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*Plans developed between World War II and the Korean war influenced strategic thinking about war in East Asia for the following quarter century. A consideration of how and why they were developed may be useful to the contemporary strategic planner and other military professionals.*

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE POLICY PROCESS: AMERICAN PLANS FOR WAR IN EAST ASIA, 1945-1950**

by

Roger Dingman

Strategic planning is a difficult and risky enterprise. It demands that one make accurate predictions about the future. It forces the practitioner to grapple with multiple uncertainties. Some are external—who an enemy may be; what his political intentions are; and what his capabilities for realizing them may be. Others lie closer to home. If he is to meet the threat posed by a possible foe, the military professional must have appropriate means for doing so. He must accurately estimate his own need for weapons and realistically forecast politicians' willingness to provide dollars for defense, ordinary citizens' readiness to supply manpower, and industry's ability to produce the weapons he needs. The successful strategic planner must somehow resolve these uncertainties so as to formulate working hypotheses on which he can base plans for a possible war.

**Background.** Theorists from Clausewitz onward have agreed on how the strategic planner *ought* to behave. He must understand what national policy and objectives are. He must calculate

the costs, risks, and benefits of alternative courses of action, both for his own nation and for its possible antagonists. He must analyze the domestic and international situation so as to determine his need for men, money, and materiel. And, most important of all, the strategic planner must be certain that his designs for war are consistent with and subordinate to national policy.

But analysts have differed sharply over how the strategic planner *actually* behaves. Some have portrayed him as a rational calculator. If he reasons correctly, the plans he produces in peace are likely to be useful in war. If those designs prove inaccurate or inappropriate, the fault may be traced back to the reasoning process. The system may not have provided the planner with adequate intelligence, or he may not have interpreted it correctly. His individual perspective may have skewed his assessment of information at his disposal. Or the strategic planner, like other policymakers, may have based his estimates on assumptions drawn from false or inappropriate historical analogies.<sup>1</sup>

Others have suggested that the strategic planner may be no different from other policymakers who are, in effect, "organization men." These theorists have argued that policies and strategies are not so much products of individual human reasoning as outcomes of organizational interaction. Organizations do not reason but respond incrementally so as to cope with immediate threats to their mission. They act so as to guarantee their successful performance of assigned functions in time of crisis. The individual working within an organization does act and think "rationally," but his understanding of what is reasonable derives more from the functional rationality of his organization than from abstract *raison d'etat*.<sup>2</sup>

These two conflicting approaches to policymaking pose important questions for the historian and the strategic planner. Neither can be satisfied simply by asking what the substance of a particular strategic design may be. Both need to consider how strategies are actually developed within modern, bureaucratically complex governments. To what extent are they products of rational calculation or responses to organizational needs? What factors determine the balance between the two in the genesis of a particular strategic design? And how does the interplay of rational calculation and organizational imperative influence the substance of a strategy?

This essay attempts to provide answers to these questions by examining the development of a particular set of strategic plans: American designs for war in East Asia produced between the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Korean war. It focuses on the activities, problems, and products of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and their subordinate planners. The subject commands attention for several reasons. First, recently declassified documents enable one to see not only what the Joint Chiefs produced but also the

effect of efforts to reform the national policy and strategy development process on their work. By looking closely, one should be able to learn something about evolving American policy and strategy for East Asia. Secondly, plans produced between 1945 and 1950 influenced American thinking about war in the region for the next two decades. It was during this period that the notion that the United States could project its power from offshore island bases onto mainland Asia so as to deter conflict, or contribute to the achievement of decision in it, was born. Finally, careful reconstruction of how and why American plans for war in East Asia developed in the past may offer insights into the strategic planning process useful to contemporary military professionals in their efforts to shape strategic designs for the future.

**Early JCS Organization.** Before tracing the evolution of American plans for war in East Asia, it is essential to consider who the planners were, what their organization was like, and how they went about their work. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and their subordinate staff planners defy simple generalizations. It is easier, and perhaps more significant, to demonstrate what they were not than to identify their unifying characteristics. These men were not intellectuals; they were men of action. Some had achieved prominence in the field as the best shiphandlers, pilots, and soldiers of their generation. Others had worked their way upward as administrators, navigating the always treacherous currents of national and service politics. Many had served on one or more of the wartime committees that planned operations and tried to forecast postwar needs. Two of the chiefs, Forrest P. Sherman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, had worked as strategic planners during the period of pre-World War II crisis, trying to anticipate operational needs as the nation mobilized for possible

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participation in global war. None, however, was a veteran of earlier postwar efforts at strategic planning; all were too young to have had such a part in post-World War I days. Several had participated in or led major operations in the Pacific. But with one possible exception, none could be called an expert on the peoples, politics, and military organizations of East Asia.<sup>3</sup>

