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Strategic Weapons: An Introduction

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This is the basic trouble with Mr. Korb's book—a volume which whets the appetite but does not satisfy. *The Joint Chiefs of Staff* represents a valiant but flawed attempt to examine and evaluate a quarter century of troubled "security," but the author has compressed far too much into too little on the basis of inadequate sources.

HANSON W. BALDWIN

Professor Korb replies:

It is quite an honor to have such a distinguished and long-time follower of military affairs as Hanson Baldwin take the time to review my book on the JCS. As is the case with Mr. Baldwin's own writings over the years, his comments on my work are generally perceptive and well phrased. However, in his review, Mr. Baldwin makes a number of statements about my study which are simply inaccurate and misleading primarily because they are based upon a misreading of the book. In this reply, I would like to attempt to set the record straight in eight specific areas.

First, Mr. Baldwin accuses me of not adequately dealing with this nation's security policies over the past 25 years. In the preface (p. xii), I specifically noted this was beyond the scope of my study. An adequate treatment of this subject would require many books.

Second, Mr. Baldwin criticizes me for not assessing the relationships of the Chiefs to the President and the Secretary of Defense in Chapter Two which deals with JCS backgrounds. An overview of these relationships is presented in Chapter One while Chapters Three and Four describe JCS interactions with the President and Secretary of Defense in great detail. