Keeping the Strategic Flame

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B–17s on daylight raid over Germany.

Strategic thinking by the American military appears to have gone into hiding. Planning on the tactical and operational levels flourishes, but the strategic level is largely discussed in historical terms rather than as current art. Three decades ago, strategic thought burnt bright in the sanctuary of the national security temple. And for three decades prior to that—back to the 1930s—strategic theorizing dominated military debates in this country.

What happened? We cannot blame the demise of the Soviet Union since the strategic flame began to dim during the 1960s, a quarter century before most people believe the Cold War ended. It cannot be a decline in the defense budget, for we spend about the same amount in real terms today as at the height of strategic thinking in 1955.[1] Some may blame the Vietnam War when the military every bit as much as our civilian leadership seemed to lose its strategic compass. But the cause may lie deeper in military institutions. And even if it should be found, that may not motivate a revival of strategic thinking, for few lament its absence today.

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I would like to pursue three sets of questions about this paucity of strategic thinking:

- What is strategic thinking? How can it be distinguished from other kinds of military thought?
- What happened to strategic thinking? What caused its flame to wax and now wane?
- Why should we mourn the absence of strategic thinking today? What will it take to rekindle the flame?

I will argue that the strategic flame must be rekindled and kept alive. It has gone out twice before in this century to the Nation's detriment.

The Strategic Idea

The familiar terms *strategic* and *tactical*—which act as bookends on either side of the term *operational*—have accumulated lots of baggage in this century, and some of it must be jettisoned at the outset. The best way to do that is to start over. General Glenn Kent, the legendary Air Force analyst, sometimes admonished those who were about to brief him that they could define terms in any way they wished, but he would hold them strictly to their definitions. To avoid confusion, he urged briefers to use simple dictionary definitions. For the terms *strategic* and *tactical*, the ordinary dictionary definitions are close enough and strip away some of the baggage that encumbers them in military usage. But to sharpen the differences, a distinction should be made between strategic and tactical as separate kinds of endeavors (see figure 1). Note that these differences between strategic and tactical do not refer to types of weapons (nuclear or conventional), their range (intercontinental or theater), or the ways in which military power is applied (force, logistical, or surveillance).

Joint Vision 2010 is a current illustration of thinking tactically

Figure 1. Redefining Two Familiar Terms

Term	Strategic	Tactical
Objective	Going to the heart of the matter	Dealing with the matter at hand
	Going for the jugular	Playing the hand dealt
Focus on	Ends	Means
Nature	Transformatory	Engaging
Style	Game-changing	Game-playing
In the game of chess	Check and mate moves	Opening and castling moves
In Vietnam	Why we went there: Stopping the fall of southeast Asian dominoes	What we ended up doing: Trying to defeat an opposing military force

These distinctions beg for some comparison with the term *operational*, which lies between strategic and tactical. By contrast with the other two, the operational enterprise has as its objective *providing the means*—getting the right things in the right amount to the right place at the right time. This operational quality of the American military has long been the envy of the world. Repeatedly during this century it has moved large land, naval, and air forces, set them up, and made them fully functional halfway around the globe. It required more than logistics or support. It meant knowing which units to send where and when in order to create complex military forces that could fight as well as defend and support themselves—precisely as they were organized, trained, and equipped to do—from the first to the last forces sent.

If the operational thinking of our military is secure and without peer, and if tactical thinking has come to the fore, strategic thought has been all but abandoned. The difficulty lies in seeing the strategic side of national security increasingly as the province of politicians and diplomats while the operational and tactical sides belong to the military, free from civilian meddling (for some evidence of this development, consider the examples outlined in figure 2).

The current demand by the military for well-defined objectives is eloquent evidence of how far our thinking has drifted toward the tactical domain. The insistence on operationally planning based on enemy capabilities, while tactically prudent, is the antithesis of strategic thinking, which should concentrate on enemy vulnerabilities. Although defeating enemy forces may sometimes be necessary to achieve our objectives, it is not always the Nation's or the military's best option.