The organization of which these men were a part was itself metamorphosing during the early post-World War II years from an ad hoc wartime body into a permanent element of the American governmental structure. The Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1945 were simply a group of senior military advisors to the President who presided over a number of subordinate committees. Called into existence by Presidential order to provide strategic direction for U.S. forces and to coordinate their actions with those of our wartime allies, the chiefs lacked a statutory foundation. In October 1945 the architects of defense reorganization proposed to remedy that deficiency by mandating the chiefs' existence and specifying their responsibilities by law. The latter were to include making strategic plans; providing strategic direction to the armed forces; offering strategic advice to the President, a national security council, and other agencies; and coordinating the services' personnel and materiel programs with strategic plans. But it was 1947 before the National Security Act assured the chiefs' statutory existence and spelled out their responsibilities. The latter, significantly, did not include shaping or coordinating individual service budgets. In 1947 the chiefs acquired a permanent staff of some 100 officers; 2 years later amendments to the National Security Act raised that number to slightly more than 200. The Joint Staff was to be led by a director of the chiefs' own choosing.<sup>4</sup>

These institutional changes did not make the Joint Chiefs of Staff a

cohesive organization. Until 1949 the group lacked a chairman, and even then he was without authority to impose unanimity on his colleagues. Indeed, the first chairman, Gen. Omar Bradley, was required by law to report their differences to the President. The organization suffered from what Eisenhower, a former chief who shrewdly shunned the chairman's job, called the "basic evil." Its members owed it no loyalty and felt no compunction about airing their differences. Individual chiefs regarded themselves as knights sent forth to do battle in defense of particular service interests. Not infrequently they harbored thoughts bordering on paranoia. So long as Adm. William D. Leahy sat with the group as chief of staff to the Commander in Chief, the admirals felt that their interests could be protected. But when General Bradley became chairman in 1949, Chief of Naval Operations Louis Denfeld complained that he was always outvoted, 3-1. The admiral felt that Bradley had never shed his Army loyalties and that the umbilical cord between Air Force and Army had never really been severed.<sup>5</sup>

The JCS organization was structured so as to preserve and protect the particular interests of its component member services. Each service had to have equal representation within every subunit of the JCS staff. When that principle was violated, even temporarily, there was trouble. In 1947, for example, a bitter quarrel broke out because the Navy temporarily had two representatives on the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC), the chiefs' senior advisory body. This prompted the Air Force not only to object to the idea of giving each service two representatives, but also to insist upon (and get) a return to the one for each principal. The subunits most directly involved in strategic planning, the Joint War Plans Group (after 1947 the Joint Strategic Planning Group) and their assisting

units, the Joint Intelligence and Joint Logistics Committees, preserved a working interservice balance. The planners worked in teams made up of one officer from each service. Their papers were reviewed by an Army-Navy-Air Force triumvirate before moving up the chain of command to the chiefs themselves. Under these circumstances, as Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett later put it, the very structure of the JCS organization made it "extremely difficult" for either the individual planner or the chiefs themselves to express "a broad non-service" point of view.<sup>6</sup>

While quite capable of protecting individual service interests, the JCS planning structure was not well suited to assuring a steady flow of coordinated intelligence assessments and national policy guidance to working strategic planners. The JSSC might have performed both functions. But it was separate from the Joint Staff, of which the war planners were a subordinate part. The JSSC regarded its primary function as the provision of ad hoc advice to the chiefs on particular policy matters. Only occasionally did it comment on their guidelines to the planners. When in 1951 it was suggested that the JSSC ought to provide direct guidance to strategic planners, its members protested. They had never been asked by the director of the Joint Staff to provide such, and they felt that doing so would impair the "quality and timeliness" of their work. For most of the period under consideration, the JSSC did not provide coordinated intelligence assessments. Not until April 1950 did the group prepare and circulate strategic evaluations of changing world conditions.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not enjoy a monopoly on strategic planning. They were but one of several planning bodies mushrooming in post-war Washington. Each service retained its own planning unit. Varying in size

and in the Army's case actually shrinking in manpower, these groups were important competitors to the JCS planners. Their power derived from the fact that their projections became integral parts of each service's annual budget presentation. These units could and did advance their own concepts for future wars. Civilian bodies, too, posed a challenge to the JCS planners. In 1947 the Department of State established a policy planning staff. Led by George Frost Kennan, this group not only tried to devise a global strategy for containing the Soviet Union but also vigorously opposed war planning. The National Security Council staff, created in 1947, also moved gradually into the strategic planning field. Its position papers blurred the distinction between policy and strategy. By 1949 this group would enunciate its own strategic concept for East Asia. Finally, not to be outdone by those outside the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson early in 1950 created his own advisory planning body, the Office of International Security Affairs.<sup>8</sup>

Its organizational environment and characteristics had a major affect on the Joint Chiefs of Staff's development of strategy. War planning was the principal instrument for doing so. But the genesis of a war plan was not easy; the job was both conceptual and bureaucratic. It might begin with the chiefs' agreeing that a particular problem needed study. They would then provide guidelines for the development of a strategic concept to the Joint Strategic Planning Committee. The latter in turn would delegate the task to its subordinate Joint Strategic Planning Group, which in turn allotted various aspects of the task to its component teams. Their responses would then be collated and pushed back up the bureaucratic ladder to the chiefs themselves. The chiefs might then give the go-ahead for the preparation of a full war plan, complete with detailed estimates of the situation, analysis of

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alternative American and enemy courses of action, and detailed intelligence, operations, and logistics annexes. The final product might amount to three or four massive volumes.

The actual planning process, however, was far less rational and far more disjointed than the foregoing would suggest. At almost any point differences, magnified by interservice frictions, might develop. Because no mechanism short of hard bargaining among the chiefs themselves could resolve such differences, progress on a particular plan might be halted for months. The chiefs could easily be dragged down into disputes over individual points in a plan and thus be blinded to larger issues that its underlying concept presented. Rationality also suffered through piecemeal. Subordinate staff units might be buried in the details of a scheme that had yet to be approved as an overall concept by their superiors. The Joint War Plans Committee, for example, made atomic bomb targetting studies of the Soviet Union well before the chiefs or their civilian superiors agreed that such bombing should be a central feature of any war plan.<sup>9</sup> The planning process might also be disrupted when outsiders—particularly, as we shall see, the President himself—intervened with their ideas. Thus it was not easy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff planners to maintain consistency of purpose or coordination of effort.

**Early Problems.** They began their work late in 1945 facing three sorts of problems. The international situation, fluid and puzzling, demanded reassessment. To be sure, the old enemies—Germany, Japan, and Italy—lay defeated, occupied, and unable to pose the threat of war for years to come. But it was difficult to discern the roles that allies in the war just past might play in the future. Britain, first among equals on the list of American friends, lay

economically prostrate. Driven from China by the Japanese and facing a rising tide of nationalist opposition to colonial rule in South and Southeast Asia, she was at best an uncertain weight on the scales of power. China, praised during World War II as one of the four great powers of the future, teetered on the brink of civil war. Only the Soviet Union, scarred and scorched by the recent war, had the ability to challenge the United States. Logically, the Russians were the most probable future foe. Yet their leaders' puzzling behavior—at one moment cooperative, at another hostile—made the U.S.S.R. an enigma in any assessment of the global or regional East Asian situation.

The planners faced equally important and complex problems at home. Civilian and military leaders would have to define new norms for budgets, manpower, and deployments. General Marshall, fearing that history would repeat itself, put his subordinates to work even before the war ended on plans for orderly demobilization, service unification, and universal military training. But the immediate postwar reality was far worse than what he or others anticipated. Seized by what Eisenhower called "hysteria," the public within the first postwar year forced demobilization of three quarters of the 12 million men under arms in 1945. No one could be certain where and when some kind of stability would be restored.<sup>10</sup>

Planners also struggled to clarify individual service roles and missions. Their task was complicated by the so-called unification effort, which dragged on in congressional debates well into 1947. Proposals for a new Department of Defense that would diminish the autonomy, and perhaps the prestige, of each service heightened defensiveness about roles and missions. So, too, did a new and at best partially understood weapon, the atomic bomb. Used but twice, the subject of tests in the Pacific and arms control talks in the United

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Nations, it forced planners to think long and hard about the viability of traditional definitions of service roles and missions.

In retrospect these problems add up to the classic dilemmas of any postwar period. But for contemporaries their magnitude and complexity were enormously increased by the apparent unwillingness and inability of civilian authorities to provide positive guidance for strategic planning. During the last months of the war, it seemed that that might not be the case. In February 1945 the State War Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) proposed that a statement of postwar policy objectives for East Asia be drawn up. Navy Secretary James Forrestal and President Harry S. Truman concurred in this idea, and during the summer a long-time consultant to the Department of State prepared an objectives paper. But when it came before SWNCC in October for consideration, the State Department representative objected. John Paton Davies argued that it was unsound to discuss regional objectives apart from global ones. Behind his words lurked diplomats' fears that professional military men were poaching in the policy planning preserve.<sup>11</sup> Thus the JCS planners had to rely on their own rather vague guidelines as embodied in JCS 1518.

That document, approved by the Joint Chiefs on 9 October 1945, outlined a strategic concept that had been developing within the Pentagon for some time. The United States would rely on a "forward defense," one which positioned air and sea forces far from American shores. But that concept, readily stated in the abstract, defied easy translation into definite strategic plans. The chiefs themselves found it difficult to agree on more detailed guidance. When, for example, they tried in May 1946 to do so, the *de facto* chairman, Admiral Leahy, first ignored, then rejected the proposals. Differences

over purposes and procedure also worked against implementation of the basic concept. Army spokesmen wanted to deal with conceptual problems of a global war, while their Navy counterparts insisted on addressing more immediate issues. The admirals were particularly anxious to end an anomaly left over from the Pacific war campaigns—a dual command structure that left the senior admiral in Hawaii without authority over Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Japan and Korea. Army spokesmen vigorously opposed planning that assumed a single Pacific-East Asian command structure.<sup>12</sup>

No "Purple Suit" Planning. Moving from the general to the specific also proved difficult because doing so increased the individual planner's propensity to think in particularistic and protective terms. His understanding of the conceptual framework for thinking about East Asia reflected individual service interests. In naval eyes, the problem was essentially one of sea control—a matter of islands, naval air bases, and carrier strike forces. Army planners, by contrast, emphasized continental issues. One had to think about China and Korea, as well as the Philippines and Japan, if he were to plan properly. "Forward defense" also raised the hoary and always divisive issue of basing. The problem was not simply where to locate bases. Nor was it just a question of their control and management. To be sure, admirals assumed that U.S. naval forces would be required in the Philippines, on Formosa, and in Japan "long after our troops have been withdrawn." And generals were loath, amidst their fight against rapid demobilization, to plan on their early departure from Pacific and East Asian island positions. The heart of the matter was how each service might operate from forward bases. Army Air Force officers insisted that their airplanes could patrol the Pacific from fewer

