on the basis of humanitarian principles as from a practical weighing of the long-run advantage to this country.

—W. Walton Butterworth, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs,
September 15, 1948¹

To make credible its nuclear threats against China and other “Soviet surrogates”, the Eisenhower administration accelerated the deployment of nuclear-delivery systems surrounding mainland Asia. The real estate was ready throughout the Pacific since, as a 1951 Joint Chiefs of Staff memo put it: “[A]cquisition by the United States of its foreign bases has been dictated largely by atomic weapons considerations.”² These considerations were not, however, the result of rational preparation for nuclear war. U.S. bases and nuclear delivery systems in the Pacific were the legacy of positions won in World War II and vicious infighting over the shrinking post-war military budget. As historian Roger Dingman explains, strategists primarily wrote warplans which inflated the nuclear role and basing requirements of each service:

Concerns of this sort helped make revised plans for war in East Asia more

offensive, if not pre-emptive. Indeed, they transformed the East Asian mainland into a tempting target of opportunity whose very existence could help validate individual service claims for exclusive possession or priority performance of a particular function.³

While Eisenhower projected an image of national unity and determined anti-Communist resolve, the story of nuclear war in the Pacific during the 1950s was less heroic. Battling over division of the defense budget, U.S. military services competed for pre-eminence in nuclear offensive capability and squabbled over nuclear targets. The main contenders in this inter-service nuclear rivalry were the Navy and the Strategic Air Command.

SAC's Pacific Spearhead

In the years after World War II, the Strategic Air Command (SAC), the heavy bomber division of the newly independent Air Force, moved quickly to take control of all aspects of nuclear war against the Soviet Union. As the admirals were well aware, SAC was about to challenge the Navy's dominion over its "own" ocean. SAC's General Whitehead wrote to the Commander of his Pacific Air Command in May 1947: "Can you imagine the consternation at Navy headquarters when you make the announcement of a mass move of a VHB [Very Heavy Bomber] Group, complete with its personnel from the Z.I. [Zone of Interior, that is, the U.S.] to Guam or Okinawa?"⁴

SAC did not delay pressing for advantage over the Navy in the Pacific. In April 1947, it began to rotate a bomber squadron from the U.S. to Japan for month-long tours in *Operation Finback*. In July, SAC highlighted its nuclear capability by flying B-29 bombers from Yokota, Japan to Washington, D.C. in thirty-one hours, stopping only at Alaska.⁵ In July, 1948, SAC staged an even more spectacular demonstration of its nuclear reach by flying two B-29s on an inaugural, globe-girdling trip via the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and thence on to the Philippines and Okinawa.*⁷

* The planes flew from the U.S. to Azores Island, Libya, Aden, Ceylon, Philippines, Okinawa, Hawaii, and back to the U.S. SAC planes deploying to the Far East thereafter often flew the Indian Ocean route to keep their hand in for an all-out attack on the U.S.S.R.⁶

For all its publicity-generating activity, SAC had only twenty-seven B-29 bombers in 1948 fitted out and trained to drop nuclear bombs.⁸ Codenamed Silver Plate, these aircraft were deployed to the Far East in 1948, the first time that they had flown outside the U.S. since the nuclear attack on Japan.⁹ In the month-long tour in the Far East, the unit flew six "maximum effort" training missions in which the planes dropped bombs on Micronesian or Japanese islands, and simulated attacks on air bases in Guam, Korea, and Japan.¹⁰ The Silver Plate bombers also flew a series of nine "Top Secret" missions.

Whether these flights were dry-runs of the March 1948 emergency plan for nuclear war with the U.S.S.R. – code-named *Grabber* – is unknown. Under *Grabber*, SAC bombers were to begin the "air-atomic" offensive from bases in Britain, Pakistan, India, and Okinawa within a fortnight of the outbreak of a war.* The Navy, then conducting the *Operation Sandstone* nuclear tests in the West Pacific to prove its viability in the nuclear age, also objected vociferously to *Grabber*, which denied it a significant role in war with the U.S.S.R.¹² The need to demonstrate conclusively its superior offensive capability *vis-à-vis* the Navy may have impelled SAC to send the Silver Plate bombers to the Pacific in the first place.

It was not until the Korean War, however, that SAC developed an effective nuclear warfare capability in the northern Pacific. On paper, early plans such as the 1947 *Plan Earshot* assigned nuclear-armed SAC bombers to targets in the Soviet Union and China in the event of war.¹³ In reality, SAC bombers in the Pacific were not fully nuclear-capable until the early 1950s. At the height of the Korean War in 1951, SAC's Emergency War Plan allocated fifteen nuclear bombs to its wing on Guam for attacks on Vladivostok and Irkutsk.†¹⁵

Loaded with bombs – labelled "Look out Commies!" – the SAC B-29 bombers carried out their primary mission during the Korean War with devastating efficiency.¹⁶ In just two months, from mid-July to late September 1950, they "destroyed all significant strategic targets and enemy airfields in Korea," according to the official SAC history, and the

* The July 1948 joint emergency warplan described Okinawa as the *only* site from which the U.S. could launch a nuclear attack without worrying about allied consent.¹¹

† The military wrested possession of nuclear weapons back from the civilian Atomic Energy Commission in 1950, and received permission to store them outside of the United States in 1952.¹⁴

22nd and 92nd bomb groups returned to the U.S.*¹⁷ General Emmett O'Donnell, head of SAC's Far Eastern Bomber Command, described the results graphically in 1951: "Everything is destroyed . . . There is nothing standing worthy of the name."¹⁸

SAC's Japanese bases at Kadena and Yokota remained springboards for attacks on Soviet and Chinese targets after the Korean War. Since the early SAC bombers (the B-29, B-50 and B-36) were handicapped by a relatively short range, SAC was forced to rely on the forward bases close to potential targets. The advent of the B-47 in 1953, the first strategic jet bomber, did not substantially alter the situation. Although the plane could accelerate to 980 km per hour, it lacked the range to reach the Soviet Union from bases in the United States.¹⁹ Existing facilities were consequently expanded for B-47 use in Guam, Japan, and Okinawa.²⁰

In 1954, Guam became SAC's chief base in the Pacific, the keystone of its arc of forward support bases stretching to Okinawa and Japan. One of thirty-eight overseas SAC bases which encircled the Soviet Union and China from all points in the compass,²¹ Guam aimed its attacks primarily on airfields and nuclear bombers in the Soviet Far East.²²

Aside from the SAC bomber wing on Guam, the Air Force deployed nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in Taiwan, South Korea, and Okinawa to threaten China and the Soviet Far East. With a range of 960 km, the Matador missile was based in Taiwan in 1957 (under the overall command of the Navy),²³ while the Mace, with a range of 1,900 km, was deployed in 1961 in Okinawa and South Korea.²⁴ Though both of these cruise missiles were limited in range, they could nevertheless reach targets deep inside China. The Mace could even reach Vladivostok - the Soviet Union's primary naval base - and other targets in the Soviet Far East.²⁵

The Navy's Fight for a Nuclear Role

In the race for the lucrative budgetary link with nuclear warfare, the Army lost out to the Air Force and the Navy. The Army did manage to persuade Eisenhower to send its Long Tom 280 mm nuclear artillery to

* The 98th and 307th bomb groups remained in Yokota and Kadena, respectively.

Korea in 1953,²⁶ and Honest John short-range missiles followed between 1954 and 1956.²⁷ But the Army's nuclear programs were swamped by the Navy's nuclear fleet.

Nuclear weapons had threatened the independent existence of the Navy in the 1940s. With the Air Force positioned as the premier nuclear attack force, the Navy was forced into a painful examination of its role. In a famous memo written in December 1947, Rear Admiral Daniel Gallery argued:

The Navy will soon be obsolete. The next war will be different from any previous one. It seems obvious that the next time our Sunday punch will be an Atom Bomb aimed at the enemy capitols and industrial centers and that the outcome of the war will be determined by strategic bombing . . . I think the time is right now for the Navy to start an aggressive campaign aimed at proving that the Navy can deliver the Atom Bomb more effectively than the Air Force can.²⁸

While such a statement was heresy in the tradition-bound Navy of 1947, the Navy was fighting desperately with the Air Force for a nuclear role by the early 1950s. The two services first skirmished in 1948-1949 over planning for nuclear offensives against the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean. But the main battle for control over nuclear warfare capability unfolded in the Pacific.

The Navy's first maneuver to counter SAC's emerging control of all aspects of nuclear war was a defensive one: prove that the fleet could survive a nuclear attack. Staged in 1946, *Operation Crossroads* involved a full-blown atomic attack on an unmanned fleet off Bikini Atoll in the U.S. Trust Territory of the Marshall Islands. In the Navy's opinion, the fleet "survived."²⁹

Moving to the offensive, the Navy developed a "carrier-based nuclear option" to match the Air Force challenge. By February 1951, it had forged a rudimentary nuclear attack capability for carriers, with the deployment of nuclear-capable AJ-1 Savage and P2V-3C Neptune bombers.³⁰

The Navy demonstrated its readiness for a possible nuclear war by deploying the nuclear-armed carriers *Oriskany* and *Kearsage* off Korea in 1952.³¹ At the Navy's urging, the Atomic Energy Commission dramatically reduced the size and weight of nuclear weapons, permitting small aircraft to carry atomic bombs from carriers.³² Thus, by the late 1950s,

most of the fighters and all attack aircraft on Navy carriers could deliver light-weight nuclear ordnance, while selected fighter-bombers, the A3J Vigilante and the A6 Intruder, were assigned the city-busting, strategic bombing mission.³³ From 1960 until 1964, when Polaris missile submarines were deployed in the Pacific, two nuclear-strike carriers were on constant patrol off the Soviet Far East to defend the Navy's role in the SAC-dominated *Single Integrated Operational Plan* for nuclear war.³⁴ The Navy often flew fighter-bombers armed with nuclear weapons from its carriers toward China, ordering them to veer away just before crossing the coastline so that Navy intelligence planes could monitor Chinese radar defenses.³⁵

The Marines in the Pacific further enhanced the Navy's nuclear delivery capability. Former nuclear A-4 Skyhawk Marine pilot Lieutenant John Buchanan recently recalled:

My job on my primary mission days was to take off from Iwakuni, Japan, proceed across the China Sea, let down at low-level just before I reached the coast of China, and proceed inland at 100 feet off the ground and 350 knots or so until I came closer to my target. Then I was to accelerate to 500 knots and as I came over the target, to do a loop and toss my nuclear bomb in the air, continue the loop and proceed back to base . . . Later we were told that the purpose [of these SIOP missions] was to blow corridors through for the B-52s to make their way deeper into Russia . . . I was the Cold Warrior, very mechanical. I was gonna go over and bomb the military airfield in Peking and do a good job at it.³⁶

Although it conceded targets to the carriers, the Air Force was not enamored of the Navy's plan to hit coastal targets in Asia and Europe, seeing it as a "poorly camouflaged intrusion into the responsibilities of the newly autonomous service [i.e., the Air Force]." ³⁷ This inter-service conflict was so fierce that it often resulted in duplication of targeting plans.

Even *after* an inter-service conference in 1954, which had been convened expressly to address this problem, U.S. nuclear war planners still found that the Air Force and Navy had "duplicate" attacks on 115 airfields and forty industrial complexes in the Far East. There were even "triplicate" attacks on thirty-seven airfields and seven industrial complexes³⁸ — a phenomenon called "overbombing." Indeed, some Asian cities and bases were targeted by up to twenty-five nuclear war-

heads each! The 1958 nuclear war plan for the Pacific, in fact, specifically assigned the high priority ("enemy atomic delivery") targets to both the Navy and the Air Force.* SAC planners, however, refused to attach any significance to the Navy's nuclear attack forces, regarding them as too slow, unreliable, and small to bother adjusting the Air Force's Pacific strike strategy.†

In May 1954, the bitter Air Force-Navy conflict was played out in the proposed bombing of Dien Bien Phu (see Chapter 3). Aside from bombing the Viet Minh and provoking China, Admiral Arthur Radford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, apparently had another motive - proving the effectiveness of nuclear-bomb delivery by the Navy's carrier-based planes. In Pentagon planning conferences, the Air Force argued for a tactical nuclear strike by its B-29 bombers operating out of Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. However, Admiral Radford, a leading advocate of naval air power, later stated that the attack, if carried out, would have relied on the Navy's carriers.⁴²

In an effort to match the Air Force's deployment of Matador and Mace cruise missiles in Taiwan and Okinawa, the Navy developed a carrier-based nuclear option, and, in 1955, introduced a sea-fired cruise missile - the Regulus I - in the Pacific. The Regulus cruise missile, which could deliver a nuclear warhead 640 km to Soviet ports and cities, was carried by submarines like the *Grayback* and *Growler*, operating from Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan.⁴³

The Polaris missile-firing submarine was the Navy's answer to Air Force dominance over strategic nuclear weapons. Developed under the leadership of Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations during the Eisenhower administration, "the Polaris program [was] a specifi-

* SAC targets after 1955 were primarily inland Soviet airfields, while Navy targets were primarily Soviet airfields on the coastal periphery which would launch attacks on aircraft carriers and naval targets, especially pens which housed submarines which might threaten U.S. aircraft carriers. By 1956, however, naval nuclear-strike bombers could strike up to 2,700 km inland, competing with and greatly distressing SAC.³⁹

† The situation in 1954 continued. The 1958 nuclear appendix to the General Emergency Operational Plan called on SAC and CINCPAC to minimize the use of ground bursts which would increase fallout in order "to avoid alienation of potentially friendly populations in satellites and fringe areas (and allies)." ⁴⁰ Indeed, then-CINCPAC Admiral Felt worried that he might have to be "more concerned about residual radiation resulting from our own weapons than from the enemy." ⁴¹

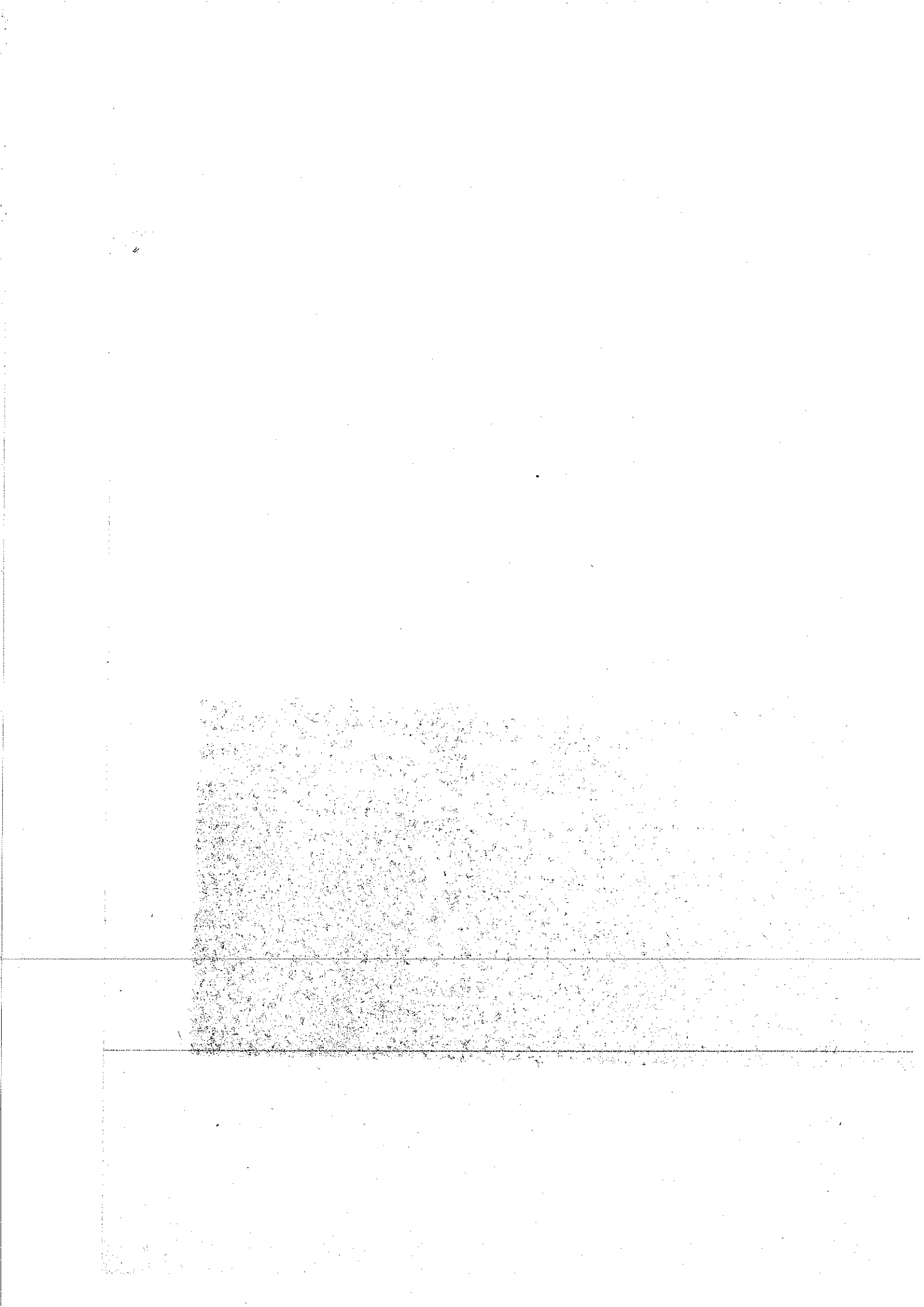
cally dedicated naval contribution to the strategic mission which, when fully implemented would allow the general purpose forces to remain dedicated to their limited war mission.”⁴⁴ Deployed in 1964, the new submarines operated in the Western Pacific using Apra Harbor in Guam as their forward base and carried Polaris missiles with a range of 2,000 km.

The Navy, in short, had more than caught up with SAC. It had become the cutting edge of the U.S. capacity to wage limited war, *and* was fast becoming a pillar of nuclear strategy.