Joint Vision 2010 is a current illustration of thinking tactically. It is largely about engaging an enemy with joint forces in the future—without evident purpose beyond fighting and winning.[2] It could instead have been about the different ways military power, through joint capabilities, might be brought to bear on the future spectrum of national interests. The military planning posture that came out of the Bottom-Up Review at the start of the first Clinton administration is a contemporary example of operational thinking. It explained (or argued) what kinds of forces in what amounts are needed where and when for two nearly simultaneous major regional contingencies. It is difficult to find current instances of strategic thinking from within the American military.[3]

The strategic flame is a metaphor for the grand idea that military power can sometimes be brought to bear most effectively and efficiently when it is applied directly toward a nation's highest purposes without first defeating defending

Figure 2. Examples of Strategic and Tactical Thinking

Strategic	Tactical
What are our national interests and objectives?	What is the military objective?
What are an enemy's *vulnerabilities?*	What are an enemy's *military capabilities?*
What will it take to achieve national objectives?	What will it take to defeat an enemy's military?
How can we most quickly go to the heart of the issue?	How should we best engage an enemy's military?

enemy forces. It is an enduring idea latent in the age-old precept of seizing the enemy capital, but one which was often frustrated by the interposition of defending forces. So long as military forces were confined to the surface of the earth and limited in mobility, as was the case prior to the 20th century, strategic thinking was mostly positional—the occupation of capitals, straits, ports, etc. Seizing or occupying such critical points was a strategic objective, but access could be denied or delayed by defending enemy forces that typically had to be defeated before any objectives were achieved. Thus, winning a war became the *sine qua non* for pursuing strategic aims. Little wonder that combat was seen as a noble contest among professional warriors over a prize, which was a disarmed or vulnerable opponent finally opened to the strategic designs of the winning state, which is pure Clausewitz.

The technological achievement of flight through the air and then in space provided the first plausible opportunity to test the existing barriers to strategic objectives. Strategic thinking became militarily actionable: national objectives could be achieved directly, without first defeating enemy forces. Airmen were the earliest to see, elaborate, and promote this idea. What made airplanes distinctive from surface forces was that access to strategic objectives could be sudden—a matter of hours or minutes with little or no warning—from any direction and to any place. As with surface forces, the interposition of defenses was still conceivable but not as certain. The agility and rapidly increasing speed of aircraft made the kinematics of defenses appear much less advantageous. The advent of ballistic missiles and space technologies in mid-century made defenses against strategic actions even more remote.

The strategic thinking made actionable by planes and then missiles was controversial from the outset. It first appealed mostly to aviation-minded people such as Smuts, Douhet, Trenchard, and Mitchell; but aviators such as Chennault and Moffett were skeptical of expansive claims by air strategists. World War II demonstrated these arguments in the European and Pacific theaters.

The Idea in Practice

Over Europe in the 1940s, British and American airmen played out strategic bombardment theories with results that ranged from failure at worst to ambiguity at best. "Bomber" Harris and "Hap" Arnold structured forces and mounted bombing campaigns around their respective ideas that the aircraft would always get through and the industrial base of the enemy war machine could be destroyed by precision daylight bombardment from self-defended bomber formations. Those ideas proved disastrous to aviators who tested them over Germany. Their bomber forces were too small to overwhelm enemy defenses; and they found themselves in an age-old battle with the defenders, precisely the clash the strategic theorists had promised they could avoid.

The British took up bombing at night to evade the worst of the defenses; and the Americans found themselves in a fighter-plane battle for control of daylight skies over Germany as Chennault had warned. It had become a war of attrition even in the air. By the time the United States built up its fighter and bomber forces enough to overwhelm German air defenses, the forces were diverted to support tactical objectives for the impending invasion of Europe.[4] Thus the theory of strategic bombardment remained either incompletely tested (to airmen) or discredited (to the critics).

In the Pacific, a strategic campaign was carried out on land, under the sea, and in the air. Because of the "Europe first" policy adopted by Roosevelt and Churchill, the Pacific war had to be fought with an economy of force, not by attrition. On the surface, MacArthur and Nimitz pursued island-hopping campaigns to seize only bases needed to close on the strategic objective of Japan. They did not attempt to defeat the enemy en masse or to push back its entire perimeter. Under the sea, American submarines closed the waters around Japan to shipping[5] instead of scouring open seas for enemy naval forces.[6] In the air, both MacArthur and Nimitz used their air forces tactically to support strategic island-hopping campaigns that led to air bases within practical striking range of Japan. It was Curtis LeMay who then used such bases to strategically launch aircraft over Japan.

DOD

Loading equipment for Desert Shield.

After learning that the theory behind the development of the B–29 wasn't workable, LeMay completely subverted available means to pursue strategic ends. Since the combination of daylight bombing from self-defended formations at high altitude using high-explosive bombs could not gain the desired effect, he stripped the defensive armament from B–29s and flew them at night without formations and at medium altitude to maximize their loads of incendiaries. Whatever the legality or morality of such bombing, LeMay was clearly on the way to burning down every major Japanese city when the atom bomb punctuated his campaign with an exclamation point.

the strategic idea appeared finally to have come of age in the 1950s

The Strategic Bombing Survey,[7] conducted following World War II to validate or refute strategic bombardment theories, did not resolve the dispute, although the atom bomb now seemed to make the argument academic. It was obvious that even a few bombers armed with these atomic weapons could be enormously destructive; and defenses able to deny all the planes access to their targets seemed all but impossible. The advent of the ballistic missile, with access times measured in minutes rather than hours, simply compounded the problem of defense against strategic actions. The strategic idea appeared finally to have come of age in the 1950s.

But the strategic stalemate of the Cold War was bypassed in a series of conflicts in which strategic objectives were tempered by larger political considerations than fighting or winning wars. In Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere pursuit of strategic objectives, while technically and militarily feasible, was deemed too risky in its potential impact on other foes and domestic support. Even as strategic thinking defined the broader and more vital framework of the Cold War, it seemed useless for militaries mired in conflicts where the strategic options were arrogated to their civilian leaders.

In retrospect, however, strategic thinking did reappear periodically, sometimes in stunning forms—and not just in framing and sustaining the nuclear standoff at the nexus of the Cold War. While it may have been conceived as a tactical alternative at the time, the Berlin airlift of 1948 was a strategic masterpiece. It not only fulfilled its tactical objective of feeding and fueling the populace of Berlin (that is, dealing with the matter at hand); it *transformed* the game on the strategic level. The Soviets blockaded land routes to Berlin, believing that the West would have to choose between initiating hostilities (perhaps precipitating World War III) or abandoning Berlin. Supplying Berlin by air was inconceivable to the Soviets based on their own limited experience with airlift and the failed German effort at Stalingrad. What no one on either side seemed to recognize then or now is that an airlift would turn the tables and oblige the Soviets to initiate hostilities. That was check. When the sufficiency and sustainability of the airlift became apparent, it was checkmate. Thereafter, if the blockade was to be continued the West could only gain international admiration at the expense of the Soviets.

The Cold War yielded another transformatory strategic action in the Cuban missile crisis. On the strategic (game defining) level, the struggle for world opinion focused on who was telling the truth about missiles in Cuba. The United States asserted their presence and the Soviet Union denied it. Both sides had predisposed supporters in the absence of contrary evidence. The aerial reconnaissance of Cuba, clearly revealing a build-up of Soviet missiles and facilities, transformed the debate. In a dramatic moment, Adlai Stevenson, the U.S. representative to the United Nations, posted the reconnaissance photographs for all the world to see and declared that he was prepared to wait until hell froze over for the Soviet explanation of the evidence. The aerial reconnaissance and public release of the photos (unprecedented at the time) was a strategic action—the pursuit of the Nation's highest purposes without first defeating enemy forces.

Note that both the Berlin airlift and the Cuban reconnaissance utterly transformed the

East-West games being played at the time; yet strategic objectives were accomplished not by force but with military capabilities that normally support fighting forces. These cases are stunning proof that the strategic use of military power does not always take the form of military force. Indeed, cases of strategic action during the Cold War which involved the use of force are much more ambiguous in their effectiveness. They include coercive and punitive raids on Hanoi and Libya—the first to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table and the second to punish Kadafi for presumed connections with terrorism. The pertinence and impact of both actions are still argued today.