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bases more efficiently and economically than Navy craft. Admirals retorted that their aircraft, operating from both carriers and island bases, were best suited to protect what had been purchased in blood from Japan.<sup>13</sup>

Differences of this sort made working and thinking in a coolly logical manner impossible. In order to get the planning effort underway, the planners had to make compromises that contradicted abstract rationality. Agreeing to disagree on central questions of procedure and priorities, the Joint Chiefs authorized planning along both regional and global lines. They glossed over differences on Pacific command structure and assumed only in directives for immediate Pacific regional planning that U.S. occupation forces would be withdrawn from Japan and Korea. In East Asian and global war plans, however, they retained the assumption that American forces would be required to maintain the occupation of Japan and assure the defense of the Philippines.<sup>14</sup> Given these contradictory assumptions and conflicting individual service interests behind them, the planning endeavor was certain to be fitful and acrimonious.

**The Soviet Enemy Identified.** That effort produced three basic plans between the end of 1945 and February 1948. The first East Asian plan was completed in August and September 1946. It readily identified the Soviet Union as the most probable enemy. The Russians were estimated to have aircraft capable of attacking not only U.S. positions on offshore Asian islands but also Hawaii and Los Angeles. The planners further hypothesized that within 5 to 6 years the Soviets would possess atomic weapons and guided missiles of 3,000-mile range. The scheme defined American strategic objectives negatively: denial was the name of the game. The Soviets were not to be allowed to gain positions from which they could strike at American trans-

Pacific lines of communication. Nor could the United States permit any power to dominate China, Korea, Japan, and the Philippines—nations whose friendship and stability Washington coveted. But operations to achieve these goals were not to take precedence over anti-Russian actions in western Eurasia.<sup>15</sup>

The plan, JCS 1259/16, called for an "offensive-defensive" strategy in East Asia. The contradiction in terms reflected the planners' inability to resolve the question of whether U.S. forces were in the region to protect Pacific sea space or to project American power from Pacific islands onto the Asian mainland. The same unresolved issue made it impossible to agree on base positioning. Army planners wanted to concentrate the fleet at Guam and to put ground forces as potential striking units in the northern Marianas and the Bonins. Navy representatives thought the latter forward positions unnecessary and split over the wisdom of developing Guam as a major naval base. Not until August 1947 did the JCS planners reach even tentative agreement on base development plans. Twenty subsequent attempts were made to revise this scheme so as to please all concerned. Their failure meant that JCS 1259/16 simply could not stand as a meaningful strategic design for war in East Asia.<sup>16</sup>

Such a plan took shape only slowly and painfully over the next 15 months. When the JCS planners discussed the possibility of a global war against the Soviet Union in March 1946, they were unable to agree on whether or not the Russians would take the offensive in East Asia or on what American responses to the Soviet challenge should be. Some argued that the situation demanded preparation for war and rearmament of just-defeated Germans and Japanese. Others reasoned that because the United States was militarily weak, it should try by every possible means—even including renewed efforts for



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atomic arms control, loosening of the Anglo-American alliance, and abandonment of some proposed forward bases—to avoid conflict. But by June 1946 opinion hardened around the conviction that war plans must be made.<sup>17</sup>

**War Plans.** These were to be written under the so-called PINCHER concept. This notion presumed that the next war would resemble the last one. In its earliest phase, U.S. forces might be pushed back from occupation positions on the Eurasian landmass. But then they would reform, projecting first airpower, then ground forces into a ring around the enemy. That ring would tighten until the foe realized that he must capitulate. But moving from this general concept to completion of a second East Asian war plan, MOONRISE, that would be coordinated with a global joint outline emergency war plan was not easy. In fact the planners completed MOONRISE before the concept for the latter design had been fully developed and approved.

MOONRISE began with extremely significant premises.<sup>18</sup> While war within a year was improbable, American military inferiority in East Asia was likely. Not only would the Russians have more men and aircraft there; the United States would also lack a carrier task force west of Hawaii when the conflict began. The plan argued that control of East Asia would be a net liability for both the Soviet Union and the United States in the global strategic calculus.

MOONRISE advanced very important calculations about relative capabilities on the Asian mainland. The Russians could overrun Korea in 20 days and take most of Manchuria and north China in 40 to 50 days. An additional 100 days would find them in occupation of the mainland as far south as the Yellow River. What, if anything, could the United States do to stop them? The planners considered various lines of defense but concluded that

none, not even a position in the mountainous terrain of Shantung, was defensible. But Japan less Hokkaido, as well as the Ryukyus and possibly Formosa, could be held by American forces. These estimates pointed toward the emergence of a maritime, essentially defensive, strategy.