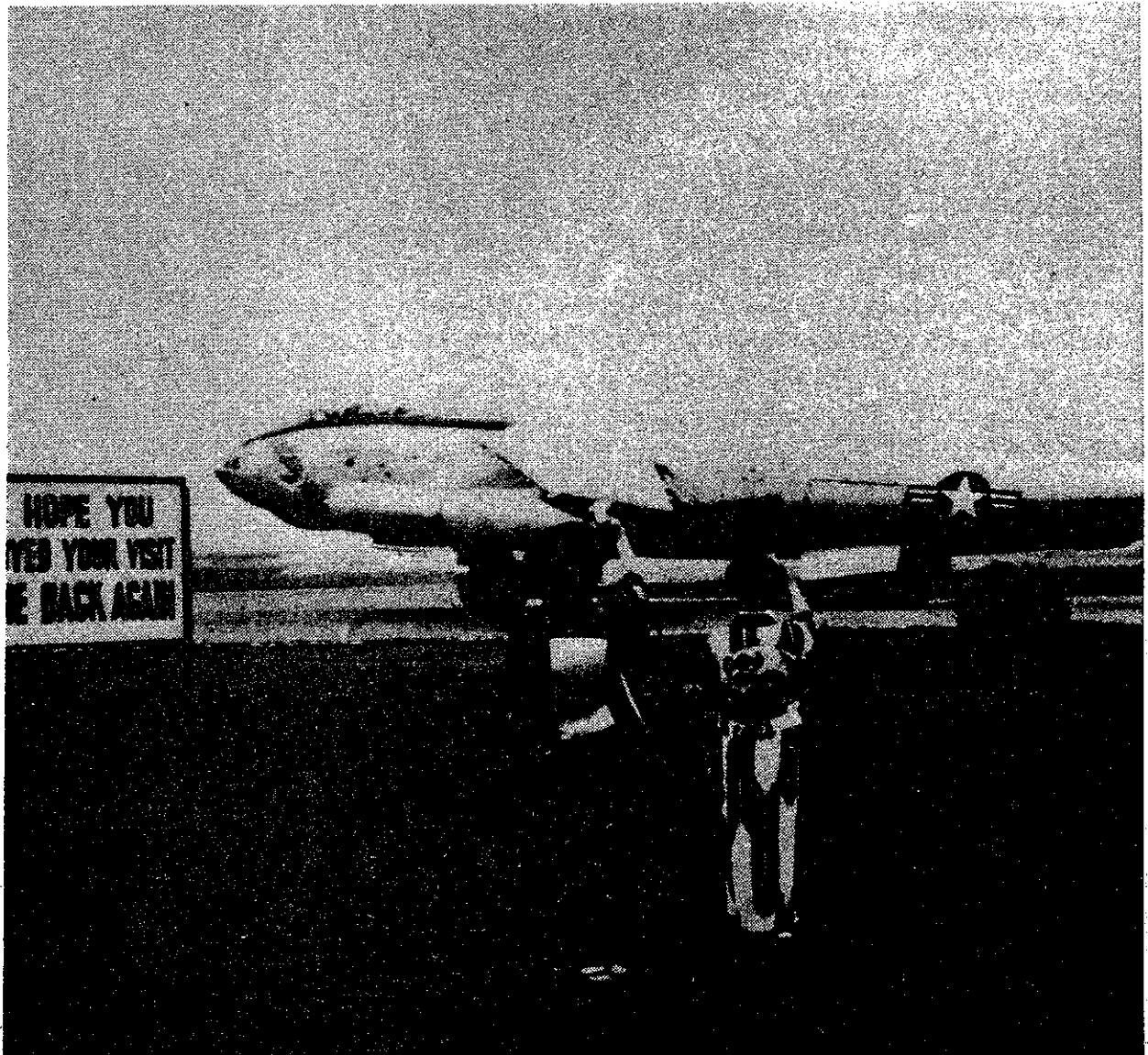
Nuclear Lake

By the end of the Eisenhower administration in 1960, the Pacific had become a nuclear lake. After expelling the indigenous population, the U.S. used Bikini and Eniwetok atolls in the central Pacific for at least sixty-six nuclear tests between 1946 and 1958. These included the *Bravo* hydrogen bomb explosion of 1954, the largest and dirtiest ever detonated by the U.S. Patrolling the Western Pacific were two 7th Fleet carriers which had a primary role under the new strategic targeting program, adopted in 1961.⁴⁵ Roaming the Pacific's depth were five submarines capable of attacking the Soviet Far East and China with nuclear-armed Regulus cruise missiles. Ground-launched cruise missiles were stationed in Okinawa, Taiwan, and South Korea. The Marines and Army had small nuclear weapons ready for use in ground wars. And in Guam a SAC wing was prepared to spearhead a nuclear offensive.

On offshore islands, on surface vessels, underwater, and in the air over the Pacific, U.S. forces were ready to rain nuclear ruin on the Soviet Union, China, or any other enemy. One U.S. Senator called this awesome nuclear strike capacity “a perfectly fabulous capability of delivering nuclear weapons in the Communist countries.”⁴⁶



Well-wishers wave at B-47 nuclear-capable bomber departing Yokota, Japan, 1954
(Strategic Air Command)



FIVE NUCLEAR WAR BY THE BOOK

We have the ability now, right now, to destroy any enemy that wants to attack us or does attack us, regardless of what it [the enemy] does, or when it does it, or how it does it, or anything else.

—Admiral Arleigh Burke, 1960¹

Limited nuclear war represents our most effective strategy against nuclear powers or against a major power which is capable of substituting manpower for technology.

—Henry Kissinger, 1957²

American nuclear threats in the 1950s were matched by a frenzy of nuclear war preparation and planning. These preparations pivoted on the string of forward bases in Japan and the Western Pacific, which were fashioned into a bastion for U.S. nuclear forces. While Asia-Pacific host countries became involved in every aspect of nuclear war – command and control of nuclear weapons, communications and intelligence for “target nomination”, and execution of atomic attack – the U.S. sought neither their advice nor approval of the nuclear build-up.

U.S. plans for nuclear war were complex, confusing, and contradictory. Other than the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S. had no real experience in nuclear war. Although the atomic tests in the Marshall Islands simulated nuclear war operations in remote areas,³

U.S. military leaders were simply shadow-boxing with their own imaginations. As pioneers of a whole new concept of warfare, they were forced to invent bureaucratic rules and procedures for nuclear operations.

In 1955 and 1956, the Far East Command formalized these new rules as the *Standard Operating Procedure for Atomic Operation in the Far East* (hereafter, *SOP*).⁴ These recently discovered documents provide a rare glimpse of the surreal character of nuclear war planning in the Pacific in the mid-1950s. Most importantly, they reveal that the all-important problem of control over the use of nuclear weapons – who can give the order to fire and under what circumstances – was far from resolved. Indeed, the *SOP* demonstrates no less than four ways in which the use of nuclear weapons could escape the control of the responsible military commanders.

Furthermore, the documents demonstrate conclusively that the United States, despite repeated refusals to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons, routinely stored nuclear weapons in Japan and the Far East in the 1950s. They also show that Japan was the hub for nuclear command and communications and that nuclear bombers intended for attack on China and Korea were to have been launched from and “recovered” to Japan.

The U.S. Navy’s Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) developed an *Operational Plan* in 1958 that offers another view inside the bizarre world of nuclear war planning of the 1950s. As the 1958 *Operational Plan* explains in great detail, U.S. Navy commanders expected to lose communication with each other and with Washington, D.C., in a nuclear war. Once communications collapsed, local commanders were still expected to use nuclear weapons.

The *Operational Plan* reveals remarkable discrepancies between the intent and probable outcomes of U.S. plans in the event of an actual nuclear war. The inability of CINCPAC to separate China from Russia, the possibility of inadvertent nuclear war due to loose control procedures, and CINCPAC’s expectation that nuclear weapons would be used at the outset of a general war, all highlight how little the U.S. military had learned after a decade of deploying nuclear weapons in the Pacific. Indicative of their remarkable ignorance of the consequences of nuclear war, U.S. commanders prepared Asian and American Special Forces for combat inside the Soviet Union and China *after* the advent of nuclear war.

Competing Nuclear Commanders

The fragmentation of command among competing services made control of nuclear weapons in the Pacific especially complex. Headquartered in Tokyo, the Far East Command was an Army fiefdom from 1946 to 1957. Created to accommodate General MacArthur's ego and the ferocious inter-service rivalry over spheres of command in the war-time Pacific, the Far East Command was a unified inter-service command (Army, Navy, Air Force) covering Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa,* the Philippines, and the Bonin Islands. Reflecting MacArthur's enormous personal prestige, the Commander-in-Chief Far East (CINCFE) answered directly to the Army representative on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The rest of the Pacific, China, and Micronesia fell under the Navy's Pacific Command, reflecting the role of carrier airpower and the Marine amphibious forces in World War II.⁶ In 1947, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, accountable to the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington D.C., donned a second hat as Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC). Although he supplied naval forces to the Army's Far East Command, CINCPAC retained operational control of the 7th Fleet in the West Pacific.⁷

Overlapping these boundaries in 1947, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) kept command posts in Japan and Alaska to coordinate with theater commanders. Senior SAC staff were at home in the Pacific. Indeed, the Chief Commander of SAC in the late 1940s, General Curtis Le May, had directed the World War II bombing of Japan and his three top staff had served with him in the Marianas.⁸

In 1954, Guam became the command post for Far Eastern operations by SAC's Third Air Division,⁹ and in October, the first B-36 wing to be deployed outside the U.S. arrived on ninety-day rotation.¹⁰ SAC regarded training deployments in the Pacific as more convenient than Europe because U.S. allies did not constrain SAC's overflights.

This division of commands by area and function continued until 1952, when the Joint Chiefs shifted Taiwan from the Far East to Pacific Command after rejecting MacArthur's request to stock nuclear weapons there at the height of the Korean War.¹¹ In 1957, the Navy – by allying itself with the Air Force – scored a final victory in the bureau-

* Okinawa was added October 4, 1950 after the outbreak of war in Korea.⁵

cratic battles for the Pacific when its Pacific Command swallowed the Army's Far East Command.¹²

Fragmentation of U.S. military commands meant that the Far East Command's *Standard Operating Procedure for Atomic Operations (SOP)* formed only part of Pacific nuclear war planning. It did not control SAC's operational procedures (which remain classified) or CINCPAC's, which are available only for 1958. During its brief ascendancy during the Korean War and its aftermath, the Far East Command's *SOP* clearly attempted to impose some order on the decentralized chaos of nuclear operations. The *SOP* refers obliquely to this imperative by stating that its rationale was to ensure that the Far East Commander employed his allocation of nuclear weapons "efficiently and effectively."¹³

The 1951 Johns Hopkins University report to the Far East Command on nuclear warfare in Korea had concluded: "[I]t generally will not be feasible to set up new separate procedures and doctrines for the tactical use of nuclear weapons except to the extent that these new procedures and doctrines can be integrated into and coordinated with, procedure and doctrine applicable to the tactical use of *all* weapons."¹⁴ Like the 1955 *SOP*, the study recognized that nuclear weapons were unprecedented and their use would compress the normal time for military organization from years and months to weeks and days. The 1955 *SOP* tried to resolve the key organizational problems identified in the 1951 report - maintenance of central control, effective integration of ground-air intelligence and operations, and target identification.¹⁵

Rules of the Game

After the Korean War, General John Hull, former head of the 1948 U.S. nuclear tests in the West Pacific, was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Far East, over the heads of senior Army officers. Drawing on his experience with the testing program which, he wrote in 1948, "simulates actual [nuclear] wartime operations", Hull brought considerable nuclear enthusiasm and expertise to Tokyo.¹⁶

General Maxwell Taylor took over in April 1955, and issued the Command's first *SOP* in June 1955. The *SOP* was revamped in 1956 by Taylor's replacement, General Lyman Lemnitzer.

In 1955, General Taylor was responsible for waging nuclear war in the Far East. Denied prior authority to use nuclear weapons, he had to

get the nod from the President via the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) when hostilities broke out or were imminent. The General assumed that receipt of such a go-ahead would be problem-free: "Upon initiation of hostilities, on a scale warranting the use of atomic weapons," he stated, "it is expected that CINCFE [Commander-in-Chief, Far East] will be authorized to expend atomic weapons, in support of combat operations, in accordance with current JCS policy and operation plans."¹⁷ Although this authorization would have activated the entire structure of command and control over atomic warfare in the Far East, the General offered absolutely no operational procedures if he were to lose contact with Washington.*

Unlike the nuclear weapons authority structure of the 1980s, this arrangement did not require Taylor to seek approval for each atomic strike. Instead, he apparently received a general authorization to use nuclear weapons as he saw fit, and even had the discretion to further delegate nuclear authority† to subordinate commanders.

General Taylor appointed a Deputy for Atomic Operations (hereafter the Deputy) who acted as his representative at the Theater Joint Operations Center (hereafter the Center). The brain of atomic warfare in the Far East, the Center acted as his "joint agency for the planning and coordination of atomic operations."¹⁸ Besides his Deputy, the General selected the Center's administrative/executive director. General Lemnitzer instructed the center's director to keep "a current display of all Far East Command Atomic Operations and those operations of other commanders which may affect the Far East Command effort."²⁰ The three component commands - Army, Navy, Air Force§ - were also represented at the Center, which was based at Taylor's headquarters in Tokyo. ||

* It is possible, of course, that he received orders on this matter which were regarded as so sensitive that they were not incorporated in the top secret *SOP*.

† By which we (following the *SOP*) mean authority to expend nuclear weapons as specified.

‡ The Center was initially run by the Far East Air Force, which appointed the director and operated "in coordination" with two assistant directors from the other two services. In 1956, General Lemnitzer took back the power to appoint the Center's director.¹⁹

§ The component commands were: Army Forces, Far East/8th U.S. Army; Navy Forces, Far East; Far East Air Force.²¹

|| Emergency alternate sites were located at Fuchu Air Station and Yokosuka in Japan.²²

At the most general level, the Far East Commander's responsibilities were exercised through the Center "by acting on component commanders' proposed atomic strike plans, by allocating weapons, and by delegating to component commanders authority to expend weapons."²³ Taylor or his Deputy was also responsible for approving targets and resolving local inter-service rivalries.²⁴ In 1956, General Lemnitzer for the first time dealt with emergency destruction of nuclear weapons, claiming that he controlled such activity.²⁵

Once granted nuclear authority, Taylor had two options: he could retain all authority to use nuclear weapons; or he could order his commanders to expend specific warheads. These standing orders detailed further procedures for either a planned or emergency war situation. Significantly, General Lemnitzer defined an "emergency" in 1956 to be "a situation which gravely affects a commander's forces and requires immediate usage of any weapons at his command *without regard to Standing Procedures.*"²⁶ In other words, the appropriate procedure for emergency situations was to abandon all the control and coordination structures set up by the *SOP*!

General Taylor could also authorize his commanders to nominate targets for atomic destruction. "Analyzing a specific target and determining that it warrants atomic attack," he directed, "is the responsibility of the nominating commander."²⁷ If General Taylor elected to retain expenditure authority either before or during an actual war, his commanders would submit Atomic Strike Nomination Messages to the Center which maintained the current list of targets, updated with the latest information for the first day of nuclear war.²⁸ In an emergency, when conditions changed and new situations emerged rapidly, the Center switched to a Prenominating Intelligence Reporting System. The System then used intelligence information to classify a nominated target as a "scheduled target", a potential "target of opportunity", or a "contingent target" (needing more intelligence to qualify for the nuclear hit-list).²⁹

The primary role of the Center was to ensure that targeting was coordinated - and correct. Anticipating problems of duplication, both Generals ordered the Center "to include all target conflicts which have not been resolved" in the presentation to the Commander-in-Chief Far East at the daily meeting on the Atomic Operations Plan.³⁰ Inter-service conflicts and competitive targeting, in other words, had remained a problem despite the creation of two major multi-service boards, the

Joint Coordination Center at Hawaii, and the Joint Coordination Center Far East of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.^{*32} Indeed, General Taylor may have initiated the *SOP* for presentation to the annual Worldwide Coordination Conferences held in Washington, D.C., to mediate inter-service squabbles over nuclear targets.³³

While targeting procedures were the same whether the Far East Commander retained or delegated nuclear strike authority, the procedures for executing the attack differed. If he retained authority, his officers developed the strike plan and he approved all strikes. In a nuclear war, he was to have sent out Atomic Strike Execute Messages to his commanders from the Center, giving the signal to bomb nominated targets. If he chose to delegate his authority, his commanders were required only to notify the Center of their intended targets. The Center, in turn, was to coordinate these intention-to-strike messages at a daily planning conference to ensure that nuclear weapons were used efficiently. Once the nominated target was checked, the Center would then reply to the commanders with Atomic Strike Execute Messages,³⁴ and nuclear warheads, in theory, would start flying.

Whichever option the Far East Commander chose, nuclear strikes were supposed to require receipt of the execute message. When he retained authority to expend nuclear weapons, his execute message to commanders ordered them to implement *his* warplan. Conversely, if he delegated his authority to component commanders, the execute message merely rationalized the nuclear attacks, weeding out duplication and error. As we shall see, this distinction was central to the loopholes in the system that could allow the whole procedure to go haywire.

In either case, the Far East Commander was to compile an Atomic Strike Plan Summary Message for dispatch to the Joint Chiefs' representative at the Joint Coordination Center in Tokyo and to his own commanders. To transfer these messages, General Taylor set up a communication system over eleven teletype, telephone, and radio channels which connected the Center with subordinate commanders, the Joint Chiefs of Staff representative in Japan, and the region's other nuclear command posts (most importantly, the Strategic Air Command). Each, in turn, "patched" messages through to their own senior commanders in the U.S.³⁵ The General ordered that "instantaneous

* Which included the Far East Command, Strategic Air Command, Alaskan Command, and Pacific Command.³¹

communications” were “mandatory” in nuclear operations and warned commanders that “delays inherent in normal command and administrative networks cannot be tolerated.”³⁶ Although consistent with the imperatives of controlling nuclear weapons, this order defied the reality of unreliable communications across the vastness of the Pacific. Loss of communications, as we shall see, was a key pathway to loss of control over nuclear weapons. The dilemma continues to haunt nuclear war planners four decades later.