When the Flame Is Low

With the end of the Cold War and the political constraints imposed by the risks of nuclear confrontation, one might have expected a renaissance in strategic thinking in the American military. It hasn't happened. Both the Persian Gulf War and Bosnian conflict have been approached mostly in operational and tactical terms. In the Gulf, only the first rapid deployments into the theater as part of Desert Shield prior to October 1990 were unambiguously strategic, at least as defined here. Protecting oil fields south of Kuwait was our first and highest interest; and that was accomplished by force deployments, not engaging and defeating enemy forces. Subsequent interests—ejecting the Iraqis from Kuwait and ending the threat to the region—were largely approached operationally and tactically: Iraq's air defenses were temporarily neutralized and its air force shattered. Coalition ground forces were built up until they were capable of frontal assaults on Iraqi armies that had been weakened by aerial attacks. Even the Scud missile threat was dealt with tactically—offensively in Scud hunts and defensively by Patriot missiles—to keep Israel out and the coalition together, both of which were means, not ends.

military power can sometimes be brought to bear when it is applied without first defeating defending enemy forces

Thus the Gulf War was not dominated by strategic actions; it was mostly a demonstration of operational and tactical virtuosity—precisely the sort of opportunity our military has increasingly sought from civilian leaders since Vietnam. Moreover, subsequent actions in the Gulf have been mostly tactical: punitive strikes against an intelligence facility and air defense installations. Two air embargoes have not stopped Iraq from either using helicopters or abusing its own minorities.[8]

The strategic ends to which our military power might be applied over Iraq today are not so clear. Hence we default to a tactical use of force: beating up the opposition. The strategic problem is the Iraqi leadership, not its people nor its military; and separating these elements for the strategic application of military power is not easy. Airpower is thus applied to tactical ends, to taking down air defenses in preparation for what—other tactical applications of airpower? This is evidence that the strategic flame has dimmed.

Curiously, the American response to the Bosnian conflict may have demonstrated more by way of strategic thinking. Dropping supplies was the direct pursuit of one of our highest interests at the time—heading off winter starvation within the Muslim enclaves—without seeking to engage opposing forces. While the air embargo over Bosnia appears to have been no more effective than efforts over Iraq, Operation Deliberate Force may have been a direct factor in ending the fighting and bringing the Serbs to the bargaining table. Moreover, it appears that the strikes in Deliberate Force were not directed so much at military forces as at intimidating their leaders. We may have to wait for history to clarify the strategic thinking involved in the run-up to the Dayton accords.

Such examples and the definition of the strategic idea might suggest deliberate exclusion of fighting or surface forces. Not so. Throughout the Cold War, fighting forces—whether land, sea, or air, nuclear or conventional, whose presence and readiness served to deter conflict—were key to the grand idea that military power can sometimes be brought to bear most effectively and efficiently when it is applied directly to the highest national interests without first defeating defending enemy forces. That grand idea does not exclude applying military power directly against opposing forces if their defeat or destruction advances national interests. There are circumstances when that could conceivably be an end in itself, without further action, such as eliminating enemy capabilities for employing weapons of mass destruction. But the cases are few. Eliminating the Iraqi Republican Guards as a power base for Saddam Hussein might have been strategic in intent, but their power rested in their loyalty to him more than their arms. Thus their defeat on the battlefield may not have been a sufficient means to that end.

Israel seems to have appreciated the strategic use of military means for its highest interests in the 1976 Entebbe raid and the 1981 strike on the nuclear reactor near Baghdad. These probes were not about defeating enemy forces or winning a war; both were direct applications of military force toward national ends—recovering hostages and thwarting hostile nuclear developments.

Nevertheless, the strategic role of fighting forces began to shift when nuclear weapons and global access became feasible in the mid-20th century. This time, the seminal strategic thinking seemed to spring from civilians rather than the military. Bernard Brodie was thinking strategically fifty years ago when he observed what nuclear weapons implied: "Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose."[9] At about that time, George Kennan suggested that our interests would best be served by "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies [until] the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power."[10] These ideas on deterrence and containment remained pivotal to our thinking about national security throughout the forty-year Cold War. Of course they would be modified and elaborated over time and in light of new developments, both political and technical. Containment was embellished with massive retaliation, flexible response, and détente. Deterrence was defined by criteria of assured destruction, extended to cover allies, and eventually mocked as mad. Concepts for massive civil defense and missile defense programs disturbed, but could not displace, deterrence as the strategic core of national security. Vestiges of that core are still found in operational thinking, in explaining the purpose of military forces—to deter enemies and, if that fails, to fight and win.