But other forces, working in the opposite direction, manifested themselves in the third major plan, the initial concept for a joint outline emergency war plan. The latter, completed only a month after MOONRISE, ranked East Asia third in importance below Western Europe and the Middle East. It defined extensive American objectives: containing the enemy in East Asia; luring him into actions that would waste his forces; and preventing the spread of communism. These ends were to be accomplished by increasingly offensive measures that would require bases in Japan, and perhaps in China as well. Behind more offensive American tasks lay rising individual service visions of capability. Army Air Force planners initially targeted some 20 Soviet cities for attack with conventional weapons in 1945; in April 1946 the number of targets rose to 30. Within 2 weeks of completion of the joint outline emergency war plan, the aviators would write of bombing 24 cities with 34 atomic bombs. The Navy was no less sanguine. In January 1947 Admiral Sherman briefed President Truman, outlining the need for a 24 carrier fleet, one-third of which would be stationed in the Pacific. He argued that carrier-based aircraft, together with submarines, could contain the Soviet Navy in the Pacific and destroy its bases.<sup>19</sup>

**Refining the Plans.** Refinements in the joint outline emergency war plan made between October 1947 and February 1948 tipped the balance still further toward an insular and increasingly offensive strategy. Revised intelligence estimates questioned the rapidity

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of any Russian advance into China and put an additional one and a half million Chinese Communist soldiers in the Russian camp. Little wonder, then, that plans to provide aid to the Chinese Nationalists were code-named HEADSTONE. In December 1947 the planners raised Japan's importance as a base to a level equal to that of Britain in Western Europe. Still more important were February 1948 revisions that emphasized planning operations that could rapidly destroy the effectiveness of all Soviet forces in East Asia. In the joint outline emergency war plan the line between offensive and defensive strategy for the region was becoming blurred, to say the least.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of a global war, as embodied in this plan, had taken on sufficient clarity to allow Maj. Gen. Alfred E. Gruenther, Director of the Joint Staff, to brief President Truman.<sup>21</sup> Their meeting on 18 February 1948 might be said to mark a watershed in the development of American plans for war in East Asia. Prior to that meeting, the JCS planners had struggled with conceptual problems. Lacking clear-cut politicodiplomatic guidance from civilian sources, they had relied on their own estimates of the trend of events abroad. Facing constant pressures for force and expenditure reductions, they gave first priority to protecting particular service interests, roles, and missions. Concerned more with capabilities—both the enemy's and their own—than with intentions, they had moved away from a continental toward an insular and maritime understanding of American strategic interests in East Asia. As this transition occurred, their plans increasingly blurred the distinction between offensive and defensive postures in the region. From this time onward to the outbreak of the Korean war, the JCS planners would be more concerned with refinement and coordination than with reconcepts for war in

Their efforts would be shaped by developments abroad, by the guidance they received, and by organizational responses to it. From the spring of 1948 through the early summer of 1950, the international situation grew more tense—and more stable. To be sure, the Berlin blockade, Mao Zedong's conquest of mainland China, and Soviet explosion of an atomic bomb left little room for complacency. But as tensions mounted, lines of division and of alliance became clearer. In the West the United States proposed, negotiated, and in April 1949 signed the NATO treaty. Six months later in the East, Mao established the People's Republic of China. In January 1950 he carried on protracted negotiations in Moscow that resulted in a treaty of alliance with the Soviet Union. Washington responded by stepping up its economic, moral, and psychological—but not military—commitment to the survival of non-Communist regimes in South Korea, on Formosa, and in Indochina. These developments modified the planners' assessment problems. The issue was no longer how quickly the Russians might advance into China but rather the consequences of what was perceived as such an advance: Did it compromise the value of American bases on offshore islands? Did it presage a surge of Communist strength into Southeast Asia? And did it require major revision of strategic plans?

Guidance. Despite high hopes, the JCS planners received precious little politicodiplomatic guidance in their search for answers to these questions. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal tried to get such guidance in July 1948 when he proposed that the National Security Council (NSC) endorse development of a position paper defining U.S. foreign policy objectives. Once it was in hand, the Council could specify implementing measures, and strategic planners in turn could identify and rank in appropriate hierarchy specific tasks

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to be performed. In this way, Forrestal hoped, strategic and budgetary decisions could be kept consistent with national objectives.<sup>22</sup>

But his efforts provoked a strong counterreaction within the Department of State. Already wary of the NSC, the diplomats only grudgingly agreed to write an objectives paper. On this occasion, and again in the spring of 1950 when efforts to devise a comprehensive anti-Soviet strategy recurred, they opposed the whole concept of war planning. George Kennan, chairman of the Policy Planning Staff, argued that Forrestal's proposal and others like it rested on the implicit and unacceptable premise that war with the Soviet Union was inevitable. He, and even Secretary of State Dean Acheson, came to regard the Joint Chiefs of Staff as obstacles, if not enemies, to the conception and execution of sound foreign policies. The diplomats' paranoia was reflected in a study, commissioned by Kennan, that concluded that the U.S. Government had accepted "the infallibility of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."<sup>23</sup>