Loss of Control

Although control over its own nuclear arsenal was a top priority of the Far East Command during the 1950s, the actual control over atomic weapons remained highly decentralized and was weakened by four crucial loopholes in the standard operating procedures. The first loophole concerned exceptions to the requirement that the Center issue an execute message before an atomic strike could be carried out. “Failure to receive such an execute message . . . from the TJOC [Theater Joint Operations Center],” declared General Lemnitzer, “will *not* preclude such a strike from being executed as scheduled in the atomic intentions message . . .”³⁷ In plain English, a commander with delegated authority to use nuclear weapons did not require approval from the Center to carry out an atomic strike. This leeway was granted despite explicit assertion elsewhere that the Atomic Strike Execute Message was crucial in avoiding unauthorized, incorrect, or improper targeting.[†]³⁸

Since this reversal of standard procedure might encourage a cavalier attitude toward atomic strikes among field commanders, General Lemnitzer warned:

This is not to be construed that the coordination machinery of the TJOC [Theater Joint Operations Center] be ignored but rather that *the tactical com-*

* The issue was simply neglected in the first SOP.

† General Lemnitzer noted that if the Execute Message did not include the identifying numbers attached to nominated targets by the originating command in his message to the Center, then those targets “either were *not approved by the CINCFE (Commander-in-Chief, Far East) or were in conflict with another commander* and are being held pending the results of that commander’s strike.”³⁷

commander is free to exercise his command prerogatives, if for some reason (i.e. loss of communications, mission or forces are in jeopardy) such coordination machinery is not available. Notwithstanding, it is the responsibility of the individual commander to insure that all precautions have been taken to prevent the inadvertent destruction of friendly forces. Under these circumstances, it would be incumbent on the commander having so exercised his command prerogative to inform this command of his action as soon as the tactical situation permits.³⁹

By admitting that an Execute Message aimed only to coordinate but not control nuclear strikes, this SOP directive contained immense room for nuclear mistakes.

A second potential loss of centralized control arose from General Lemnitzer's order to the head of Far East Air Force about the conduct of close air support strikes. If the commander "desires to assign an alternate target," he instructed, "*the plan will not be delayed for inclusion of this alternate target if such delay could prevent meeting the [bomb delivery] time on target.*"⁴⁰ That is, if the original target could not be located, and if an air commander in close enemy range spotted a suitable substitute, the attack could proceed without prior approval from either the Center or Far East Command.

This blanket approval for atomic air strikes clearly allowed for enormous error on the part of a combat commander. Aside from the directive's obvious potential for poor coordination, bombardiers were notorious for misidentifying targets from the air.*

Another potentially disastrous source of confusion arose from the possibility of naval nuclear strikes outside of the Far East Command's control system. General Taylor ordered that "when conditions require that carrier task forces maintain radio silence, Naval commanders to

* Because pilots and aircrews were untrained in air observation and interpretation of ground targets, flew over unfamiliar territory, and moved at high speeds at low altitude, the 1951 report on use of nuclear weapons in Korea concluded that "Visual observation, particularly by bombers and fighters, has low credibility."⁴¹ Identifying nuclear targets added special intelligence requirements, viz. estimation of the point location of the target center; the size of the target and the numbers and distribution of equipment and personnel within the area target; and distinguishing friend from foe.⁴² In a training bombing run in 1948, for example, B-29 bombers hit the inhabited island of Kuma-shima rather than the target island range on Tori-shima, despite the lead bombardier's clear view of the target.⁴³

whom authority to expend [nuclear] weapons has been delegated *may accomplish planning and execution of strikes with these weapons within the Navy structure.*" Thus, all the Navy had to do to launch a nuclear attack was submit its Strike Intention Messages to the Center "as far in advance of execution as possible."⁴⁴ This discretion simply recognized the *de facto* autonomy of the Navy's Pacific Command and its extreme reluctance to subordinate naval nuclear forces to the Army's Far East Command. These decentralized procedures allowed for overlapping and potentially disastrous nuclear strikes by the Army's Far East Command in competition with the Navy's Pacific Command headquarters.

The instructions to the emergency disposal units are the fourth and most remarkable route to a potential loss of control over nuclear weapons. "In the event that capture of atomic weapons is imminent and communications have been disrupted or time *does not permit the request for and receipt of authority to dispose of atomic weapons,*" directed General Lemnitzer, "all concerned" were, in order of priority, to:

- (1) Evacuate all material.
- (2) Evacuate nuclear components and utilize non-nuclear components [presumably the high explosive detonators] . . . against known or suspected targets.
- (3) Evacuate nuclear components and destroy non-nuclear components.
- (4) *Utilize weapons as atomic weapons against known or suspected targets.*
- (5) Destroy nuclear and non-nuclear components.⁴⁵

The General ordered, in short, that nuclear weapons should be used – without further approval – if the warheads could not be evacuated during a crisis. That is, he preferred the risks of nuclear explosions to the risks of simply rendering the weapons inoperable.

Japan, Nuclear Pivot of the 1950s

Military strategists of the 1950s imagined nuclear war to be a more relaxed activity than the apocalypse envisaged in the 1980s. Instead of minutes and hours, nuclear war planners thought in terms of months and even years. As Albert Wohlstetter wrote in a 1954 Rand Corporation report: "The job of Strategic Air Command is not likely to be accomplished by the first strike, and repeated strikes against the enemy

will be required.”⁴⁶ In establishing its procedures for *daily* wartime planning conferences at the Center, General Taylor anticipated that nuclear warfare would be a protracted affair.⁴⁷ CINCPAC’s nuclear annex to the Joint Chiefs’ *General Emergency Operational Plan** likewise assumed that the first phase of a nuclear war would last a month.⁴⁸ Logistical planning for nuclear war reflected the military’s conception of a leisurely pace.

Some time between 1952, when nuclear weapons were released to the military for overseas deployment,⁴⁹ and 1955, when General Taylor issued the first *SOP*, the Far East Command set up a fullblown nuclear weapons storage and logistics system in the Pacific. While nuclear command and control were superficially centralized at Taylor’s Center in Tokyo, nuclear weapons delivery, storage, recovery, and disposal units were dispersed throughout the Far East. Due to the limited facilities available to the Far East Command when General Lemnitzer issued the second *SOP* in November 1956, even the forward-deployed portion had to be kept at the SAC-controlled storage site in Guam. “In the event of a global war or contingency operations in the Far East,” explained Lemnitzer, “that portion of CINCFE’s [Commander-in-Chief, Far East’s] allocation of atomic weapons remaining in CONUS [Continental United States] on D-Day will be airlifted to the Far East Command.”⁵⁰

The *SOP*, moreover, reveals what the U.S. military has never admitted publicly: “In addition to those [nuclear weapons] stored in the CINCSAC [Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Air Command] sites referred to above,† *CINCFE’s atomic weapons and components are stored in storage sites under the operational control of the component commands of the FEC [Far East Command].*”⁵¹ This statement provides the first official documentary evidence that the U.S. stored nuclear weapons in Japan and elsewhere in East Asia in the 1950s.

Under Lemnitzer’s *SOP*, either he or his Deputy for Atomic Operations coordinated supply and resupply of nuclear weapons (except for naval forces which were to normally rely on CINCPAC for nuclear weapons support). Moving downward on the chain of command, twenty-three officers at thirteen sites held nuclear weapon “accounts”

* This is not the *Oplan 25-58* used in the Taiwan Straits crisis.

† Earlier, the *SOP* refers to a singular SAC site being used for CINCFE nuclear storage. As SAC forces based at Yokota shifted to Guam between June 1954 and April 1955, this SAC site must have been Guam, as must have been those referred to as CINCSAC “sites.”

**Table 5.1:
Nuclear Weapon "Accounts and Disposal Units", Far East Command, 1956-1957**

Country	Command	Site
A. Sites of Far East Command Nuclear Weapon Accounts (1957) ^a		
Japan	Army Forces, Far East	Ikego AD, Zuchi (2)
	Air Forces, Far East	Hazuke Air Field, 80th Fighter Bomber Squadron (1)
		Johnson AB (1)
		Misawa AB (2)
		Komaki AB (1)
	Navy Forces, Far East	Sasebo NOF (1)
		Yokosuka NOF (1)
		Iwakuni NAS (2)
		Atsugi NAS (1)
		Sabe, RYCOM AD (2)
Okinawa	Army Forces, Far East	Kadena, 7th Tactical Depot Squadron (5) ^b
	Air Forces, Far East	Kadena, 12th Fighter Bomber Squadron (1)
	Navy Forces, Far East	Naha NAF (1)
Iwo Jima	Air Forces, Far East	Central Air Base, 7th Tactical Air Squadron (2)
B. Far East Command Sites with Nuclear Weapon Disposal Capability, (1956) ^c		
Japan	Army Forces, Far East	7th OD, Ikego AD, Zuchi
		17th OD, Funaoka AD, Funaoka
		Hozono AD, Kamada
	Air Forces, Far East	2715th ASSD, Tachikawa AB

Table 5.1: (cont)

	Naval Forces, Far East	2716th ASSD, Yamode AP, Kokura 2718th ASSD, Kozajo NOF, Yokosuka NOF, Sasebo
Okinawa	Army Forces, Far East Air Forces, Far East	5th OD, Machinato 546th ASSD, Kadena AB
Guam	Air Forces, Far East	Anderson AB
Philippines	Air Forces, Far East	Clark AB
South Korea	Army Forces, Far East	8th OD, Uijongbu

Key: () - Number of nuclear weapon accounts; AB - Air Base; AD - Ammunition Depot; AP - Ammunition Park; ASSD - Ammunition Supply Squadron Depot; NAS - Naval Air Station; NOF - Naval Ordnance Facility; OD - Ordnance Detachment; RYCOM - Ryukyus Command.

Notes: a. From Far East Command, *Standard Operating Procedure for Atomic Operations* (mimeo), 1956, Appendix 11, p. D-11-1.

b. Three of these officers were in receipt of "Nuclear items only". The remainder could also receive non-nuclear parts of nuclear weapons.

c. From *ibid.*, Appendix 1 to Annex D, revised January 1957.

and were responsible to Lemnitzer for receipt, custody, and tracking of nuclear weapons (see Table 5.1). In 1957, these officers were located in Japan, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima.

In addition, fourteen nuclear weapon disposal units were active in the Far East Command in 1956. The Far Eastern Army and Air Forces had six units each, and the Navy had two units. Since emergency disposal was integral to nuclear warfighting orders, the presence of disposal capability identified a fighting unit as nuclear-capable. Although concentrated in Japan, the disposal units were more widespread than nuclear weapon accounts, and were found in Okinawa, Iwo Jima, south Korea, Guam, and the Philippines.

The presence of a disposal unit, however, did not demonstrate that nuclear weapons were stored at a particular site; for that, munition storage units were undoubtedly required. It seems logical that only the six sites with both nuclear accounts *and* storage depots listed in Table 5.1 could have served as nuclear weapons storage sites.* Nuclear weapons were probably just transshipped through the nine account sites without munitions storage† in peacetime; in wartime, nuclear weapons would have been shipped to nuclear-capable forces at these sites without interim storage. Overall, Japan was clearly the logistical center for Far Eastern nuclear operations.

It is possible that the U.S. stored the actual nuclear fissile material of the bombs – known as the “core” – only in U.S.-controlled Okinawa, and not at Ikego, Sasebo, or Yokosuka in mainland Japan. However, we can infer from the *SOP* statement that, at the very least, the “non-nuclear” mechanical assemblies for nuclear weapons were stored at one of the mainland sites in Japan in the late 1950s.‡ Indeed, a 1958 CINCPAC message to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff confirms that this was probably the arrangement.§ “With the advent of sealed pit

* That is, at Ikego, Sasebo, and Yokosuka in Japan; Sobe/Machinado and Kadena in Okinawa; and Anderson in Guam (where SAC stored Far East Command’s weapons).

† That is, Hazuke, Johnson, Misawa, Komaki, Iwakuni, Atsugi, Sobe, Naha, and Iwo Jima.

‡ The *SOP* states that “atomic weapons and components are stored in [Far East Command-controlled] storage sites”, that is, not just at Okinawa.

§ Because the heat released from fissile materials could distort sensitive components, the nuclear cores were stored separately from the rest of the bomb in the first designs. In about 1958, advanced designs known as “sealed pit” allowed the core to be stored in the

weapons,” cabled Admiral Harry Felt, “the need for complete weapons at aircraft sites will become immeasurably greater.”⁵² The introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan, Felt stated, had “no solution which will meet fully Jap [sic] and U.S. desires.” He then outlined U.S. nuclear weapon options in Japan:

- (1) To maintain the status quo with respect to weapons in Japan even though other stocks are converted to sealed pit weapons.
- (2) To remove non-nuclear components from Japan when they become obsolete, without replacement.
- (3) Secretly to replace non-nuclear components with sealed pit weapons when the former become obsolete.⁵³

The “status quo” may therefore have been the storage of nuclear weapons components in Japan without the cores. While the third option – secretly introducing weapons with cores into Japan – was the “most desirable militarily”, Felt recommended maintaining the status quo because it was “the most practicable at this time.” The third option was adopted – as far as is known – only at one, and possibly two sites after 1960.

General Lemnitzer’s *SOP* also reveals some of the potential U.S. nuclear targets in Asia. In explaining how to transmit Atomic Strike Execute messages, he cites the example of a one-megaton attack by a bomber from Kadena Air Base in Okinawa on a Chinese airfield about 95 km from the Soviet border.⁵⁴ A typical Atomic Strike Intention message ordered a F-100 plane from Misawa Air Base in Japan to launch a nuclear strike on a target in Korea just north of the Demilitarized Zone.⁵⁵

In cases where Far East Command’s forces could not deliver the nuclear strike, the Center was to request support from Strategic Air Command (SAC).⁵⁶ In one example, Far East Command requests a SAC bomber to deliver a 1 megaton Mark 6 bomb on an airfield in north-west Korea close to the Chinese border, to explode at 1,000 m altitude over a large concentration of aircraft.⁵⁷ Another model message calls for an Honest John missile to explode 300 m above the “target of

assembly, simplifying logistical arrangements, but complicating the political aspects of overseas storage. Before sealed pit weapons were deployed, the U.S. could claim that nuclear weapons minus the core were not nuclear weapons.

opportunity”, a concentration of troops north of the Demilitarized Zone, just 6 km from U.S. forces.⁵⁸

Op Plan 58: Quick Strike and Preemptive Strike

The *SOP* was not the only attempt to rationalize and control nuclear warfare in the Pacific. Admiral Harry Felt, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC), compiled the Pacific portion of the Joint Chiefs’ *General Emergency Operational Plan* for his Command in 1958, one year after it absorbed the Far East Command.* Reviewing the nuclear near-misses in Korea, Vietnam, and the Taiwan Straits, he also ordered his subordinates to amend all his contingency warplans to include non-nuclear options.⁵⁹ Despite this development, his warplan continued to assume that nuclear weapons would be used at the *outset* of general war between the “Sino-Soviet bloc” and the U.S.⁶⁰

Codenamed *Normal*, the basic CINCPAC nuclear warplan contained options ranging from *Quick Strike* mobilization to counter a Soviet attack-without-warning, to a carefully planned U.S. preemptive strike against the Sino-Soviet bloc.†⁶⁴ In contrast to the 1958 Taiwan crisis, CINCPAC’s 1958 *Operational Plan* relied on nuclear forces already based in the Far East. The plans called for SAC KC-97 tankers loaded with nuclear weapons in Guam and Okinawa to fly to Japan in an all-out war. There the nuclear weapons were to be shifted to nuclear aircraft for strikes on China and the Soviet Union.⁶⁵

These CINCPAC arrangements may have supplanted the nuclear storage system maintained by the Far East Command until its absorp-

* Hereafter called CINCPAC’s 1958 *Operational Plan*.

† To implement *Normal* in 1958, Felt had 48 B-57s bombers from Johnson Air Base in Japan, and 225 F-100 fighter-bombers based in Itazuki and Misawa in Japan, Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, and Clark Air Base in the Philippines,⁶¹ as well as numerous carrier-based strike aircraft and missiles in Taiwan and south Korea. The *Plan* orders that a preemptive strike “will be directed to the elimination of Soviet long-range nuclear weapon delivery capability, attainment of air superiority, containment of Soviet air-ground offensives, destruction of Soviet war sustaining facilities, and isolation and elimination of deployed Soviet and Satellite [that is, Chinese, north Korean, and possibly north Vietnamese] military forces.”⁶² In the *Quick Strike* option for nuclear attack, on the other hand, U.S. bombers were to attack Soviet and Chinese cities and military targets for instant retaliation to “cause maximum disruption.”⁶³

tion by CINCPAC in 1957. Reflecting the changes in command, the 1958 *Operational Plan* ordered the 315th Air Division in Okinawa to “maintain sufficient aircraft on a continuous 30-minute departure alert at Kadena and Central Air Base, loaded with weapons and/or nuclear capsules for delivery of first wave requirements to bases in Japan.”⁶⁶ The 5th Air Force in Japan in turn was ordered to “maintain capability to commence launch of atomic forces in Japan within one hour of receipt of complete nuclear weapons.”⁶⁷

Japan’s role as the key nuclear attack platform was spelled out with absolute clarity in the 1958 *Operational Plan*. Similarly, in 1960, the Defense Department informed the U.S. President of a top secret plan for SAC aircraft to use two U.S. bases in Japan for recovery of Guam-based nuclear bombers and SAC “post-strike operations.”⁶⁸ Not even U.S. Ambassador to Japan Edwin Reischauer was apprised of these plans. He later noted of the Japanese that “They wouldn’t [have known] if I didn’t.”⁶⁹

Unconventional Nuclear Warfare

Air-delivered nuclear bombs evidently did not satisfy CINCPAC. The 1958 *Operational Plan* reveals that Admiral Felt intended to use trained Asian* and U.S. “unconventional warfare” forces in a nuclear attack in China or the Soviet Far East “to exploit the chaotic conditions resulting from the atomic attacks.” These forces were to infiltrate “indigenous special forces into areas which have been attacked with atomic bombs and disorganized”, and “rally indigenous elements opposed to Communist regime before enemy security control could be reestablished.”⁷⁰ The U.S. personnel, furthermore, could back-pack atomic demolition munitions, and were assigned the dangerous mission of pinpointing “targets such as bridges, tunnels, power plants, difficult to attack by conventional means.” The *Operational Plan* noted that “Unconventional Warfare use of Atomic Demolition Munitions allows precise placement and limits excessive destruction . . . Initial strikes against psychological-political forces [later defined as “fixed military installations adjacent to population centers”] may provide necessary

* Presumably the Nationalist Chinese, possibly trained at the CIA Station at Saipan in the Marianas Islands in the 1950s.

show of intent and strength to dissuade the enemy from further aggression.”⁷¹

Nuclear Dilemmas

Like the Far East Command's *SOP*, CINCPAC's 1958 *Operational Plan* contained many loopholes through which an over-zealous field commander could easily run amok with nuclear weapons. Admiral Felt had already experienced the problems of unreliable communications and unwieldy nuclear command structures in the 1958 Taiwan crisis. Poor communications, in the words of an official historian, were CINCPAC's "most critical deficiency." Classified messages for nuclear strike aircraft piled up or were simply lost altogether.⁷²

Admiral Felt's alarm grew in 1958 when *Hard Tack* nuclear tests over Johnston Island produced a dramatic black-out of all communications across the Pacific.⁷³ He was also worried about the organization of nuclear command and control. In the Taiwan Straits Crisis, he had discovered the incompatibility of the *highly centralized* command organization required for effective nuclear war with the *highly decentralized* command needed for effective conventional war by the same forces in Taiwan.⁷⁴ All in all, Felt knew his nuclear forces were a mess, and he called on Washington for help. In 1959, Washington sent to Hawaii an eager strategic analyst from the Rand Corporation named Daniel Ellsberg.⁷⁵

Poring over the 1958 *Operational Plan* in CINCPAC's top secret "cage" at Camp Smith in Hawaii, Ellsberg was amazed and alarmed. He quickly discerned that the problems in the *Operational Plan* were far worse than Admiral Felt had imagined. As nuclear command and control messages cascaded down the partly automated and bureaucratic communications of Pacific Command, clarity faded and confusion grew within the vast, multi-layered hierarchy.

The biggest flaw in the *Operational Plan*, Ellsberg later recalled, was the widespread belief that authority to use nuclear weapons had been delegated from Washington to CINCPAC and from CINCPAC to his senior commanders. This belief rested on the assumption that communications would probably be lost at the outset of nuclear war. While Ellsberg initially feared that erroneous *beliefs* were the problem, he soon

found that reality was even worse: nuclear weapons in the Pacific were *in fact* beyond centralized control.

The *Operational Plan* stated unambiguously that: "In the early stages of general war, atomic coordination procedures may fail because of disrupted communications."* The *Plan* continued: "The Fleet Commander who has access to atomic weapons suballocated to him will destroy targets as required by this Plan *despite the lack of communications and subject to the receipt of authentic indication that the President has authorized the employment of atomic weapons.*"⁷⁶

The contradiction built into this directive left the field commander in an ambiguous position, recognized by the *Plan* itself:

It is recognized that a disaster could occur which would disrupt normal operational and command channels . . . thus precluding the transmission of notification and weapon release instructions to effect implementation of emergency war plans . . . Should the time come when it is apparent to a commander that he must proceed on his own initiative, he must take such courses of action, based on the information at his disposal, as appears to best suit the national interest. Prior planning, a complete understanding of his mission, and common sense are the considerations that a commander must consider in reaching his decision.⁷⁷

Since the *Operational Plan* had been designed to *provide* commanders with just this sort of prior understanding of their missions, Admiral Felt was simply throwing up his hands in despair, and informing his subordinates that they were on their own.

Ellsberg immediately saw through this transparent contradiction, and began to poke further into the "common sense" beliefs about the use of nuclear weapons under loss-of-communications conditions at various levels in Pacific Command. As he travelled around the Pacific talking to senior and junior officers with nuclear responsibilities, he became aware of the widespread attitude that the President had "pre-delegated" authority to the Pacific Commander to launch his nuclear forces if he believed that a nuclear attack was imminent.⁷⁸

This was a belief, in the Pacific, that clearly contradicted the principle that

* This assumption was realistic as communications between Hawaii, Washington, and Tokyo were usually broken at least once every day.

everyone seemed to believe in Washington, that only the President could launch or execute nuclear weapons, that nothing has been delegated . . . In the case of this belief in Pacific Command, I found that the psychological effects of the belief were extremely widespread, because it was applied at each level of command *by analogy* to themselves. Since they were all "aware" that the unified commander had this alleged authorization from the President, they believed that in logical terms it should also apply to them, if *they* were out of touch with their next higher level of command.⁷⁹

Ellsberg also learned that senior civilians in Washington's national security elite had views about nuclear controls which clearly contradicted those of many senior commanders in the Pacific. Washington civilians did not think they had pre-delegated nuclear strike authority to the Navy's Pacific Command, but the Admirals were, in fact, operating as if they received those very orders. The confusion continued until July 1961, when civilian security officials in Washington finally located a looseleaf "blackbook" containing letters issued by President Eisenhower in 1957 to delegate advance authority to commanders such as CINCPAC in case of communications breakdown or emergency.⁸⁰ Ironically, for the first six months of the Kennedy administration, junior officers in the Pacific appear to have been better informed than the President's own advisors on this crucial issue.

Ellsberg tried to identify how the confusion might have allowed inadvertent nuclear war to start at lower levels of Pacific Command. Early in 1960, Ellsberg flew without notice to Kunsan Airfield in Korea, then the closest U.S. air base to the Soviet Union with about a dozen nuclear-armed aircraft on alert. Ellsberg remembers that the airfield was "like a little western town with a dusty airstrip". He asked the major in command what he would do if a nuclear explosion occurred at Osan, the main communications center in south Korea, or if he lost communications with the rest of the world in the midst of a crisis.*

* In time of war, a communications loss could indicate that the next higher level of command had been destroyed by nuclear war. Ellsberg had earlier discovered that nuclear armed fighters at Kadena were loaded with obsolete 1.1 megaton bombs without redundant safety pins. He had realized that in a real alert in which the planes were actually flown into a holding pattern rather than merely revved up as in practice alerts, the probability of accidental nuclear explosion and a nuclear false alarm at a base such as Osan were real and would increase in times of tension.

The Major replied that he would launch his planes in self-defense, despite specific orders that only the President could authorize such action. Ellsberg then asked what the pilots would do if they did not receive an order to execute their nuclear attack. Ellsberg recollects the Major's response vividly:

He paused for a moment and then said, reflectively, "I think they'd come back. I think most of them would come back." I will always remember, at that moment, a voice inside my head crying out, "Think?!" This was a man who was entirely in charge of the training, disciplining and control of these planes, and he was telling me, who had been sent from CINCPAC headquarters, that he thought that *most* of them would carry out their orders to return if they did not get an execute order. He then went on to say, "Of course if *one* of them were to break out of that circle and go for his target, I think that the rest would follow." "And they might as well," he added, "since, of course, if one was going to go, they might as well all go." He was quite philosophical about this possibility, although as he said, "I tell them not to do it."⁸¹

Despite the elaborate system of "positive control" requiring authenticated messages from the Joint Chiefs of the President to attack,^{*} a single wing commander on the strategic frontier could still defeat the best-laid plans and start an inadvertent nuclear war.⁸²

Continuing his enquiries, Ellsberg found that low-level officers with access to authenticating codes were often left alone at night in the

^{*} The *Spark Plug* system of positive control of nuclear attack relied on a message sent first to duty officers at forward bases, and then communicated via UHF radio to attack units. The message contained only *authenticating* codes which had to match series of numbers in a special envelope, unlike the *enabling* codes for some modern nuclear weapons which cannot be armed without the right code series. Authenticating codes cannot stop the arming of the weapons, but only authorize their use. The *Spark Plug* system used a double envelope. If the series in the message matched that on the outside of the envelope, the envelope was to be opened, and the second envelope withdrawn. If the first two letters in the message matched with the first two phonetic code letters on the face of the inner envelope, the message ordered the units to launch. If the message contained four letters and the first two letters in the series matched those on the outside of the inner envelope (or if such a four letter code was received later), the inner envelope was to be opened. If the card inside listed all four letters in the same order, the order was to "expend" weapons on the assigned target.⁸³

communications rooms of Pacific Command. Moreover, there were absolutely no procedures to send a STOP message to units winging their way toward their targets – even if the strike message proved inauthentic, a false alarm, or if the foe had already capitulated!⁸⁴ As the *Operational Plan* put it, albeit rather cryptically: “Once the undertaking [the target] is specified, there will be no subsequent change.”⁸⁵

The *Operational Plan* foresaw that in “limited” nuclear war, CINCPAC might decentralize control of nuclear strikes, “subject to specific restrictions.”⁸⁶ How CINCPAC hoped to “control” the back-pack nuclear commandos operating behind enemy lines was beyond Ellsberg.⁸⁷ Admiral Felt’s *Operational Plan* was so seriously flawed that a host of unplanned, uncontrolled nuclear strikes was possible in any serious military crisis.

Nuclear Follies

The worst was yet to come. The *Operational Plan* assumed that nuclear weapons would be used from the very start of a general war with the “Sino-Soviet bloc.” CINCPAC believed in June 1958 that nuclear weapons could substitute for U.S. conventional power in the Far East:

If U.S. forces in Far East were committed to defense of Taiwan or Southeast Asia, U.S. capability to resist Communist aggression in either Japan or Korea would be considerably reduced . . . Neither ROK [south Korean] or GRC [Taiwanese] forces could halt unaided a determined Chinese Communist [Chicom] invasion. Nor Japan and Ryukyus . . . Chicoms will probably remain capable of overrunning all of Southeast Asia if opposed only by indigenous forces.⁸⁸

Complementing this pessimistic military evaluation was the crude assumption that the U.S. objective in a general war was “the defeat of the Sino-Soviet bloc.”⁸⁹ Since the Soviet Far East offered more conventional military targets for SAC’s long-range bombers (thirty-four bomber bases to China’s eighteen⁹⁰) the Navy concentrated its short-range nuclear weapons on China. “Once you destroyed Vladivostok, war with Russia was no longer ‘interesting’ to the CINCPAC forces,” recalls Ellsberg, “whereas China, although offering few really ‘lucrative’ industrial targets, loomed as a large land mass suitable for attack

and largely within reach, with the additional feature that the population was heavily concentrated in the seaboard area close to the Seventh Fleet carriers."⁹¹

Unlike the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC assumed that general war with the Soviet Union would automatically involve China as part of a monolithic "Sino-Soviet" bloc. Training and attitudes at all levels of Pacific Command reflected this belief. Indeed, officers responded to Ellsberg's questions about fighting only the Soviet Union with "bafflement, horror, almost physical nausea at the thought."⁹² The CINCPAC *Operational Plan* therefore did not provide for separating an attack on the Soviet Union from an attack on China.⁹³

The automated targeting of CINCPAC aircraft, moreover, printed out only target coordinates, and did not distinguish between Chinese and Soviet targets. Adding to the confusion, CINCPAC commanders' top secret target maps did not show the Chinese-Soviet border even if the specific target coordinates had been laboriously entered! Under the time pressure of an actual nuclear crisis, it was simply impossible to separate the planes on the runway, deciding which were to fly to China and which were to hit the Soviet Union. Since virtually no CINCPAC bases had planes aimed only at the Soviet Union, the only way to avoid attacking China was to eliminate all CINCPAC's forces from a nuclear war. Ellsberg concluded: "Of course, you would do that only if it occurred to you that this might be a problem. I never found anyone in Washington who had any idea that there was this kind of problem."⁹⁴ Thus, even if the *national* command had issued an order to hit only Russia, "one could show that it would almost surely be aborted by the execute orders and responses at lower levels."⁹⁵

CINCPAC's response to an order for an attack only on Russia could thus be a nuclear-sized mistake - "the destruction of all cities in China."⁹⁶ And since north Korea was assumed to be a pawn of the Sino-Soviet bloc,⁹⁷ CINCPAC's nuclear strikes under the *Operational Plan* would probably have extended to Korea.

To his amazement, Ellsberg also discovered that CINCPAC could not

* As most of Pacific Command's forces were aimed against China, nuclear war with China without attack on the U.S.S.R. would have been more easily arranged by Pacific Command by simply grounding Pacific Air Force bombers in Japan and south Korea and ordering nuclear-armed warships to hold their fire. But as no one was aware that the problem existed, this feasible order would probably not have been issued.

even control nuclear weapons properly in peacetime, let alone in the midst of nuclear war. While travelling in Japan for Admiral Felt, he ascertained that the U.S.S. *San Joaquin County*, a Marine vessel, was loaded with nuclear weapons stationed off the beach at Iwakuni.* This local storage enabled the Marines to beat the Air Force to the nuclear draw by many hours. Although its presence transgressed the 1960 security treaty between the U.S. and Japan, the vessel was homeported in Okinawa, and anchored at Iwakuni with an electronic repair cover mission for convenience.⁹⁸ Despite Ellsberg's protests to Washington, the vessel remained in Japan because of the Navy's objection to civilian interference.⁹⁹

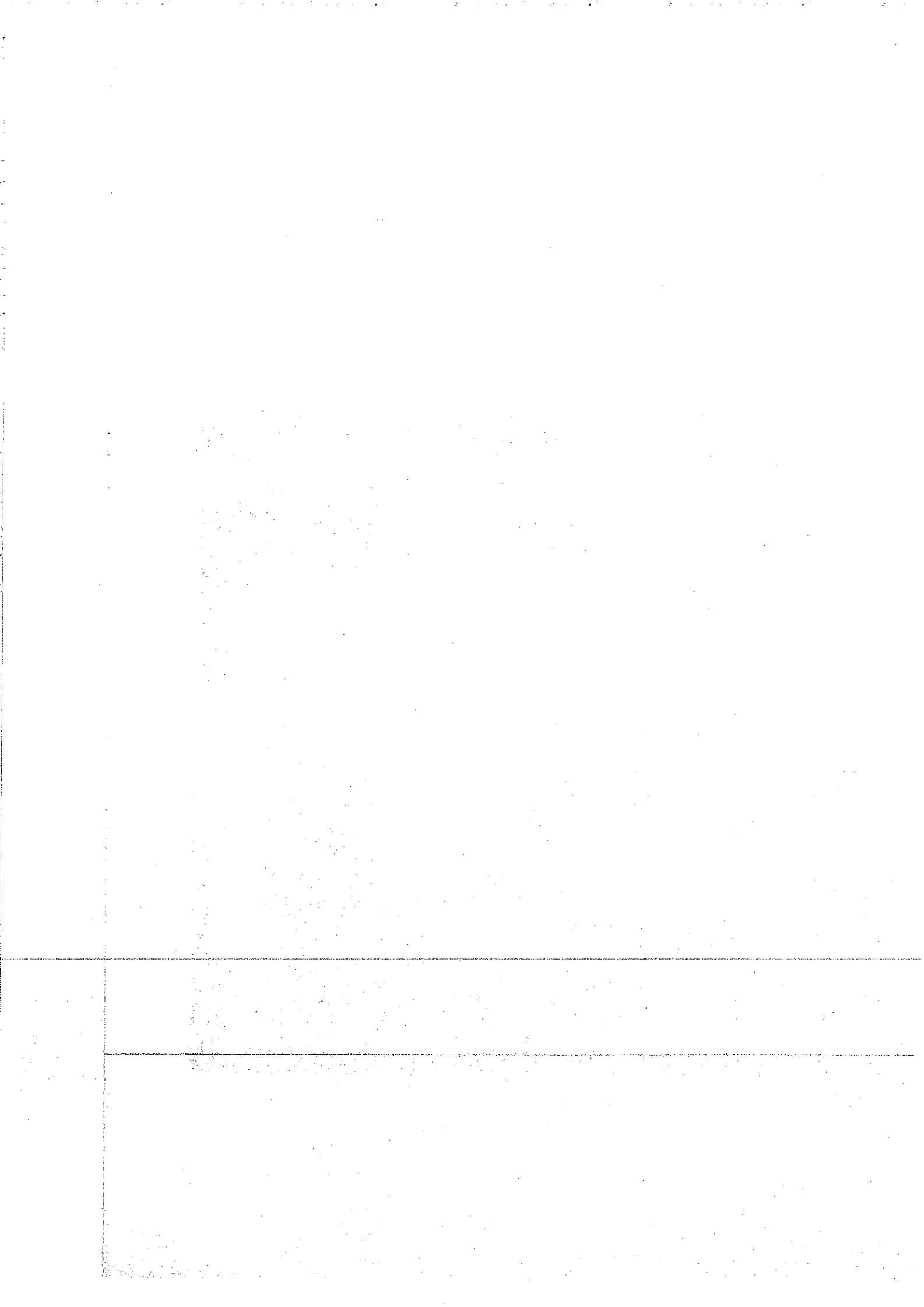
Under the revised 1960 Security Treaty, according to former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Edwin Reischauer, "America was giving up on storage."¹⁰⁰ While unobstructed transit was tacitly accepted by the Japanese government as part of the 1960 compromise, the Navy kept the nuclear barge at Iwakuni at least until 1966 when Reischauer demanded its removal.¹⁰¹ Says Reischauer, "I was furious because that was not according to the treaty at all. They were fudging it as the barge was not in transit."¹⁰²

Nuclear Heyday

The mid-1950s were the heyday of U.S. nuclear offensive operations in the Pacific. From its nuclear springboards in Japan and the Far East, the U.S. threatened Asia with nuclear annihilation on numerous occasions. During this fleeting era of absolute U.S. nuclear supremacy, CINCPAC's nuclear forces were only a hair-trigger away from inadvertent or intended nuclear war in the Far East. If such a war had occurred, CINCPAC's arsenal would have destroyed most of East Asia, whether or not Washington ordered it.