With the end of the Cold War and recession of an immediate nuclear threat to our survival, tactical thinkers may have anticipated that the military could get back to its real job—winning wars. Alas, as Martin van Creveld suggests, the relevance of traditional state-on-state warfare is declining in a world where proliferating nuclear technology is an inevitable consequence of global trade:

Slowly, unevenly but inexorably, nuclear proliferation is causing interstate war and the kind of armed forces by which it is waged to disappear. The future belongs to wars fought by, and against, organizations that are not states. . . . Unless some yet to be designed system enables states to reliably defend themselves against nuclear weapons . . . the writing for large-scale, interstate war, as well as the armed forces by which it is waged, is on the wall.[11]

When the Flame Dies

The strategic flame can go out. It flickered twice in the past—both before and after World War II. It died with Billy Mitchell's court martial and the exile of upstart Army aviators to dusty posts in Kansas or fetid jungle camps in Panama or the Philippines to atone for their radical ideas. It briefly went out again when America demobilized after World War II and before the onset of the Cold War. On both occasions we had to scramble to rekindle it and rebuild new institutions from scratch. And, to our peril, we very nearly missed rebuilding in time.

Although our experience in rekindling the strategic flame is limited, a pattern is evident. It starts with a seminal strategic idea—how military power might be more effectively and efficiently applied to pursuing national interests without necessarily engaging defending enemy forces. That idea is then translated into strategic doctrine—rules or principles about the best way military power can be forged to pursue strategic objectives. The doctrine then becomes the objective specifications for developing military capabilities and drives the acquisition of new systems. This pattern could be recognized when the strategic flame was relighted at the Air Corps Tactical School in the 1930s and in the Strategic Air Command (SAC) in the 1950s.

As war clouds gathered over Europe in the 1930s, airmen at the Tactical School at Maxwell Field began to entertain the idea of economic targeting. It was a strategic idea in the sense defined here. It presumed that an enemy might be defeated by destroying critical economic activities—factories, industries, resources—supporting its war machine. But these airmen did not know how to execute that idea at first. They had to study national economies to identify economic targets; and they had to determine how to damage or destroy such targets. Their answer was precision aerial bombardment. But they went further doctrinally. To be precise they needed a better bombsight; and to see targets they had to bomb by daylight. To gain access to targets without first defeating defending enemy forces, they would need long-range bombers that could survive by flying at high altitude in self-defended formations. That doctrine drove development of the Norden bombsight and the acquisition of the B–17 Flying Fortress. Establishment of the semi-independent Army Air Forces followed as these capabilities emerged.

Strategic thinking came first, before the capabilities were in hand. Doctrine, development, acquisition, and institution-building followed logically. It can be argued that the strategic thinking at the Air Corps Tactical School was not sound, that the theory of economic targeting was beyond the means chosen by at least another decade—it would take a breakthrough in the destructiveness of weapons. But the validity of their theory is not the test for the existence of strategic thinking. No

Berlin airlift, 1948.

U.S. Air Force

Norden bombsight.

Northrop Grumman

one would suggest abandoning operational or tactical thinking if it sometimes proved wrong or reached beyond available technology. Airmen in that day were thinking strategically and thus laid the foundations for American security policies for the next half century.

