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President's Notes: Taking Stock

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TAKING STOCK

I don't believe anyone could read any of my articles of the past 2 years and reach the conclusion that systems analysts are my kind of guys. It may thus strike some readers as odd that I begin this final Taking Stock by advocating the application of the logic of the world's first systems analyst—the 17th-century mathematician and founder of modern probability theory, Blaise Pascal. His logic, in the matter of how to resolve issues of vast import, was not to apply the conventional wisdom of suspending judgment "until all the facts are in," but to choose ("wager" was the word he used) that outcome by which one stands to lose the least in case he's wrong. I don't think it's too whimsical or too insensitive to apply Pascal's wager to the number one dilemma of our age—the occurrence or nonoccurrence of global war in the decade or two ahead. I think Pascal would agree that the smart wager is that global war will occur.

To me, this wager is more than a fail-safe precaution; all the trends are

tracking steadily in the direction of that outcome. Destabilization is in the wind and it seems an inevitable fallout of every political viewpoint. The liberal press feeds us a daily fare of what they perceive as the destabilizing influence of hawkish policies. What about dovish policies? Even the liberal *New Republic* is publishing articles that make a case for the destabilizing effects of them. A recent issue featured an article describing the deep lament of Moscow intellectuals who fear that the Kremlin's perception of American indecision and weakness will result in Soviet provocation, in the reckless pressing of their advantage. These intellectuals were described not as dissidents, but as scholars and coffee house skeptics who are conscious of their government's cynicism, and incredulous of an America on which they depended to keep the power balance stabilized, an America too sensitive to sideline heckling and so fickle and fainthearted as to drop the ball game in Vietnam and elsewhere. They don't understand us

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and are dismayed at the probable destabilizing results of our growing reputation for caving in.

Given the political fact that wars and rumors of wars can be made to follow from the logical extension of either hard or soft line policies, and the historic fact that war has blighted this planet in all but 268 of the past 4000 years, I think it was reasonable that while speaking recently in Annapolis I advised the midshipmen not to waste emotional energy on the twists and turns of every current event, "but to rest their nervous systems and gird their loins for World War III." Said another way, "put your money on the number dictated by Pascal's logic and concentrate on acquiring the traits you will need to meet the tests ahead."

A fallout of my philosophy course, "Foundations of Moral Obligation," has been the illumination of some seldom stressed aspects of leadership that may well be a part of those tests. I mean in particular those necessary in the new decisionmaking territory our middle and junior grade officers of today can expect to find themselves in before the turn of the century. The "new territory" might well be one of a nuclear war, one that lasts for months, one in which communication with deployed units may be intermittent or severed. There in the eye of the storm, leadership will entail many unique duties that will test and challenge. The ability of our leaders to function in such a do-it-yourself environment may influence the direction as well as the outcome of the battle, or perhaps the war.

To lead, they will face the need to be moralists, not as those who sententiously exhort men to be good, but those who elucidate what the good is. This requires first and foremost a clear idea of right and wrong. A disciplined military life will encourage a commitment to a personal code of conduct and from good habits a strength of character and resolve will grow. This is the solid

foundation from which the good is elucidated—by action, by example and by tradition. A moralist can make conscious what lies unconscious among his followers, lifting them out of their everyday selves, into their better selves. All great men in history have relied on some measure of ethical resolution in their lives and it's been perfected in their work and heritage.

Secondly, there are times when our leaders must be jurists, when decisions will be based solely on their own ideas of fairness, their knowledge of the people who will be affected, and their strength of character. There won't be a textbook or school solution to go by. I'm not talking about petty legalistic arbitrations or controls, but about hard decisions with seemingly endless complications. As jurists, they will be writing law and that's a weighty responsibility. When they're in the hot seat, they'll need the courage to withstand the inclination to duck a problem or hand it off; they've got to realize that it's necessary to take it head on. And they must understand the peril of that fatal flaw of writing a law that cannot be obeyed.

Leaders will discover that part of their duty will involve teaching. Every great leader I've known has been a great teacher, able to give those around him a sense of perspective and to set the moral, social and particularly the motivational climate among them. This is not an easy task—it takes wisdom and discipline and requires both the sensitivity to perceive philosophic disarray in your charges and the knowledge to put things in order. I believe that a good starting point is to put some time in on that old injunction, "Know thyself."

There are footsteps of greatness to follow in any of the Service branches. During a military career, there are opportunities to leave those same clear footprints for future generations to follow. In John Ruskin's words such a process is "painful, continual and difficult... to be done by kindness, by

waiting, by warning, by precept, by praise, but above all by example." Teachership (in my view) is indispensable to leadership and is an integral part of duty.

Another of those unique duties is that of being a steward. That requires tending the flock, even "washing their feet," as well as cracking the whip; it takes compassion to realize that all men are not products of the same mold. There is much more to stewardship than the carrot and stick enticements that some of our vaunted motivational experts would prescribe. It requires knowledge and character and heart to boost others up and show them the way. The old Civil War historian Douglas Southall Freeman described his formula for stewardship here at the Naval War College 30 years ago; he said you had to know your stuff, to be a man and thirdly, to take care of your men. That's a good formula to follow in the times ahead that will test stewardship.

One final aspect of leadership is the frequent necessity to be a philosopher, able to understand and to explain the lack of a moral economy in this universe, for many people have a great deal of difficulty with the fact that virtue is not always rewarded nor is evil always punished. To handle tragedy may indeed be the mark of an educated man, for one of the principal goals of education is to prepare us for failure. To say that is not to encourage resignation to the whims of fate, but to acknowledge the need for forethought about how to cope with undeserved reverses. It's important that our leadership steel themselves against the natural reaction of lashing out or withdrawing when it happens. The test of character is not "hanging in there" when the light at the end of the tunnel is expected but performance of duty and persistence of example when the situation rules out the possibility of the light ever coming.

Finally, I think it is clear that in my

view, education prepares men for leadership and survival. For the record, I am convinced that formal education is now more important than ever for those of us in uniform. Certainly we can all see clearly the side of Pascal's wager on which the Soviets come down. As revealed in a recent book, *The Armed Forces of the USSR* (written by an American military couple well acquainted in Moscow), Soviet officer education takes a top priority in professional development and the courses are continually being lengthened and made more rigorous. Today, a Soviet officer cannot be assigned command of an army brigade or higher, or command of a naval second rank ship or higher, unless he has had the "rough equivalent" of our Postgraduate School or War College. I say "rough equivalent" because their course lengths are longer. Their shortest war college (the General Staff Academy) is a 2-year course; the shortest technical PG is 3 years, most are 4 and some are 5. Moreover, entrance to these "academies" is gained only through competitive examination for which junior officers in their late twenties spend thousands of hours preparing.

The future will test this nation's leadership, its resourcefulness, its imagination, its dedication, its creativity and its will. To bring the point closer to home, it will probably give several of our mid-career officers of today one (and if they're lucky, two) chances for a moment of magnificence. May they all be preparing themselves for that moment. May they never sell themselves short.



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