During the 1960s, the increasing range of Soviet nuclear missiles and the new American communication systems transformed these U.S. bases from springboards of U.S. nuclear attack to lightning rods for Soviet and Chinese nuclear retaliation. America's Asia-Pacific allies were now cooperating not only in nuclear offensives, but – for the most part unwittingly – in their own potential annihilation.

* Although undocumented, confidential sources informed the authors that the Navy also kept anti-submarine depth bombs offshore Japan's coast for aircraft at Atsugi after 1960.



U.S. Military advisor in south Vietnam, 1962
(Pentagon Archives)



SIX LOSING THE WAR, WINNING THE PEACE

Henry viewed the world as a chessboard with black and white Soviet and U.S. pieces.

—U.S. Foreign Service officer, 1982¹

Henry, you tell those sons of bitches [the Vietnamese] that the President is a madman and you don't know how to deal with him. Once re-elected I'll be a mad bomber.

—Richard Nixon, 1972²

We have sought to rely on a balance of mutual interest rather than on Soviet intentions as expressed by ideological dogmas. In dealing with the Soviets, we have, in a sense, appealed to the spirit of Pavlov rather than Hegel.

—Henry Kissinger, 1974³

A decade of military doctrine which placed nuclear weapons at the forefront of strategy ended abruptly when the U.S. embarked on a full-scale ground war in Indochina. For the next decade, the Pentagon focused less on nuclear weapons in the Pacific and more on conventional and covert means of warfare. Propagated by Robert McNamara, President Lyndon Johnson's Secretary of Defense, his strategy became known as Flexible Response, and self-consciously supplanted the Mass-

ive Retaliation strategy of the 1950s. A key proponent, General Maxwell Taylor, claimed that Flexible Response would enable the U.S. "to respond anywhere, anytime, with weapons and forces appropriate to the situation."⁴

The first "situation" which prompted American response under the new doctrine was the demise of French colonialism in Indochina. After the French eviction, the U.S. undertook to suppress the exploding social and political revolutions long contained by French and Japanese colonial occupation. Instead of protecting colonialism or keeping Indochina within the Western orbit politically and economically, the U.S. ended up defending little more than its reputation as a superpower capable of dealing with an upstart challenger.

To implement Flexible Response in Indochina, the U.S. drew on a three-pronged strategy. First, it took a leaf from the CIA's book on successful counterinsurgency against the Huk rebels in the Philippines.⁵ This campaign combined elements of psychological warfare with repressive paramilitary operations against the insurgents, as well as political opponents of south Vietnamese strongman Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem, however, stymied efforts at land reform and political liberalization and the U.S. supported his assassination in 1963. Under Diem's successor, Marshall Thieu, U.S. policy fared little better.

Second, bombers rained devastation onto Indochina. American airpower bombarded much of the population of north Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia into caves or refugee camps. Third, U.S. ground forces and their allies herded much of the south Vietnamese population into strategic hamlets and conducted "search and destroy" missions in the countryside.

Vietnam became the arena for a replay of the Truman-MacArthur policy struggle between proponents of rollback versus containment. The Air Force and the Navy strained to hit the vitals of north Vietnam and juicier targets in China with bombs dropped by B-52s or from aircraft carriers. Containment liberals, on the other hand, sought to stabilize the political situation by imposing changes on the south Vietnamese regime and by restraining the air war.⁶ Amidst the increasingly acrimonious debate, the Johnson White House took direct control of U.S. ground troops after detaching them from the operational control of Pacific Command. The air war, however, remained under the control of CINCPAC Admiral Ulysses Grant Sharp, an adherent of the rollback current.

Transnational Garrison

U.S. bases in the West Pacific were ideally placed to prosecute the Indochina War. Nevertheless, the military acquired new bases throughout Indochina and expanded existing offshore bases in the Philippines, Okinawa, Guam, and Micronesia. At the peak of base construction in 1966, U.S. forces operated from seventy-three major air bases and airfields in south Vietnam, as well as four major and ten smaller military ports. Army garrisons and encampments dotted the whole country. This infrastructure supported over 500,000 U.S. troops, 1.2 million South Vietnamese troops, about 50,000 south Koreans, and contingents sent by Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines.⁷

The military also constructed eight major bases in Thailand. The largest, U Tapao Air Base, hosted seventy B-52 bombers which carried out tactical bombing missions, and KC-135 refuelling planes. Subic Bay in the Philippines, together with Marine bases in Japan and Okinawa, served as a huge training ground and rear area for U.S. Marine Corps units deployed to Vietnam. Clark Air Base served as the main logistical staging area for the mainland war effort, with traffic reaching as high as fifty transports a day bound for Vietnam, while Subic Bay served as the "essential fulcrum for projecting naval and naval air power into the Tonkin Gulf."⁸ Yokusuka Naval Base in Japan functioned as a rear base and maintenance center for the Seventh Fleet's four aircraft carriers operating in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. network of bases in the West Pacific, in short, was akin to a transnational garrison.

At the zenith of the war, the U.S. activated its maximum non-nuclear firepower – a complete inversion of its strategy in Taiwan fifteen years earlier. The B-52 bombing runs from Guam and Thailand climaxed in the "Linebacker II" attack in December 1972. Ordered by President Richard Nixon, the attack rained 20,370 tons of high explosive for over eleven days on Hanoi and Haiphong.⁹ Equivalent to the explosive power of one small nuclear bomb, the air attacks did not reverse U.S. losses in the ground war where the insurgent forces retained the initiative. Indeed, the Vietnamese had already defeated the U.S. politically by forcing a withdrawal of U.S. troops from south Vietnam without a reciprocal pullout of north Vietnamese forces.

Frustrated by these failures, Nixon and Secretary of State Henry

Kissinger commissioned studies of nuclear attack on north Vietnam to interdict the Ho Chi Minh supply trail and the railway from China. But at this time, in contrast to the 1950s, the potential of domestic political fallout from even the mention of nuclear threats rendered Nixon and Kissinger unable seriously to consider nuclear attacks. Only once, when B-52 bombers were placed on maximum nuclear alert for twenty-nine days in October 1969, were nuclear forces mobilized during the war – and even that instance remained a secret between the U.S. and the Soviet commands.¹⁰

By the end of the Indochina War in 1975, all three prongs of the U.S. military strategy in Vietnam were badly bent. Instead of showing that conventional weapons could relieve nuclear weapons of the burden of winning “low intensity” wars, the defeat exposed the limits of U.S. military power, nuclear or non-nuclear.

The U.S. in Retreat

The U.S. defeat in Vietnam had immense geopolitical consequences. Except for its toehold in Korea, American forces were expelled from the Asian mainland and thrown back to its fortified offshore island chain. The defeat pushed Thailand, America’s key remaining mainland ally in Southeast Asia, toward neutrality – a change underlined by its pressure to close U.S. bases. Neutralism swept both mainland and island Southeast Asia, with the newly formed Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) timidly advancing a proposal that the region be converted into a “zone of peace, freedom and neutrality.”

Not even the island chain escaped the impact of the debacle. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, a longtime ally, distanced himself from the U.S. by issuing a joint communique with the newly established Socialist Republic of Vietnam promising “not to allow any foreign country to use their respective territories as a base for direct or indirect aggression against each other.”¹¹ And in Okinawa, protests against the use of local bases as a staging area for the Vietnam war pressured the U.S. into returning Okinawa to Japan in 1972.

Pressures for disengagement came not only from Asia but from influential elements within the United States. Key policymakers in the Democratic Party favored a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea. The author of the containment policy himself, George Kennan, came out in

favor of abandoning American bases in the Philippines. "The original justification for the maintenance of those bases has now been extensively undermined," wrote the dean of American diplomacy. "The American response to the situation that now exists should be, surely, the immediate, complete, resolute, and wordless withdrawal of the the facilities and equipment they contain, leaving to the Philippine government the real estate, and only that."¹²

The Rise of Strategic Diplomacy

To arrest this unravelling of U.S. power in Asia-Pacific, President Richard Nixon revived a policy in 1969 which the Truman administration had seriously considered adopting before the Korean War eliminated it as an option - the encouragement and exploitation of differences among Communist powers. Nixon's Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, began to implement *rapprochement* between Washington and Beijing in 1971.¹³ The new relationship was too late to save the U.S. position in Vietnam, but apparently not for want of trying on the part of the Chinese. According to the Vietnamese, China had repeatedly urged them to accept a Taiwan-style solution for south Vietnam, with the rationale that they could win by diplomacy later what they now failed to get by force.

Both the "China Card"* and detente with the Soviet Union were elements of a new U.S. policy of "strategic diplomacy", an approach which succeeded the reliance on unilateral American force which had failed so miserably in Vietnam. In his memoirs, Kissinger explained the political and strategic assumptions which underpinned his approach:

The late 1960s had marked the end of the period of American dominance based on overwhelming nuclear and economic supremacy. The Soviet nuclear stockpile was inevitably approaching parity. The economic strength of Europe and Japan was bound to lead them to seek larger political influence. The new, developing nations pressed their claims to greater power and participation. The United States would have to learn to base its foreign policy on premises analogous to those on which other nations conducted theirs. The percentage of

* That is, the "normalizing" of U.S.-Chinese relations and discussion of U.S.-China diplomatic recognition, finally concluded in 1978.

the world's Gross National Product represented by our economy was sinking by 10 per cent with every decade: from 52 per cent in 1950 to . . . some 30 per cent in 1970. . . . This meant that if all the rest of the world united against us, if some hostile power or group of powers achieved . . . hegemony . . . America's resources would be dwarfed by its adversaries. Still the strongest nation in the world but no longer preeminent, we would have to take seriously the world balance of power, for it tilted against us and might prove irreversible. No longer able to wait for threats to become overwhelming before dealing with them, we would have to substitute concept for resource. We needed the inward strength to act on the force of assessments unprovable when they were made.¹⁴

Kissinger's program for arresting America's decline relied on manipulating conflicts in a "pentagonal" world where Western Europe, Japan, China, the Soviet Union, and the United States were the principal actors. In his scheme, detente was a carrot-and-stick policy aimed at denying the Soviets nuclear superiority while simultaneously enrolling them in a tacit alliance to contain the spread of national liberation movements in the Third World. Playing the China card would both check the Soviets and moderate the victorious Vietnamese. Inspired by both conservatism and *realpolitik*, Kissinger's diplomacy bore a striking resemblance to George Kennan's original containment policy.

Containment by diplomatic pirouettes, however, failed to appease either American liberals whose experience in Vietnam led them to desert the containment framework altogether, or the rollback advocates who saw the Indochina debacle as a failure of American resolve. Just as Kennan's earlier vision of containment as the "adroit and vigilant application of counter-force" had failed to appeal to the ideological temperament of the American foreign policy establishment, Kissinger's strategic diplomacy did not spark a consensus, especially in the volatile aftermath of defeat. As political scientist Jerry Sanders argues in his seminal study of U.S. policymaking in the Vietnam era:

Such *realpolitik* satisfied very few, however, and became a subject of bitter debate almost from the start. Conservatives, who supported the renewal of bombing and the Cambodian incursion made possible by detente, nevertheless held a visceral contempt for negotiated deals with the USSR and the People's Republic of China. Liberals, who applauded the easing of Cold War tensions, were to the same degree appalled at the cynical application of detente in re-escalating the level of destruction in Southeast Asia.¹⁵

Detente through strategic diplomacy was only one side of the "Grand Design" Nixon announced at Guam in 1969. The other was retrenchment and revitalization of U.S. military power to match Soviet conventional forces, then seen to be probing for advantage in the Third World.¹⁶ The Sino-Soviet shooting war which erupted in March 1969 was a vital factor in Nixon's strategy. If Soviet and Chinese Communists were killing each other instead of presenting a monolithic threat to the West, reasoned Nixon, then the way was clear to enlist China in the containment of the Soviet Union and to reassert U.S. centrality in the global balance of power. The Sino-Soviet split also implied that less overall military power was needed to sustain "containment".¹⁷

Far from the withdrawal perceived by some, Nixon aimed to compensate for reduced U.S. military disengagement with increased allied power. Most importantly, indigenous troops rather than Americans were to fight ground wars. The U.S. would continue, however, to provide training, war materiel, and airpower backing. The first test of this aspect of the doctrine was Vietnamization, which promptly proved a massive failure. Even as the south Vietnamese Army collapsed, the U.S. Army fell back to island bases or to the continental United States. The Air Force, especially the Strategic Air Command, stayed on in Guam and trained its sights back to its traditional enemy, the Soviet Union. And the Navy simply sailed away to implement the military side of the Guam Doctrine, known in naval circles as the "offshore strategy".

The surface fleet faction of the Navy, led by Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, the new Chief of Naval Operations, launched a radical reform of his tradition-bound service and its fixed ideas - faith in big carriers, an almost obsessive focus on East Asia, and avoidance of land-intervention. Recognizing the failure of carrier-based bombing in guerilla wars like Vietnam and under pressure to cut costs as the war wound down, Zumwalt stopped big-carrier construction in 1974 and opted for smaller mid-sized carriers. He also established new naval priorities: control of the seas; protection of U.S. access to sea lanes and Third World resources; and, reversing established naval doctrine, intervention on land. Even these land operations, however, were seen only as brief attacks to initiate political changes. The new naval doctrine still required island bases in the Pacific for anti-submarine warfare. Professor Franz Schurmann has explained the key features of this naval modernization program:

While the U.S. would have to retrench militarily, it still had to maintain a "presence" throughout the world. The military instrument of that presence would be primarily the Navy, not the old Navy obsessed by East Asia but a new Navy with truly global awareness, strategies and capabilities.¹⁸

This military-reform counterpart to Kissinger's strategic diplomacy collapsed in 1974, however, when the Watergate scandal forced Nixon's ignominious departure from the Presidency. Successfully exploiting tensions between the hardliners and the diplomats in the national security elite, Nixon had won room to maneuver in withdrawing from Vietnam. With Nixon gone, Kissinger made peace with the old Navy, dropped the redeployment of carriers to the Indian Ocean ordered in 1974, and restored three of the Navy's big carrier forces in the West Pacific. Accommodating the rollback conservatives was not so easy, however, for its leaders believed that the way forward was not to avoid commitments such as Vietnam but to fight them differently. In the rightist resurgence that followed Nixon's resignation, Kissinger's strategic diplomacy was unceremoniously dumped. Throughout the debates, the Navy's Pacific fleet remained centered on big carriers, and had only begun the painful process of shifting from an anti-Chinese to an anti-Soviet posture. The philosophy of the incoming Carter administration only increased the right's restlessness and alienation, and after 1976, they moved rapidly to ally with anti-Soviet hardliners in Congress dedicated to sabotaging arms control and detente with the Soviet Union.

While Kissinger's strategic diplomacy had lowered East-West tensions in the mid-1970s, the relative peace it bought was an unstable one – a lull between leftist advance and right-wing counter-attack. While it successfully maintained nuclear parity with the Soviet Union through SALT I,* detente did not discourage Soviet aid to national liberation movements, particularly in southern Africa and the continent's north-west Horn. Kissinger's status in conservative circles fell to the point where Senator Henry Jackson, a leading Cold Warrior, accused him of "having been beguiled by the Soviets", and columnist Joseph Kraft charged that he had been "taken in".¹⁹

The Asia-Pacific region was the one area where strategic diplomacy was an unqualified success. But not even this achievement was his

* The first U.S.-U.S.S.R. Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, signed in 1972.

alone. Continuing Kissinger's policies, the Carter administration's skilful Asia team completed the process of pro-American strategic stabilization in the Asia-Pacific region.

Trilateralism in Power

President Jimmy Carter took office in 1977 with a policy of "constructive engagement" that was supposed to depart, as he put it in his celebrated Notre Dame speech, from "our inordinate fear of Communism." As it emerged over the next four years, Carter's foreign policy encompassed aspects of the traditional containment approach, Kissinger-style strategic diplomacy (the China Card and detente), and what Jerry Sanders has aptly described as "trilateral managerialism".

Carter's policy was strongly influenced by his experience on the Trilateral Commission, a forum of prominent public figures drawn from the industrial Western countries. Responding to the defeat of containment and to increasing dissatisfaction with Kissinger's "balance of power" politics, the Commission sought a new model for world order that could mediate the growing contradiction between the military and economic requirements for the maintenance of American power. The Commission's solution to this dilemma tried, as Sanders puts it, "to shift emphasis to the economic pillar of containment but without disavowing the military pillar."²⁰

The strategy's success rested on the "management of interdependence" through a reinvigorated system of world trade and refurbished financial institutions to replace the defunct international financial order which had been one of the casualties of Vietnam. For selected Third World countries, the Trilateralists "envisioned a role . . . in a rationalized world economy that offered them greater promise of economic gain through interdependence than by striking out on an independent course."²¹

It was an approach reminiscent of Woodrow Wilson's prescription for a new world order following World War I and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's vision of multilateral "internationalism" following World War II. Like its predecessors, Trilateralism was never given a chance. By the end of the Carter administration in 1980, U.S. foreign policy, after floundering for three years, had returned to hard-line containment.

By 1978, China was openly encouraging a continued U.S. military presence in the Pacific, and its deputy prime minister told the Western press that "there were practical reasons for the stationing of U.S. troops in both Japan and the Philippines." After briefly flirting with the idea of "neutralizing" the area, the ASEAN* countries swung strongly in support of the U.S. military presence when the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea in late 1978.

The "Vietnamese threat" was not, however, the only factor. Traditionally anti-Chinese, the ASEAN dictatorships also sought the U.S. presence as a counter-balance to the diplomatic drive of the People's Republic. By the end of the decade, the diplomatic maneuvering of Carter's Asia-Pacific team had brought the United States into a position of being courted to *stay* in Asia by both the Chinese and the ASEAN countries.