The very same pattern was repeated in the emergence of SAC some two decades later. As the outlines of the Cold War began to take shape in the late 1940s, America's nuclear posture was in disarray: Neither the weaponry nor means of delivery had been maintained beyond research and experimentation. This time, the seminal strategic thinking came from civilians like George Kennan and Bernard Brodie in the concepts of containment and deterrence. The military problem was how to implement the concept of deterrence. The solution was to make the threat of nuclear retaliation to an attack on the United States so evident, quick, certain, and massive that any rational enemy would be dissuaded from making such a mistake. But again it was strategic doctrine that drove developments, acquisition, and institutions. Central to SAC was the doctrine of a single integrated operational plan, the scheme to constantly maintain trained, tested, ready nuclear forces to execute a massive, coordinated nuclear attack upon the Soviet Union. That plan drove the development of a series of bombers and ballistic missiles, tested their crews, and argued for requisite force levels. The institution that evolved became the military centerpiece of the Cold War; and its effects are still evident in military planning and culture today. SAC wasn't conceived to defeat an enemy air force; it was designed to fulfill the Nation's highest security objective directly—to deter a nuclear attack by the visible threat of unacceptable damage through a well-coordinated retaliatory strike. Nor was the fleet ballistic missile program conceived to defeat an enemy navy;[12] it was specifically designed to fulfill that same objective directly, but with an assuredly survivable force—one which denied the enemy any plausible counterforce option. As with strategic bombardment theories of the 1930s, deterrence theories of the 1950s may seem naive or simplistic today, but they were determinants of the path that led to the present; and they arose from strategic thinking.

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Why Has the Flame Dimmed?

From the beginning—when the strategic flame burned most brightly during the first half of the Cold War—some worried that a traditional test of military weapons between armies and navies could force our hand—that we could be self-deterred from being the first to use our nuclear strike forces even as we suffered a traditional defeat. The Korean war lent credence to that argument.

Hence we built up other arms—conventional or tactical to differentiate them from nuclear or strategic—and thus started a destructive division in our minds and institutions that still haunts us. Tactical weapons grew until they dwarfed their strategic counterparts; they even acquired nuclear weapons and found a niche in nuclear war plans. At great cost, they provided the United States and

its allies with an uneasy degree of security in Western Europe and Korea. A warfighting role was even found for these conventional forces in Southeast Asia until we learned to our chagrin that they became hostages that could be extracted only after we resorted once again to strategic strikes against enemy will, values, and resources.

Nevertheless, the strategic flame was much reduced by our attention to conventional arms, not by funding so much as interests. The military has once again built up large vested interests in traditional weaponry—intended to defeat their opposite number in kind, to fight and win wars—to the neglect of other capabilities (such as special operations forces) that might be more directly and adroitly applied to the Nation's highest or ultimate objectives.

In order to retain and modernize traditional arms, our military institutions have contributed to the reduction of the strategic flame. Once again, as occurred earlier in this century, the military—including the aviators—has become mostly rooted in the idea that weapons should be conceived to defeat their opposite numbers in a major regional conflict—with armies confronting armies and air forces opposing air forces. The Navy, with no other significant maritime power to defeat, has oriented itself on projecting power over the land from the sea. But this concept remains mostly operational in nature—about the kinds of units needed to provide presence and project power.[13]

U.S. Air Force (Marvin Lynchard)

F–117 precision bombing.

For the most part, however, the mid-20th century strategic idea that a military can be used for something more pertinent than defeating its counterpart has been pushed into the background. So the strategic flame has dimmed. If it is again extinguished by larger vested interests or neglect we may find ourselves struggling against time to rekindle it once more.

Relighting the Flame

What must be done to rekindle the strategic flame? Reduced resources pose difficulties, but they are not the problem. The flame can be kept burning with even a fraction of today's defense budget. But it can't endure without devotion and spirit. It is easy to have both when institutional fortunes are soaring and assets abound. Keeping faith in ideas rather than things is difficult when institutions and resources are focused on things. As in the case of those strategic pioneers at mid-century, strategic thinkers within the military today may get greater support from the public, from outside the defense establishment. That is altogether fitting, for keepers of the strategic flame serve the Nation even more than they do the institutions to which they belong.

The strategic idea can't always be applied successfully, as history has shown. Sometimes the available technical means are not up to the demands. And sometimes the ends are not apparent. Unfortunately for those devoted to things rather than ideas, new strategic means cannot be defined apart from evolving strategic ends. That was part of the trap into which we fell some fifty years ago by dividing forces along strategic and tactical (nuclear and conventional) lines. It is not that we lack the ability to define strategic means once the strategic ends have been defined; we neglect to spend the effort up front to define and pursue the strategic ends. It is the keepers of the strategic flame who must find strategic ends for applications of military power, for no others will assume that responsibility. It took hard work and acrimonious debate to define the ends for the strategic applications of military forces twice before—and it will again.