President Truman did not share the diplomats' exaggerated notions of the chiefs' power. But he was no more willing than Kennan to allow the NSC to serve as the source of politico-diplomatic guidance for strategic planning. Thus the Council became a forum in which different agencies tested policy proposals and fashioned bureaucratic compromises. Its slowly emerging position papers tended, at least insofar as East Asia was concerned, to reflect doubts and differences rather than to provide clear guidance. The NSC did not produce a comprehensive statement of American policy for East Asia until December 1949. That document, drafted by the Council's staff without prior consultation with the Joint Chiefs, simply confirmed what their planners had long since assumed. Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippine Islands were central to America's strategic

posture in East Asia. NSC 48/2 did little, however, to clarify uncertainties about the nature and extent of American interests in other crucial danger points in the region—Korea, Formosa, and mainland Southeast Asia.<sup>24</sup>

Budgetary guidance, by contrast, became clearer and more brutal with each passing year. By the spring of 1948 demobilization was completed, and defense spending had fallen to about 36 percent of total federal expenditures. President Truman, anxious to achieve a balanced budget, in May 1948 set what appeared to be a new postwar norm. He directed the Pentagon to assume that no more than roughly \$15 billion would be available for defense in the coming fiscal year. This directive prompted a Janus-like response from the armed services. Initially they searched optimistically for economies that would not compromise their ability to carry out assigned functions. But when it became clear that cuts of that sort would not be enough they resisted, rallying behind Secretary Forrestal's efforts to get more funds. By early 1949 those efforts had ended in failure. The services were then tempted to seek a bigger share of the budgetary pie by attacking each other's claims for funds. The President himself pushed them in that direction by determining to shift some Navy functions (and, by implication, funds) to the Air Force. The resulting interservice fight for dollars not only heightened tensions within the Military Establishment but also renewed civilian determination to effect further cuts. The President lowered planning guidelines for fiscal 1951 defense spending to a mere 13 billion.<sup>25</sup>

Truman did not provide such decisive guidance on weaponry matters. Early in 1948 he expressed a preference for the use of conventional rather than nuclear weapons in any conflict, and he gave that preference bureaucratic force by naming Gen. Omar Bradley Army Chief of Staff. Bradley insisted that it would be unwise to base American strategy on

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the use of nuclear weapons. Their full effects were as yet unknown, and the U.N. might prohibit their use. Thus in September 1948 the President gave only tentative approval for planning that assumed the use of nuclear weapons. His qualms and Bradley's objections riveted the chiefs' attention on the means rather than the ends of a possible war. An interservice committee, chaired by Air Force Lt. Gen. H.R. Harmon, was set up to study the possible effects of atomic bombing on the Soviet Union. In May 1949 the committee handed down a mixed verdict. While admitting the certainty of immense destruction, it concluded that atomic bombing would not assure Russian capitulation. Nonetheless, the report argued, the need for early use of nuclear weapons would be "transcending."<sup>26</sup>

**Effect of Roles and Missions on Planning.** Truman accepted that conclusion in October 1949. But the Harmon report intensified bureaucratic warfare among the services. Bradley remained unconvinced, and Army spokesmen continued to insist that massive ground armies would be required to defeat the Russians. Air Force generals, upset by the less than resounding endorsement of strategic bombing in the report, conspired to keep its text from the President and admirals fought viciously for precedence in funding delivery vehicles, thus intensifying the struggle over service roles and missions. This battle prompted the "admirals' revolt" of 1949, which culminated in the President's dismissal of Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Louis Denfeld. It left one observer, Adm. Arthur Radford, then Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet, convinced that the United States had no meaningful strategy.<sup>27</sup>

Given their ongoing quarrel over roles and missions, reductions in budgetary resources, and the trend of world events, the JCS planners might well have modified their designs for war in East

Asia so as to minimize responsibilities and reduce projected tasks. They might have opted for a more clearly insular and defensive, if not completely neutral, posture in the region. But close examination of the revisions they made between 1948 and 1950 suggests that their choices were otherwise. The planners sidestepped clear-cut decisions on China, opting instead for incremental and incomplete disengagement from the civil war there. As Communist forces rolled southward, the clarity of earlier estimates that had emphasized the indefensibility of mainland positions disappeared. The July 1948 version of the joint outline emergency war plan, for example, spoke of "maintenance of U.S. forces in their present location, their redeployment to tenable locations in China, or their withdrawal from China if necessary." It also retained the task of providing "some aid to China if feasible." Revisions made in November 1948 simply stated that the United States could not rely upon Nationalist China for aid in a global conflict. The planners' thoughts about Formosa were muddy at best. While the Joint Chiefs emphasized the desirability of denying the island to Communist forces, their planners do not appear to have developed any specific schemes for its defense.<sup>28</sup>

By contrast, the JCS planners affirmed the need to remain in Japan and to use bases there and in the Ryukyus for offensive purposes. The July 1948 joint outline emergency war plan described Okinawa as the only position from which immediate atomic attacks could be mounted against the Soviet Union. There, unlike in Britain, the United States would not have to secure an ally's consent for such strikes. Their number and intensity grew in revised plans to the dropping of 134 atomic weapons on some 70 Soviet cities. Military professionals no longer quarreled over whether the American presence in the Japanese home islands

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was permanent or temporary. Admirals pressing the case for more carriers argued that their airplanes could both defend the old enemy and attack the new. Army planners, facing the dismal prospect of fewer funds and greater reliance on nuclear weapons, insisted that Japan be rearmed. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff went no further than recommending that the training of up to five Japanese divisions be taken as a highly secret planning assumption, their decision argued, in the logic of existing plans, for continued U.S. Army presence in Japan.<sup>29</sup>