Indeed, what Malaysia's U.N. ambassador described as "the coincidence of strategic interests" had been translated into an active political and military alliance. The three allies - China, America, and ASEAN - spearheaded the effort to retain the notorious Pol Pot regime as the official representative of Kampuchea in the U.N. Simultaneously, China and some ASEAN states armed the Khmer Rouge to carry out guerrilla warfare against the Vietnam-backed Heng Samrin Government.

To carry off its diplomatic triumph in Asia, Carter's foreign policy team sacrificed a key feature of his administration - the promise to make "human rights" a major consideration in American relations with its Third World allies. Since the end of World War II, encouragement of human rights and democracy had been the idealistic side of the containment policy. When the consensus around containment shattered over Vietnam, McGovernite liberals appropriated containment's democratic mission while rejecting its *realpolitik* methods, particularly counterinsurgency.

Once in office, however, Carter could not escape the insoluble contradiction between containment and democracy. In the case of the Shah of Iran, human rights policy retreated rapidly in the face of "strategic" considerations - oil and Middle Eastern stability. And in East Asia, repressive but "strategic" allies such as Marcos in the Philippines and Park Chung Hee in South Korea, escaped the aid cuts and arms

* Association of Southeast Asian Nations, including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. Brunei joined in 1984.

embargoes applied to military dictatorships in Latin America. Indeed, Carter backed down from his campaign pledge to withdraw U.S. troops from south Korea, and negotiated a new military base agreement with the Philippines which gave President Marcos \$500 million in aid.

By 1980, with Vietnam pinned down in a two-front war against China and the Khmer Rouge, and left-wing movements throughout Southeast Asia split by the Vietnam-China conflict, the U.S. had won the peace after losing the war. As Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, explained:

If we had predicted in 1975 that less than 5 years after the end of our long and traumatic involvement in the Indochina wars our position in the Pacific would be as strong as it is today, almost no one - optimist or pessimist - would have found the prediction credible . . . The basic cause of tension in the region [has] become the rivalries among Communists. The non-Communist countries of Asia, relieved of many of the pressures caused by old Cold War divisions, are experiencing unprecedented economic and political development.³²

Carter's Defense Secretary Harold Brown, a person not given to hyperbole, went even further: "Nearly thirty years after the end of the [Korean War], and a decade after the end of the [Vietnam War], the political-military balance in 1980 in the Pacific appeared more favorable to U.S. security interests than at any time since the Communist revolution in China in 1949."³³ It was a considerable accomplishment, and the U.S. had achieved it without firing a shot.

U.S. helicopters exercise in Indian Ocean before attempting to rescue
American hostages in Iran, February 1980
(U.S. Department of Defense)



SEVEN RESURGENT ROLLBACK

In a world which is becoming smaller every day, the United States cannot protect its interests by drawing an arbitrary line around certain areas and ignoring the rest of the world. That approach was tried once. It resulted in the Korean War . . . No region of the world can be excluded in advance from the agenda of our concern, for each may be used as an instrument of expanding the means of control as Soviet campaigns advance.

—Committee on the Present Danger, January 1980¹

The emphasis on strategic diplomacy during the Nixon, Ford and Carter presidencies disturbed the military. The tension surfaced openly in 1978 when Carter ousted Major General John Singlaub, Chief of Staff of the U.S. forces in south Korea, for publicly disagreeing with the proposed troop withdrawal from the peninsula. But something deeper, more profound than the dominance of diplomacy over warfare troubled the military in the Pacific - they no longer had a clearly defined adversary.

In Search of Enemies

The U.S.-China *rapprochement* had removed the rationale which had justified military expenditure and adventure for thirty years. As Rand Corporation analyst Richard Solomon put it:

Since the disintegration of the Sino-Soviet alliance, and with the more recent normalization of U.S.-PRC relations, the sources of threat to American interests in Asia have diffused. Whereas the sharp political-military demarcation between NATO and Warsaw Pact states in Europe has been blurred only slightly by detente and American diplomacy in Eastern Europe, the one clear line of military confrontation in Asia toward which defense planning can be oriented is the heavily armed boundary between North and South Korea. The main lines of conflict in the region are now between the Communist states - disputes such as the Sino-Vietnamese rivalry, in which Americans have little incentive to become involved.²

One army colonel was candid in his assessment of the malaise gnawing at the military in the Pacific:

One cannot cite the Soviet airborne divisions as a threat to our interests in the Pacific, nor can one count the dozens of Soviet divisions deployed along the Chinese border. Both forces certainly exist, but they do not directly threaten our interests . . . Therein lies the difficulty for the Army in the Pacific. The threat that the U.S. Army is needed to counter is an ill-defined insidious one that comes and goes and manifests itself in the form of perceptions in the minds of our Pacific allies.³

The coming of peace and the loss of a clearly defined enemy was most distressing for the Navy, since "Pacific defense" had been its traditional justification for a large, modern fleet. The loss of an Asian enemy reinforced the Carter administration's Europe-first, "Central Front Strategy" which, the Navy brass feared, "would result in reduced funding for Navy and Marine Corps units around the world in order to build up and modernize US air and ground units assigned to the Central Front in Europe."⁴

The Navy watched apprehensively as the Pacific Command shrank and scarce budgetary resources were shifted to Europe. By 1977, the number of service forces in the Western Pacific area was down to 140,000 - the lowest level since 1941. The number of ships in the Navy's global fleet dropped from nearly one thousand at the height of the Vietnam War to less than 500 under Carter. Aircraft carriers, the most prized naval weapon, declined dramatically from twenty-five to twelve. Disregarding the greater efficiency of the new ships that replaced those which had been decommissioned, the Deputy Chief of Naval Oper-

ations complained: "The Navy's share of the cost of the Vietnam War was the loss of a generation of new ships." Since the U.S. Navy was replacing the British fleet as the "guardian" of the Indian Ocean, Admiral James Watkins complained that "a one-and-a-half ocean Navy" had to face the contingency of a "three-ocean war." The Navy was not appeased in 1978 when the Carter administration announced that it was abandoning the Nixon administration's "swing strategy", which would have shifted Pacific naval forces to Europe in the event of a crisis in the North Atlantic.

"The Great Soviet Bugaboo"

As it groped for a mission in the era of air power and atomic bombs in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Navy had raised what one Air Force general once disdainfully referred to as "the great Soviet bugaboo" – a mythical Russian submarine fleet – to justify more naval defense expenditures.⁵ Searching for an enemy in the Pacific in the era of detente, the U.S. naval command rediscovered the Soviet menace. Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, chief of the Soviet Navy, provided the rallying point for the Navy's counterattack. Under Gorshkov, warned the U.S. Navy brass, the Soviet Navy had outstripped the U.S. fleet. They cited the numerical build-up of the Soviet Navy and its "warm water" port at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. More ominously, Gorshkov had upgraded the Soviet Navy from mere coastal patrol to a "blue water" navy capable of deep water sailing. The Russian bear, they complained, had learnt to swim. Ignored in these Cassandra-like warnings was the simple fact that the Soviets did not have even one real aircraft carrier, the essential component of effective power projection.

With the loss of the massive bases in Vietnam and Thailand, the threat to the U.S. base system in the Asia-Pacific region worried resurgent militarists. Proposals to close down bases, such as those in the Philippines, alarmed the navalists:

Given the current size of the forces allotted to the Pacific Fleet and the vast ocean areas of the Pacific Command, the loss of bases, especially in the Philippines or Japan, would make it impossible for CINCPAC to carry out his mission throughout the entire region . . . [It] would mean giving up the concept of a forward strategy in the Pacific.⁶

By the end of the Carter administration, there was a virtual schism among Asia-Pacific policymakers between (mostly civilian) proponents of containment through diplomacy, and advocates of an increased American military presence. Nowhere was the debate more bitter than over the question of the balance of power in Northeast Asia. Military analysts accused the Carter administration of running down U.S. military "raw power" and credibility in East Asia. No symbol of this decline was more potent than the absence of even a single aircraft carrier in the Pacific Far East after Carter deployed 7th Fleet vessels to the Indian Ocean.⁷

The Unraveling of Strategic Diplomacy

By 1980, Carter's Trilateralist foreign policy was floundering badly, ravaged by external failures which fed its domestic enemies. As the Ayatollah Khomeini held Americans hostage in Iran, SALT II, which limited new strategic weapons, was held captive in the U.S. Senate. Conservative think tanks like the Committee on the Present Danger and the Heritage Foundation rattled off the "losses" of the detente period: Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Iran, Grenada. The one bright spot in Carter's "watch", the Asia-Pacific region, could not, to the angry right wing, make up for losses elsewhere. Retired Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, former Chief of Naval Operations, reflected on the militarist challenge to the complexities of strategic diplomacy:

Increasingly, we will find ourselves outgunned everywhere, unless something is done. The present trend seems, however, to have a negative effect on the determination of our political leaders to use our remaining power. In the absence of courageous leadership to alert and rally, the prophets of doom have created a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁸

To appease the right and to break its ideological momentum, the President proclaimed his "Carter Doctrine" in February 1980 following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Warning that the U.S. would repel a threat to the Persian Gulf "by any means necessary", the Carter Doctrine marked a return to containment militarism. The effort, however, did not placate the right. In their eyes, the doctrine was correct but its

exponent was badly miscast. As Republican pundits put it, "Carter speaks stickly but carries a big soft."

The right's anger was not only confined to Carter and his band of "McGovernite Democrats." They also attacked Kissinger and the moderate, Eastern wing of the Republican Party which had "acquiesced" to his detente diplomacy. Kissinger, asserted one prominent conservative thinker, deserved as much blame for the demise of American power as Carter:

It was not the Carter administration that concluded the first SALT agreements within the terms of which the Soviet Union was able by 1977 to develop a clearly superior counterforce capability. Nor was it the Carter administration that inaugurated detente in 1972 and claimed that in doing so it had laid the foundations of a stable and lasting structure of peace . . . There were the actions of the predecessors of the present administration. In their effects, they compromised American interests and power to an extent we can only now fully appreciate.⁹

By the time of the Republican national convention in August 1980, Kissinger himself had adopted the right's militant rhetoric and joined the Reagan forces in attacking Carter's foreign policy - conveniently forgetting that Carter had, in fact, continued his own policies on detente, defense, and China.

The liberal consensus for containment had been shattered by Vietnam. Under attack from the resurgent right, Kissinger and Carter distanced themselves from detente diplomacy. The way was clear for a militant revival of rollback ideology.

Soviet ship cuts across bow of USS *Sterrett* during nighttime search for downed KAL 007 jetliner, September 1984
(U.S. Navy)



EIGHT NEW MILITARISM

We're not General Motors; we don't have a profit and loss column every month. The only way we can tell whether we're doing a good job is to go to war and see if you win or lose, and wars don't come along that often. That's a hell of a handicap to work under.

—Admiral W. Crowe,
Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, 1984¹

Simply stated, the concept is to get the archer before he releases his arrow.

—Admiral S. Foley,
Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, 1983²

“The United States has made a fundamental decision,” exclaimed Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage in February 1985. “We are a Pacific nation and a force for peace and stability in the region. The future lies in the Pacific.”³ Billed as Reagan's Pacific architect, Armitage addressed the Pacific Symposium, an annual military bash sponsored by the U.S. National Defense University. Just in from Manila, the former Marine stood in civilian garb, a gray suit draping his double-barreled chest, his gravelly voice stabbing the air like a machine gun, his raised finger punctuating his points.

Swept into power in January 1981, the new hardliners lost no time in remilitarizing U.S. foreign policy. Following three administrations which buttressed America's declining power through detente and

diplomacy, Reagan's strategists adhere to the rollback posture eclipsed since the late 1940s. In a throwback to Truman's NSC 68 in 1950, Richard Pipes, member of Reagan's first term National Security Council, succinctly expressed the old-new hard line: "Rather than seek to modify Soviet *behavior*, the West should assist those forces within the Communist bloc which are working for a change of the *system*." ⁴

While the Reagan administration has been preoccupied with belligerent thrusts into the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Central America, it has not forgotten Asia-Pacific. The strategy is global in scope and it is only by examining the grand geopolitical design, the encirclement of the Soviet Union, that the importance of the Pacific becomes clear.

The new strategy is an extreme version of the globalist posture adopted during the late 1940s. Embracing a stance of global readiness, the Pentagon has abandoned the "swing" strategy whereby troops based in the Pacific could be transferred to Europe in a time of crisis. ⁵ Instead, forces will be built up in each theater to fight a two-front, global war. In the Pacific, according to Navy officials, the new policy permits the Navy "to originate new plans for the Far East, such as using carrier aircraft for offensive missions against the Soviet port of Vladivostok." ⁶

Global Aura of Power

The new stance reveals a profound schism within the Defense establishment about U.S. strategic goals and military capabilities. Incoming Pentagon officials attacked the procurement policy called "concretism", based on a cost-benefit calculus which relates particular military capabilities to vital U.S. interests. Instead, they prefer "holism". Holists like Francis West, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, believe that U.S. goals are best realized by pursuing global military policies which preserve an "aura of power". Adopted by Reagan's civilian defense experts, this perspective rejects the idea that U.S. commitments be ranked - *all* interests are vital. ⁷

The Reagan strategy is clearly designed to recapture America's "war-fighting" supremacy. There are three aspects to the new strategy: attaining nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union; upgrading U.S.

capacity to intervene against Third World forces which challenge the balance-of-power status quo; and preparing U.S. forces to wage a "protracted" war against the Soviets.

To attain nuclear superiority, the administration is developing the MX, Trident I, and Trident II ballistic missiles, the "theater-nuclear" Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe, and sea-launched "Tomahawk" cruise missiles in the Pacific. To beef up U.S. capacity to intervene against "Soviet proxies", there is the 300,000-man Rapid Deployment Force which covers twenty countries in the Persian Gulf area, Southwest Asia, and East Africa.⁸

The third pillar involves preparing U.S. forces to fight a "protracted conventional-nuclear war" against the Soviets. By linking nuclear superiority to interventionary capability, this aspect of Reagan's policy carries unique risks of escalation to nuclear war.

Limited War

American military strategists are actively preparing for "limited war" with the Soviet Union – that is, a nuclear war confined to one theatre or region, or a world war fought without nuclear weapons. During his 1980 campaign, Reagan confidently proclaimed: "I can see a situation where you can have a nuclear exchange without it necessarily turning into a bigger war."⁹ Alarmed American allies in Europe and the Pacific restrained Reagan from making more explicit statements. Nonetheless, administration spokesmen have indicated that limited war, either the "theater nuclear" or conventional variety, remains a serious policy option.

Naval analyst Francis West, for example, told Congress in 1982: "A limited clash with the Soviet Union, quickly followed by a ceasefire, is a possibility." He elaborated:

A strategy of global flexibility does not necessarily mean simultaneous, intense conflict worldwide. Quite the opposite. It means assessing the opponent's strength on the entire global chessboard, assessing the capabilities of theater criticalities [sic], and assigning moves and countermoves designed to terminate the conflict speedily and with minimum escalation, while protecting the interests of the United States and its allies.¹⁰

West's scenario was recently affirmed by Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor, Deputy Chief of Staff at the Pentagon, who asserted that a limited war with the Soviet Union is an "almost inevitable probability." He hastened to add, however, that the war would be a "non-atomic, conventional, regional conflict . . . which would not result in World War III."¹¹

"Global War Games" played at the Naval War College in 1983 confirmed the Navy's belief in the likelihood of protracted war with the Soviets. Captain Marshall Brisbois, Director of the Center that hosts the Games, asserted: "Global conflict will not necessarily lead immediately to the use of nuclear weapons, if at all. The United States must be prepared to fight and win a conventional war."¹² This policy is a radical shift from U.S. naval planning before 1975, which assumed that general war with the Soviets would *automatically* activate nuclear weapons.¹³ Since Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger promulgated his Defense Guidance in 1982, the capacity to fight a protracted war with the Soviets, conventional or nuclear, has been U.S. military policy.¹⁴

The U.S. military puts a premium on firing first in either a nuclear or a conventional war. As Navy Secretary John Lehman put it, "Who gets to shoot first will have more to do with who wins than any [other] factor."¹⁵

Horizontal Escalation and Multifront War

Defense Secretary Weinberger has emphasized that the U.S. must be capable of pressing the Soviet Union simultaneously on several fronts. As he put it before the Senate Armed Services Committee: "Our long-term goal is to be able to meet the demands of a worldwide war, including concurrent reinforcement of Europe, deployment to Southeast Asia and the Pacific and to support other areas."¹⁶

Pentagon strategists have therefore revived the option of extending "limited war" with the Soviets from the region where it starts to other fronts. "We might choose not to restrict ourselves to meeting aggression on its own immediate front," Weinberger explained. For instance, the U.S. might choose to respond to a conflict in Europe by "horizontally escalating", that is, attacking perceived points of Soviet vulnerability like Cuba or the Soviet Far East.¹⁷ Vietnam and north Korea

are also included in the Defense Guidance as potential "horizontal" targets.¹⁸ While navalists continue to debate whether the Soviet Far East is more or less "vital", the thrust of the strategy is clear. As John Hessman, editor of *Sea Power* magazine, wrote in 1983: "It's the Navy's way of saying a Central Front [European] war would be confined to the Central Front for only as long as it takes the Pacific Fleet to get under way."¹⁹ An important new front is the Indian Ocean, which falls under the operational control of Pacific Command. While the U.S. moved into the Indian Ocean in 1971 to fill the "vacuum" left by the British, a major military build-up began only after 1980. Under the new strategy, the Indian Ocean represents a third major front, deserving of the same commitment as Europe and the Pacific.