How do we attend to strategic ends before the demand arises? In the same manner that we did in the past. No one directed the Air Corps Tactical School to think about economic targeting. No one told LeMay that the means for deterrence was to be found in a comprehensive nuclear war plan. Thinking about strategic ends—and means to achieve them before a threat presented itself—rekindled the strategic flame and set it to burning brightly, at least back in those days.

Thinking about these ends seems daunting. Determinants of the future are in flux on many levels—national interests, resources, threats, and technology. During the Cold War those issues at

least seemed relatively constant; and we became good at hedging against uncertainties with rapidly changing technology. But it is no longer possible to depend on abundant resources or precisely know who or where an enemy will be or what will be required of our military to directly serve the Nation. Contemplating strategic ends across this spectrum can boggle the mind; but it need not if we think strategically instead of tactically.

The strategic applications of military power are about choosing the ways, places, and times to get at the heart of the matter. The initiative lies with us when we think strategically. The burden of strategic thinkers is to explore beforehand what may be worth doing and why. Not only in war, but when friends are isolated—Berlin in 1948 and Bosnia in the early 1990s. Not just for war, but when we need to punish—Libya in 1986 or Bosnia in 1995. Not just to destroy, but when help is needed—the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew and Provide Comfort. Not just to strike, but to know what is going on—over Cuba in 1962 and Rwanda in 1996.

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Future strategic challenges may include asymmetrical conflicts (as the first world confronts threats in the second and third), terrorism with no definable state roots, and ethnic, religious, and separatist movements. They may involve a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction beyond state controls. The world may see uncontrollable migrations and contraband as borders between nation-states erode. And all this may have to be addressed as traditional nation-state sovereignties and resources decline. Preparing for war, though still necessary, will be insufficient.

The strategic idea is arguably the most important military concept of this century as well as the next. It is a much bigger idea than the one that dominates our military institutions today—warriors being able to defeat other warriors of like kind. It is serving the Nation—more directly, effectively, and efficiently—not just testing new arms one against the other. History tells us that strategic thinking requires courage and perseverance: courage because it demands departures from mainstream thinking and perseverance because it takes time for institutional mainstreams to move and join the "discovered" innovative courses of thought. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] In 1955, when the United States was urgently preparing for imminent thermonuclear war with the Soviet Union, the defense budget was $242.8 billion in 1995 dollars. In 1995 the amount was $271.6 billion. From *The Budget of the United States Government for Fiscal Year 1996*, historical tables, reported in *The National Review*, vol. 47, no. 24 (December 1995), p. 21.

[2] For a reprise of *JV 2010*, see *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 12 (Summer 1996), pp. 34–50.

[3] Even the missile defense debate seems to reflect this point. Only the political discussion addresses strategic concerns, whilst military concerns are mostly tactical.

[4] Not only were bombers diverted to tactical military objectives, the invasion itself had the tactical objective of destroying the enemy. Eisenhower's invasion order (written by himself) was to enter Europe and do just that. At the same time, other leaders advanced strategic objectives such as seizing Berlin (Stalin and Patton) and blocking Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe (Churchill) by invading through the Balkans.

[5] Submarines were aided in that strategic objective by aerial mining, including a number of sorties flown by B–29 bombers then massing in the western Pacific.

[6] The Japanese used submarines mostly for the tactical objective of sinking American naval vessels in open ocean areas of the western Pacific.

[7] See David MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War Two: The Story of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976).

[8] In fact, the only confirmed effect so far has been the shooting down of two American Blackhawk helicopters.

[9] Bernard Brodie, editor, *The Absolute Weapon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946), p. 76, as repeated by its author in *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), fn. 2, p. 377.

[10] George F. Kennan writing as "X" in "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 4 (July 1947), pp. 575, 582.

[11] Martin van Creveld, "Air Power 2025," in *New Era Security* (RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, June 1996).

[12] Indeed, the Navy sometimes argued that the fleet ballistic missile program served the Nation more than itself and thus should not come out of the Navy budget. See Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 199–200.

[13] Department of the Navy, *Forward . . . from the Sea* (Washington: Department of the Navy, 1994).