**Changing Perceptions and Commitments.** The planners also modified their understanding of American commitments to include protection of mainland Southeast Asia. Previously the region ranked very low in JCS eyes, both in terms of its intrinsic importance to the United States and in terms of its probable value to the Soviet Union. Late in 1946, for example, General Eisenhower wondered if it was really necessary to maintain American forces in the Philippines. JCS planners assumed, however, that we would remain in the islands, while Britain would defend Malaya, and France presumably would assure the security of Indochina. But as Communist forces swept into South China, American planners first extended the Japan-Ryukyus offshore island line southward to the South China Sea, then crossed it to argue that Washington should try to protect a maximum area of mainland Southeast Asia at minimum military costs. This new and difficult task did not spring from the desire to retain control of Southeast Asian resources which, although valuable, were not thought necessary to the prosecution of war against the Soviet Union. Instead the planners came to regard protection of mainland Southeast Asia as a political given. Denial of the region to communism became an end in itself.<sup>30</sup>

Taken altogether, the revisions in American plans for war in East Asia made between 1948 and June 1950 increased the number, extent, and importance of actions to be undertaken. They blurred the distinction between insular and continental, offensive and defensive strategic postures. These changes also came amidst reductions in defense spending. How can the apparent anomaly—increasing commitments while losing the wherewithal to fulfill them—be explained?

The answer to that question is not to be found in terms of revised rational calculations by the chiefs or their planners. They did not simply perceive new and greater threats in the East Asian region and respond by planning more aggressive responses to them. Their general concern over the trend of events may have been growing. If they had been in danger of forgetting the political implications of communism's advance on the mainland, shrill Republican critics of administration policies would certainly have reminded them. Sensitivity to such criticism and a desire to hedge their bets against future developments in East Asia led the Joint Chiefs of Staff to question, occasionally, basic assumptions underlying the war plans for the region. General Bradley, for example, voiced doubts about the wisdom of withdrawing American forces from Korea even though JCS planners had always considered the peninsula indefensible. In April 1950 Admiral Sherman questioned accepted regional priorities. He thought that the Soviets might well have modified *their* priorities so as to concentrate on Southeast Asia rather than Western Europe.<sup>31</sup>

But fleeting thoughts and doubts of this sort never coalesced into determination to rethink the basic design of American war plans for East Asia. The planners did not modify their assumption that the probability of war with the Soviet Union in the near future was low. They did not revise regional priorities

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which put East Asia at the bottom of the list. Nor did they change their basic concept of operations so as to confront the need for actions in the region which would not be part of a global conflict.

Instead, budgetary and organizational pressures prompted inflationary revisions in East Asian war plans. The fight for funds eroded the planners' sense of purpose and changed the whole nature of their endeavor. It became less and less an effort to anticipate challenges abroad and more and more a tool in the struggle for dollars. Under the PINCHER concept various plans already had budget-related purposes. The joint outline emergency war plan was to deal with conflict within the current fiscal year. Intermediate range plans for the next 3 to 5 years were intended to help define force levels. Longer term plans that hypothesized war 10 years in the future were regarded as guides for the development of new weapons. President Truman's budget directives, however, increased the propensity to think of war plans in narrowly budgetary terms. They could be revised to show the devastating effects of drastic cuts on operational capabilities. They could also be modified to show how the provision of more funds would make it possible to attack the enemy with greater speed and vigor.<sup>32</sup> Considerations of the latter sort may have tempted the planners to envisage more offensive actions in East Asia.

The ongoing debate over roles and missions had a similarly inflationary impact on planners' visions of operations in the region. That fight reinforced their natural tendency to think in terms of capabilities. Comparison of Soviet and American forces revealed a temporary asymmetry favorable to the United States. While the Russians had more ground forces, the United States possessed decided air and sea superiority. If one were arguing the general utility of carrier strike forces, that asymmetry made it seem only natural to

argue for their specific use against Soviet East Asian ports. If one believed that bombing was the way to defeat the U.S.S.R. and that a strong case should be made for remedying deficiencies in the number of one's own bases and bombers, then it was "reasonable" to make plans for strategic attacks from East Asian bases.<sup>33</sup> Concerns of this sort helped make revised plans for war in East Asia more offensive, if not preemptive. 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.

**Behind the Plans.** The seemingly anomalous patterns of change in American plans for war in East Asia reveal a great deal about how designs for conflict are produced. The plans analyzed in this essay were both abstract conjectures about future threats and products of the bureaucracies whose interests they touched. Because the Joint Chiefs of Staff in this period were as much creatures as masters of the individual armed services, those interests were complex. They could not be satisfied simply by making conjectures about the dimension and location of external threats to an abstractly defined national interest. They forced planners to grapple with more immediate and tangible interests—budgets, force levels, deployments, and command structures. Consequently the strategic planner became a juggler, forced to balance his perception of external threats against his understanding of the domestic needs of the organizations of which he was a part. He had to be both a rational calculator and an "organization man."