The multifront strategy is trumpeted as a significant departure from the conventional war strategy of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations based on a Europe-first posture. This so-called "Central Front" policy sought to endow U.S. forces with the capacity to fight a "one-and-a-half war" - that is, a major war in Europe and a smaller war in Asia or elsewhere. To replace what the Navy's Lehman has characterized as a "bankrupt and discredited view",²⁰ the Pentagon has advanced instead a globalist strategy akin, in the world of Admiral James Watkins, to a basketball zone defense of "going where the ball is."²¹

This strategy is reminiscent of former Secretary of State Dulles's 1954 pronouncement that the U.S. was "willing and able to respond vigorously and at places and with means of its own choosing."²² As the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Watkins, testified in 1984: "It is the Soviets who must be prepared to defend their territory 'anywhere' on their perimeter."²³

"Horizontal escalation", however, differs in one vital respect from the "massive retaliation" posture of the 1950s. Administration officials take pains to distinguish "horizontal" from "vertical" escalation, the move to all-out nuclear war. In other words, the existing "equivalence" in Soviet and American nuclear capability will not deter U.S. conventional interventions, nor preclude even theater nuclear or global conventional war with the Soviet Union.

Why does the White House adhere to this view despite Soviet warnings that theater nuclear wars would quickly escalate to all-out nuclear war? To Congressional probes on this issue, Francis West asserted

simply that the Soviet Union is a "mature global superpower."²⁴ While administration propagandists portray the Soviets as reckless adventurers, key military theorists appraise them as cautious actors who would make - in the heat of battle - a rational decision to keep a war limited, conventional, and theater-nuclear in scope.

Maritime Supremacy

Despite Weinberger's directive, neither the Army nor the Air Force were planning or preparing for global, multifront war as late as 1984.²⁵ The Navy, however, soon pressed forward, reflecting its central role in formulating and implementing the new strategy.

The key to building a global "aura of power" is "maritime supremacy", a policy of securing dominion over the world's oceans. The idea has been around since World War I, when navalists argued that to expand commercially and politically, the U.S. must attain the "command of the seas" much as the British Navy enjoyed at the zenith of its imperial power. Formulated anew by the administration's leading military strategists, the global strategy relies heavily on the Navy, which views the Pacific as its special preserve. Pentagon strategists feel that the Navy has the flexibility to wage a protracted multifront war with conventional or theater-nuclear weapons.

In explaining his view of the Navy's key role, Weinberger relies on the venerable notion of sealane defense in the context of multi-theater war: "Our naval force requirements are potentially worldwide, because . . . we must be able to defend sea lines of communication along which critical U.S. reinforcements and resupply travel to forward theaters."²⁶ Even more important than sealane defense in the eyes of Reaganauts is the Navy's capacity "to conduct offensive operations against enemy naval forces and facilities."²⁷

Geopolitical Foundations

The new emphasis on the Navy stems from what defense analysts of the "maritime school" regard as a Soviet edge on the Eurasian land mass, coupled with Soviet nuclear "parity." This "unfavorable" balance can be redressed only by assigning the primary role in conventional warfare to a superior U.S. Navy.

Navy Secretary John Lehman and other "navalists" draw their inspiration from the English thinker Halford Mackinder and the American strategist Admiral Alfred Mahan. From Mackinder, the founder of the "geopolitical school" of strategic thinking, the navalists have drawn their strategic map of the globe as a duality - a "world-island", the Eurasian land mass, and its surrounding "world-ocean." It was Mackinder's axiom that the centrally located land powers dominate the world-island - yesterday Germany, today the Soviet Union.²⁸

To counter Mackinder's pessimistic dictum, "Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island," the navalists refer to Mahan, leading propagandist of U.S. naval and imperial expansion at the turn of the century. In his view, control of the "world-ocean" is the key to nullifying the landpower of the "Heartland". Great Britain, runs his argument, effectively used control of the seas to neutralize various land powers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The U.S., say the navalists, finds itself with a similar option today: as a "bastion-redoubt" in the world-ocean, America can use its seapower to neutralize Soviet superiority on the Eurasian land mass at a time of overall nuclear parity, by controlling the "rimlands". As naval analyst James Roherty puts it:

The central role of sea power in American force structure rests on the overriding need to control and to exploit the oceans in the critical relationship with the World-Island . . . The oceans permit the United States to project, relatively unimpeded, immense power to points of its choosing along the "rim" of the World-Island. The projection of power by air is an important complement to the ocean medium but cannot be regarded as a substitute. The oceans provide not just the primary mode of transit but a congenial ground for engagement.²⁹

Doctrinal War in Washington

To translate theory into policy, the navalists had to outmaneuver competing interest groups within the defense establishment. In addition to Reagan's sympathetic ear, the navalists had an effective warrior in Navy Secretary John Lehman. Before becoming Navy Secretary, Lehman held a string of government positions, including National Security Assistant to Henry Kissinger in the Nixon administration. As a

partner of Abington Corporation - consultant to major defense contractors such as Northrop, Boeing, and TRW Corporation - Lehman has close ties with the defense industry. A member of the U.S. Navy Reserve, Lehman enjoys a strong base within the Republican Party,³⁰ an asset which has served him well in the bureaucratic wars.

The first major battle pitted navalists against adherents of the old Eurocentric "Central Front" strategy. Within the cabinet, the most serious obstacle was Secretary of State Alexander Haig, former Supreme Commander of NATO. Despite the tough anti-Soviet rhetoric he shared with the navalists and their ally Weinberger, Haig played the traditional strong suits of U.S. defense policy - Europe, Israel, and South Korea - adding only the "China card" that had been dealt by his mentor, Henry Kissinger. This strategy relied heavily on the Army, Air Force and allies - a "coalition defense", as one proponent put it.³¹ By contrast, Lehman argued that "every strategy must be based on the use of the sea."³²

The navalists exploited the strains which developed between Haig and White House insiders like Edward Meese, then Reagan's prime counselor, who distrusted Haig's ambitions.* Thus, when Haig was sacked by Reagan in the Fall of 1982, the Navy was well positioned to seize the initiative.

After sinking the "Eurocentrists", the navalists turned their guns on a different set of adversaries - "military reformers" in Congress and their supporters in the Pentagon. Led by Senator Gary Hart and others, the reformers pushed for a Navy of smaller ships armed with high technology weapons like surface-to-air cruise missiles to guard the sealanes. A key target of the reformers was the large aircraft carrier which they regarded as a sitting duck for precision-guided weapons. Mobilizing a pork-barrel coalition of Congress members who had ship-building and Navy homeports in their districts,³³ Navy Secretary Lehman won this battle in 1982 when Congress agreed to appropriate funds for two more super-carriers.

Finally, Lehman won the inter-service battle for budgetary appropriations within the Defense Department. Here he clashed with pro-Army advocates like Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Thayer, who tried to transfer funds earmarked for naval modernization to the Army

* Reagan and his closest advisors may have been particularly put off by Haig's televised exclamation, "I'm in control here!" shortly after a presidential assassination attempt in 1982.

budget.³⁴ What appeared a mere budget battle was in fact a conflict over military strategy. Advocates of increased Army spending also tend to be adherents of the "Central Front" strategy, since the Army will play a key role in any European land war with the Soviet Red Army. When Thayer resigned in early 1984 to face charges of stock fraud while chairman of a defense firm, the Navy apparently had repulsed the Army assault.

Not one Navy program, boasts Lehman, has been cut back by Congress: "If you study and understand Washington, well, you can play it like a Stradivarius."³⁵ According to one bitter critic of the maritime strategy, the staggering \$62 billion allocated to shipbuilding meant that "the Navy is the only service that is getting substantial force structure; most increases requested by the other services have been deferred."³⁶

The "Lehman Doctrine"

By 1984, Secretary Lehman's effort to make the Navy the cutting edge of conventional and "limited" nuclear warfare had overwhelmed all opposition. Dubbed the "Lehman Doctrine", its main points are:

- *Maritime Supremacy*: The doctrine's objective is "outright maritime superiority over any power or powers which might attempt to prevent our use of the seas and the maintenance of our vital interests worldwide."³⁷ In short: "If challenged, we will be capable of sending any opponent to the bottom."³⁸

- *Offensive Forward Deployment*: The Navy should abandon its sealane defense for one "visibly offensive in orientation, [with] offensive power . . . widely distributed throughout the fleet."³⁹ Such an aggressive posture "would prevent Warsaw Pact concentration of forces in Central Europe by forcing them to defend and distribute their forces against maritime vulnerabilities around the entire periphery of Warsaw Pact territory."⁴⁰

Furthermore, according to navalist Francis West, keeping the Soviet Pacific Fleet "in a defensive posture and boxed up in the Northwest Pacific assures the maintenance of certain policy goals elsewhere in the region. It does not, however, contribute to its defeat, which would assure U.S. dominance throughout the region, including the vital Northeast Asia area, which is a broader post-[U.S.-Soviet]war goal. To

do this requires the use of naval forces to defeat them in their home waters.”⁴¹ West concludes that the U.S. can “bottle up the Soviet Navy or . . . defeat it. The strategy for defeating the Soviet Navy is the one for which the U.S. Navy should plan.”⁴²

● *Targeting the Soviets:* An offensive posture requires the capacity for simultaneous attack on the Soviet fleet, its coastal installations and targets further inland. Says one Navy spokesman: “We must be able to threaten the potential adversary in his most secure areas.”⁴³ Candidates for U.S. naval attack include Soviet shore facilities in the Barents Sea and the Soviet Far East.

● *Expansion:* According to the doctrine, the minimum number of warships necessary for command of the seas is 600. Reaganites criticize previous administrations for allowing the number of active U.S. warships to decline to 479 in 1980. With a program to build 133 new ships and refit sixteen, the Navy hopes to reach its magic number by 1988.

The expansion centers on:

● *Aircraft Carriers:* The large aircraft carrier, supported by the rest of the surface fleet, is the centerpiece of the navalists’ strategy. The number of carriers will increase from twelve in 1980 to fifteen by the end of the decade.* Dismissing the criticisms of military reformers who claim that \$17 billion is too much for a battle group easily targeted by Soviet cruise missiles, Lehman and his allies have convinced Congress that the big carrier is the best weapon for both offensive operations against the Soviets and intervention in the Third World. Navalist James Roherty extolls the virtues of aircraft carriers:

The supreme exploitation of oceanic opportunities is achieved in the air-sea striking power of fast carrier forces. The versatility if not the mobility of the fast carrier force exceeds that of the fleet ballistic missile submarine, making it the premier ocean system. Participating in joint operations or acting alone, the fast carrier force lends itself to innumerable tactical scenarios . . . It is in the highly mobile and flexible capabilities of fast carrier forces that we confront the “continental” threat with a dimension that is unfamiliar to the enemy.⁴⁴

Lehman believes that big carriers can survive all but direct nuclear hits and are less vulnerable than U.S. land-based forces to attack by Soviet

* Six carriers were deployed in the Pacific in 1985.

missiles and aircraft. He also argues that carriers suffer fewer political constraints from U.S. allies.⁴⁵

The carrier provides the most secure nuclear storage site possible in politically volatile areas in the Far East and Europe where tactical nuclear weapons have been the central element of the U.S. guarantee. The rear-deployed carriers are the least vulnerable basing mode against pre-emptive attack.⁴⁶

Lehman also believes: "It's a matter of physics that ships are the best possible kind of bomb shelter there is . . . [if] anything is going to survive an all-out nuclear war, it's going to be naval ships, much more than land-fixed assets."⁴⁷

● *Battleships*: To strengthen the conventional war capability of the fleet, the navalists have resurrected the battleship. Known for its deployments in Lebanon and Central America, the *New Jersey* has already been recommissioned, while three more Iowa-class veterans of World War II will soon be refitted. "The battleship," boasts Weinberger, "can . . . absolutely devastate and level whole areas, if that is indeed the mission."⁴⁸ One battleship is already attached to the Pacific Fleet.

● *Attack Submarines*: To sharpen the offensive edge, the administration is also raising the number of nuclear-powered attack submarines from seventy-four in 1981 to 117 by 1989. The Navy has deployed conventional and nuclear-armed Tomahawk cruise missiles, and has stepped up the arming of ships and aircraft with the Harpoon anti-ship missile.

Flex Ops

To maximize combat readiness and American military visibility, the Lehman doctrine calls for a greater pace of military activity. Exemplified by a series of multi-carrier, inter-service *Flex Ops* exercises, the operating tempo of the Navy in the Pacific increased in 1983-1984.⁴⁹ These exercises involved sailing two carrier task forces off the Kuriles and Aleutians. In an effort to make the training more realistic, the *Fleetex* exercise also called on the Air Force to support the carriers, and involved Canadian forces.

By expanding the mobility of U.S. forces and reducing the predictability of their location,⁵⁰ the operations aim to increase Soviet uncertainty about American intentions. A portent of what the Navy would do in a war off the Soviet Far East, *Fleetex* demonstrated the *offensive* nature of U.S. maritime strategy. When the two carriers *Carl Vinson* and *Midway* threw down the gauntlet in the Sea of Japan by conducting exercises off the Soviet bases at Vladivostok after the *Fleetex* exercise, more than 100 Soviet aircraft scrambled over the U.S. fleet.⁵¹

Pacific Commander Admiral Crowe described *Fleetex 85* – a barely disguised dry-run for an attack on the Soviet Far East – in a cable to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger:

A. [security deletion] *Fleetex 85*. One of the largest and most extensive exercises ever conducted in the USPACOM [Pacific Command]. *Fleetex 85* took place 18 Oct-1 Dec 84. The CINCPACFLT [Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet] directed. COMSEVENTHFLT [Commander 7th Fleet] sponsored exercise involved the *Vinson*, *Constellation*, *Midway*, *Enterprise*, and *Independence* battle-groups in operations conducted off the California coast, in the vicinity of Hawaii, in the mid and northwest Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. Exercise activity gradually increased in intensity until, on 22 November 1984, the *Carl Vinson*, *Midway*, and *Enterprise* CVBGs [aircraft carrier battle groups] joined forces in the Philippine Sea, commencing a northerly transit. The battleforce engaged in concentrated air operations near Okinawa, supported by USAF [Air Force] tactical and tanker aircraft. Continuing north, the battleforce dispersed its assets and successfully countered an extensive sub-surface threat. The exercise terminated with a large number of U.S. power projection strikes flown against land and maritime targets on and near the island of Hokkaido in northern Japan. [security deletion].

B. [security deletion] During the period of *Fleetex*, the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) (13 ships and 17 aircraft) participated with U.S. units in a separate and distinct exercise, ASWEX 85-1. [security deletion]

C. [security deletion] Sea of Japan (SOJ) operations. Following *Fleetex* the *Midway/Vinson* battle force (BF) transited Tsugaru Strait and entered the SOJ on 1 Dec.⁵²

This massive exercise skirting the Soviet Far East Naval Command Center took place just six weeks after regional tensions were inflamed

by the shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007, a commercial flight which strayed into Soviet airspace.

Activating Pacific Allies

The unprecedented level of U.S. exercises in the Pacific since 1980 is symptomatic of the increasing militarization of U.S. alliances in the Pacific. Japan, for example, has agreed to "take responsibility" for "defense of the sealanes" 1,600 km to its east and south - thus bringing both the Philippines and Vietnam within its sphere of influence. Japan has also agreed to export defense-related civilian technology, a move critics claim is a violation of Japan's pacifist constitution. But despite Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's promise to make Japan "an un-sinkable aircraft carrier", the Reagan administration has not yet been able to convince the Japanese Diet (Parliament) to make major increases in military expenditures.

Besides pressuring Japan, the Reagan administration has followed what his former Secretary of State described as "the strategic imperative of strengthening our relations with the People's Republic of China."⁵³ In marked contrast to the caution of previous administrations, the Reagan White House is now openly promoting a U.S.-China military alliance against the Soviet Union. While differences over the future of Taiwan continue to block fuller cooperation, the Reagan administration is providing incentives to the Chinese by selling weapons like anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft missiles. The U.S. and China have also discussed the possibility that a Tomahawk-capable destroyer visit a Chinese port, the first such contact with the mainland since 1948.

Without waiting for a formal military alliance, Pentagon mandarins have integrated China into their strategic planning against the Soviet Union. "The PRC," says the Joint Chiefs' *Posture Statement* of 1984, "indirectly contributes to U.S. global and regional security as a counterweight to Soviet land power in Asia."⁵⁴ The most recent Pentagon *Defense Guidance* is quite specific about China's role in the event of war: "[T]he U.S. will encourage PRC military initiatives that fix Soviet forces in the USSR's Far Eastern territories and will be prepared, if necessary, to provide logistics and other support for those initiatives."⁵⁵

Pacific Command is playing an increasing role in the emerging de facto alliance. In December 1984, a Chinese naval delegation visited

Pacific Command headquarters in Hawaii for discussions of the proposed U.S. ship visit. Cabled Admiral Crowe to the Secretary of Defense in January 1985, "I see these events as signalling U.S. PACOM's involvement in the growing U.S.-China relationship."⁵⁶

The third thrust of Reagan's Asia policy is arming south Korea to place north Korea on the defensive. The Pentagon has upgraded south Korea from "a significant interest area" to a "vital interest area" and given it equal billing with Western Europe as a "first line of defense."⁵⁷ To make sure that north Korea and the Soviet Union understood this change, U.S. and south Korean units in the peninsula, backed by U.S. forces from all over the Pacific, held *Operation Team Spirit '84*. Involving 207,000 troops, this was the biggest ever held in the series, and dwarfed the more publicized *Big Pine* exercises in Honduras.

The Pentagon is also considering the deployment of neutron bombs to Korea, adding to its already massive stockpile of tactical atomic weapons.⁵⁸ A closer, multilateral military alliance among the U.S., Japan, and south Korea is being explored to facilitate operations currently impossible under the separate bilateral defense pacts.

In Southeast Asia, the centerpiece of the Reagan's policy is to "bleed Vietnam white" by supporting the Khmer Rouge and other guerilla forces inside Kampuchea (Cambodia). By cultivating fears of "Vietnamese expansionism", the U.S. hopes to speed up the militarization of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to replace the defunct Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which fell apart during the Vietnam War. Military aid to Thailand and Indonesia has been increased, and high levels maintained to the Philippines. A spate of visits by Pentagon officials, including Weinberger, has stressed the standardization of ASEAN's weaponry, creation of a common arms depot, and the prospect of sales of advanced weapons like the F-16 fighter-bomber.

The U.S. is also nudging the allies toward closer, preferably multilateral defense planning - a move that comes on top of existing intelligence exchanges, combined training exercises, military staff meetings, and joint naval patrols.⁵⁹ To implement this policy, CINCPAC instructed his staff in May 1982 that:

Special emphasis should be placed by planning agencies in the development of facilities for joint use by U.S. and host countries [listed are strategic roads, railways, airfields, ports, harbors, pipelines, munitions depots, communi-

cations, etc.] . . . Insofar as possible, equipment to be sold or provided to allies should be similar to or compatible with that used by U.S. forces in order to facilitate combined operations and logistic support.⁶⁰

In the light of their increasing reliance on Pacific allies, the severe American reaction against the one that balked, New Zealand, becomes understandable. Linked to the U.S. and Australia via a mutual defense pact (ANZUS), New Zealand in July 1984 elected a Labor government committed to keeping nuclear warships out of its ports. The Reagan administration's reaction bordered on hysteria. High-level U.S. diplomats made stern threats about "punishing" New Zealand economically, especially after the U.S. warship *Buchanan* was denied entry in February 1985. While New Zealand has little direct strategic value to the U.S., the unravelling of the region's alliance system would undermine the entire U.S. posture in the Pacific.

Upgrading Pacific Command

Even as it activates U.S. military alliances, the Pentagon argues that the U.S. should have the strength for unilateral action.⁶¹ To this end, it is swiftly building up Pacific Command. The Seventh Fleet's forward-deployed surface ships increased by almost 100 per cent between 1980 and 1983, from twenty-one to forty. Including missile and attack submarines, U.S. warship strength in the Western Pacific rose from thirty-seven to fifty-two in just three years.* Naval personnel afloat in the Pacific more than doubled, from 15,000 to 34,000.⁶²

As Admiral Crowe, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific (CINCPAC) testified in 1984: "In terms of weapon systems, we've added the Carl Vinson-class carrier; Ohio SSBNs [nuclear ballistic missile submarines]; Los Angeles SSNs [nuclear attack submarines]; *New Jersey* battleship, Spruance destroyers, and Perry frigates, F-14s, F-15s, F-16s, and now F-18s [fighter/bomber aircraft] . . ." ⁶³ Crowe stated that his "highest priority is strategic nuclear modernization", particularly "upgrading our theater nuclear posture combined with the supporting survivable and enduring C3 [command, control and communications] systems." The admiral emphasized that: "All of our military efforts in the PACOM

* Not all are sailing at any point in time.

[Pacific Command] area must rest on the foundation of a viable and credible nuclear deterrent.”⁶⁴

The Contest for Control

Although the new militarists are united on the need for a build-up of American military power, political battles continue for control over how this ever-swelling force should be used. Because nuclear weapons are the core of American military force, the political infighting is most pronounced over nuclear arms control, the classic diplomatic means of striving for advantage under conditions of mutual nuclear deterrence.

Even before coming to power, the ultra-hardliners took aim at the Strategic Arms Limitation treaties (SALT) as a sellout of U.S. nuclear superiority. Lehman called the professional “community” of arms control diplomats “unfit to serve” and called for their replacement by people “chosen for intelligence and toughness” – that is, himself and his friends.⁶⁵ Led by Richard Perle in Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger’s office, a network of anti-SALT advocates have campaigned for withdrawal from arms control agreements with the U.S.S.R.⁶⁶ They are pitted against an array of entrenched diplomats who concur on the need for nuclear superiority, but anticipate political and military advantages from engaging in arms control negotiations with the Soviets.

The effects of their unremitting hostility quickly sabotaged U.S.–U.S.S.R. arms control talks, which ended in a Soviet walkout in 1983. Lehman is well placed to assault existing arms control agreements. When the seventh Ohio-class submarine was launched in June 1985, he refused to “begin dismantling perfectly good Poseidon submarines” to comply with SALT II⁶⁷ until ordered by President Reagan. The previous year, the Navy also deployed a nuclear land-attack version of the sea-launched cruise missile. Indistinguishable from the non-nuclear model, it cannot be easily included in future arms control agreements contingent upon reliable verification of deployment limits, thus making arms control *per se* more difficult to implement.

The Pentagon and the State Department also wrangle over how the enlarged military force should be applied for purposes of routine coercive diplomacy. The Pentagon first waged an unrelenting campaign

to root out any residual notions that force is the option of last resort. That approach "is a prescription for disaster," argued Major General Bernard Trainor in June 1984, "because diplomacy without the implicit existence, capability, and willingness to use force is totally ineffective."⁶⁸ In 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Schultz openly clashed on whether force should be applied with an eye to outright military victory or subordinated to broader diplomatic imperatives in crises such as that of Lebanon.⁶⁹

Constantly contending for pre-eminence, the militarists and the hardline diplomats never definitively resolved this dispute. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Pentagon has now won greater control over the conduct of military interventions, in effect, shutting the diplomats out of military decision making. No abstract debate, the new approach is embodied in U.S. military doctrine. Determined to avoid the diplomatic restraints such as those on the bombing of Vietnam, the Air Force's new Basic Aerospace Doctrine, for example, speaks candidly of "decisive defeat" of the enemy.⁷⁰

The American Threat

While the maritime supremacists have won control of U.S. foreign policy, their military strategy remains contentious, even within the national security elite. In 1984, for example, prestigious thinkers such as John Gaddis, the doyen of conservative defense intellectuals,⁷¹ and the Cold Warrior George Kennan criticized the policy of horizontal escalation. Military analysts such as Robert Komer⁷² and Jeffrey Record at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis have also indicted the Reagan posture for its poor priorities - ignoring the importance of Europe, dispersing U.S. forces, confusing naval victory with defeat of Soviet landpower, assuming that nuclear escalation would not occur and incurring unaffordable costs. "In sum," says Jeffrey Record, "the Reagan administration's declared military strategy is not only militarily defective. It is also foolishly ambitious, betraying an unbridgeable abyss between aspirations and resources. Indeed, if strategy is the calculated relationship of ends and means, the strategy of worldwide war is not a strategy at all."⁷³

More embarrassing is the near-mutiny of top Navy brass against the civilian Lehman's anti-Soviet belligerence. When Lehman announced in May 1983 that aircraft carriers would sail close to attack the heavily

defended Soviet shoreline in war, Admiral Watkins challenged his superior by telling the press that "aircraft carriers should not go charging into waters near the Soviet Union in wartime."⁷⁴ The Navy fended off their zealous Secretary again in 1984 by giving a prestigious essay award to Captain L. F. Brooks, a critic of the Lehman Doctrine who believes that the Soviets are likely to pre-empt a carrier attack by escalating directly to nuclear weapons. Captain Brooks noted dryly: "The danger . . . is that the U.S. Navy will become a victim of its own rhetoric."⁷⁵

These critics are not strong enough, however, to challenge the alliance of anti-Soviet hardliners in the Pentagon, State Department, and White House. Rearguard action by the Army and Air Force in the budgetary battles may slow but apparently cannot stop the maritime supremacists. As long as the domestic landscape is tranquil and America's allies remain compliant, the military build-up will continue.

Under Reagan's leadership, U.S. military leaders feel they have finally overcome the "Vietnam syndrome", the American public's strong antipathy to U.S. military interventions following defeat in Indochina. As Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor said in June 1984 to the Current Strategy Forum: "If we *talk* about doing it, you are not going to get support. If you *do* it, if it's quick, if it's successful, and if it's bloodless, people will applaud it."⁷⁶ Potential candidates for such "surgical strikes" are Korea, the Philippines, Pakistan, the Gulf area in the Middle East, and Central America.

Nevertheless, there are signs that the new military net cast over the Pacific is already fraying. In the decades after World War II, the system of bilateral alliances in the Pacific allowed the U.S. great freedom in the use of military power. But the United States is now losing control over allies. Rising public concern about the growing militarism and the danger of nuclear war threatens the ideological consensus among Pacific allies. Throughout the region - Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and Micronesia - growing popular opposition to the U.S. presence represents a major challenge to America's forward deployment in the Pacific.

Over-extension and Nuclear Escalation

"We have plenty of forces," asserted Lieutenant General Trainor of the Marines in 1984, "for force projection into the third world, the devel-

oping, the non-industrial world." Since three billion people will live in Third World cities by 2000, concluded the General: "We are going to get more and more involved in urban scenes."⁷⁷ Reformers such as Admiral Stansfield Turner have made a similar case for a new Navy: "Our most urgent need is to be better prepared in the area where we are most likely to be challenged - namely, in intervention around the world."⁷⁸ With one loss (China), one draw (Korea), and one defeat (Vietnam) on its scoreboard, the U.S. has discovered that simply rounding up an international posse will not necessarily defeat a Third World liberation movement. A fundamental dilemma remains - the U.S. does not have the resources to field sufficient troops for multiple, simultaneous interventions. As General Trainor admits, the problem is "strategic mobility", that is, "getting those forces there, heavy enough to fight, and light enough to get there."⁷⁹ The Vietnam War, for example, was - in terms of American military planning - only a "half-war", even though over 40 per cent of U.S. forces were involved.⁸⁰

Pressure Point, a Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise in 1984, revealed that in an imaginary north-south Korean War, the U.S. would run out of ammunition in less than a month, and would be forced to either accept a stalemate or *escalate*. If a crisis in Korea occurred simultaneously with one in Egypt or Central America, troops could not be sustained in the extra interventions.⁸¹ This exercise confirmed a major Congressional study which concluded that "United States forces in Korea will have to sink or swim on their own."⁸²

At the other end of Pacific Command's domain, the Indian Ocean, U.S. forces face even more severe logistical constraints (see Chapter 10). Although 111,000 tonnes of war materials are already pre-positioned on ships at the U.S. base on Diego Garcia island, 1,600 km south of India,⁸³ a "surge" operation in Southwest Asia would require about 2.3 million tonnes of additional cargo and ammunition.⁸⁴ Strategist Thomas Etzold has characterized Pacific Command's Indian Ocean build-up as a "serious error" for the U.S. - "the dissipation of American power and the scattering of American military resources."⁸⁵ Supporting "vital interests" in the Middle East or the Far East, he argues, has little to do with the Navy's primary mission in the region - the Soviet Union and the military balance in the Pacific. The conflict between strategic missions arises, as conservative critic Jeffrey Record puts it, because: "America's unlimited global military objectives render almost any conceivable U.S. military means inadequate."⁸⁶

Over-extension leaves two options, both unsavory to the Pentagon. The U.S. can scale its strategy to realistic military goals. While this route risks destabilizing U.S. military alliances, it emphasizes diplomatic and economic components of U.S. foreign policy. The alternative is business-as-usual, sending in the Marines and then retreating in disorder, earning a reputation for unreliability. Faced with the ever-accelerating pace of social and political transformation in the Third World,⁸⁷ the U.S. faces an inevitable decline in its power to intervene militarily. Whether or not the U.S. engages in a massive "hot war" in the Third World or the Soviet Union, the domestic economic costs of the Reagan rearmament are likely to impose some political restraint on the rollback strategy.*

The growing gap between America's infinite global commitments and finite resources means that U.S. allies will likely be pressed into a future war. Under crossfire in Congress, Admiral Watkins admitted that over-extension means: "All tasks cannot be accomplished simultaneously without considerable risk. Thus, our current maritime strategy emphasizes maximum use of the other services and our allies in coalition warfare." To drive the point home, he added, "*We know that any major war conflict will involve our allies.*"⁸⁸

More importantly, the U.S. military's over-extension pushes it to escalate conflict to nuclear war. As its conventional resources are strained, the U.S. will therefore lean more heavily on the nuclear crutch in a conflict with a non-nuclear adversary.⁸⁹ When the U.S. prepared to withdraw half its ground forces from Korea in 1975, for example, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger publicly announced for the first time that the U.S. would not foreclose the option of using nuclear weapons in the peninsula.⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Admiral Miller testified in Congress in 1976 that nuclear weapons could compensate for conventional force in "situations that are far from our shores, where we would have difficulty, from a logistics point of view, at least, in reaching the areas in which we would have considerable U.S. interests."⁹¹

"All of a sudden," notes Joseph Addabbo, a Congressional critic of the Pentagon, "nuclear is a new synonym for strategic. If we cannot get the men and weapons there, we are forced to go strategic or nuclear."

* Or prompt a major restructuring of the domestic political process, closing opportunities for Congressional and popular input into the making of foreign policy.

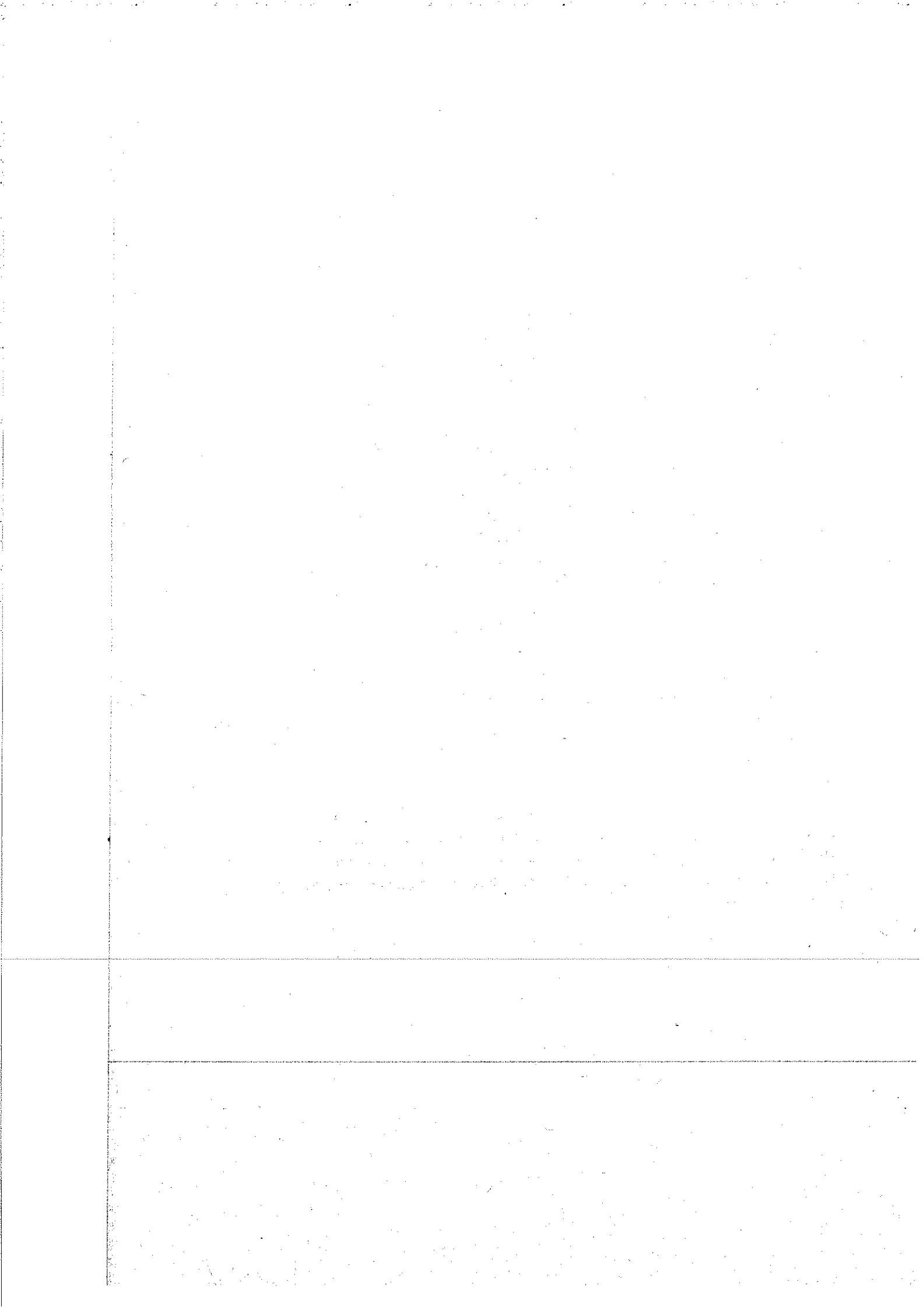
Frustrated by the military, Addabbo warned: "There is no such thing as a graduated nuclear war. Nuclear is nuclear."⁹²

Adding to the risk of nuclear war, Reagan's strategists attribute all Third World revolutions to the long hand of the Soviet Union, a perception which links a peasant revolt in Asia to a superpower confrontation in the Pacific. Even conservatives committed to preserving U.S. power object to this linkage. As American strategists have warned, the strategy of maritime supremacy "is based on war-widening initiatives that elevate secondary regional objectives into nothing less than determination to defeat the Soviet Union."⁹³

Major General Bernard Trainor sums up the views of those who advocate maritime supremacy in the Pacific:

Given what's happening with the Soviets in their force projection, we probably in some point in our lifetime will clash with them. Now, there's enormous dangers involved with that. The dangers of escalation. Both sides know it. It'll probably be an unintended clash and when it happens, there will be a rush on the part of both sides and the rest of the world who are so nervous about the two elephants bumping and getting stamped. The odds are that any such clash would be short-lived. If it is short-lived, somebody's going to come away with the perception that one side bested the other. The world better get the perception that we bested them, because the fight will be on "our turf." In our role as world leader, if in the outbacks of the world the Soviets are perceived to have bested the United States, then we have invited a great deal of international trouble for ourselves."⁹⁴

The following chapters look more closely at how the two elephants might bump in a conventional war or crush the Pacific - and likely the world - in a nuclear war. The possibility offers cause for great concern, since, as an old Malaysian proverb says, "When the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled."



PART TWO ☆
PACIFIC ARSENALS

Dual-capable B-52 bomber landing in Guam, 1972
(U.S. Air Force)