His efforts during the 1945-1950 period produced plans with some very distinctive features. They presumed Soviet hostility and large Russian capabilities. But they also supposed that the

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enemy ranked East Asia low on the list of probable arenas of conflict. That assumption, as we have seen, reflected the presupposition that any war would be global. The latter premise showed few signs of erosion during these years. The plans also clarified American perceptions of East Asia's strategic geography. They made it clear that the United States had a greater interest in Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippine Islands than in continental positions. In that respect the plans embodied an offshore island, maritime strategic posture.

But the JCS planners never resolved satisfactorily the problem that had confronted them from the very beginning: the relation of forces on the mainland to those that might be positioned on offshore islands. To be sure, by June 1950 they made a theoretical distinction between deterrent forces in Korea and in mainland Southeast Asia and those forces on island bases that might actually have to fight a war.<sup>34</sup> But that distinction was artificial and unsatisfactory. It left the relationship between military presence and political commitment unclear, in that plans called for the withdrawal or nonengagement of forces on the mainland in case of war. This posture set the stage for the nightmare that became reality in June 1950: commitment to defend the Republic of Korea without sufficient forces to do so.

Review of American plans for war in East Asia also reveals how the very processes of their birth affected their substance. Those processes, as we have seen, did not conform to the theoretical norm. Efforts to render strategy subordinate to policy were complicated by the unwillingness or inability of civilian authorities to provide politicodiplomatic guidance. Thus the JCS planners worked in isolation, without external checks against either their fundamental political assumptions or operational irrationalities that might creep into their

designs for war. No one forced them to explain the rationale behind possible Russian actions in East Asia. Indeed one finds it difficult to explain why—apart from a generalized view of Soviet aggressiveness—the planners thought the Russians would expend any serious effort in the region.

No external body asked the planners to think about threats short of total war. No master, civilian or military, tried to modify the JCS staff structure to provide for systematic study of alternative forms the Soviet challenge might take. The planners thus prepared for the worst case, global war, on the assumption that doing so would also leave them capable of coping with lesser threats in the region. That logical abstraction left them ill-prepared to meet the troublesome politicomilitary challenges that by 1950 were emerging in Korea, Formosa, and Indochina.

Instead, budget directives and fears for individual service roles and missions, magnified by the planners' organization and working procedures, prompted them to develop projected tasks more inappropriate and more offensive than might otherwise have been the case. The planners' propensity to think in terms of capabilities and "can do" led them to plan operations such as the bombing and mining of Soviet East Asian ports that could be completed with relative ease. But the relationship between actions of that sort to the increasingly political challenge presented by the spread of communism in East Asia was unclear. So, too, was its relationship to victory in a global war. Herein lay the roots of what would later become the American nightmare, first in Korea, then in Vietnam. We could project our power onto the Asian landmass. But there was no certainty that doing so would achieve decision in war.

LESSONS. The story of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's efforts to plan for war in East Asia between 1945 and 1950 is

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rich in insights for the historian and the strategic planner alike. Its lessons concern neither the substance of designs for war in the region nor the definition of American interests there. Rather they relate to the strategic planning process itself. That process is one of formidable complexity; it demands more than skill in political conjecture or in technical military estimation. Its essence appears to lie in the balancing of imperatives—both those derived through rational calculation and those imposed by organizational necessity—to produce meaningful designs for war.

Achieving such a balance is no easy task. Whether one succeeds or fails in doing so may depend on three inter-related factors. The first is timing. It may be that prewar, wartime, and postwar periods each have their special characteristics, each of which impose special demands on the planner. Postwar periods may require organizational rearrangements likely to increase friction between diplomats and military professionals. It may be that they force budget and manpower cuts that increase the planner's propensity to think defensively about roles and missions rather than expansively about the changing nature of national interests. It may be that the phenomenon of narrowed vision—thinking so much about the war just past and the weapons used in it so as to exclude consideration of other forms of conflict—is characteristic of postwar periods.

The character and relationship of organizations is a second factor determining the outcome of the strategic planning process. In theory, those organizations are unitary and their relationships are clear and hierarchical. In practice, as this essay has shown, organizations concerned with strategic planning are fragmented and competitive in varying degrees. When, as was the case in 1945-1950, some of them are new,

and when neither law nor practice have defined their responsibilities and working relationships, they are likely to have a distorting effect on the strategic planning process. Indeed, their strongly felt need to resolve organizational, rather than national or international, problems is likely to color the guidance the strategic planner receives.

Under these circumstances, the third factor—the character of the strategic planner himself—becomes all the more important. He cannot be a mere cog in the bureaucratic machine. He must be aware of the complexity of the strategic planning process and sensitive to its demands. If he is not to become a victim of "groupthink,"<sup>35</sup> he must constantly ask questions about the assumptions concerning both external threats and organizational needs that are presented to him. But above all else the strategic planner, if he is to succeed, must keep his essential purpose—the preparation of plans for war—foremost in mind. If he does not, he is all too likely to be lured into making plans that suit organizational needs but do not serve national ones.

In the final analysis, it may be that strategic plans are only as good as the men who make them.

### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Roger Dingman, a professor of history at the University of Southern California, was educated at Stanford and Harvard Universities, receiving his Ph.D. degree from the latter. He was a professor of strategy at

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### NOTES

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33. Brown, pp. 24-27.

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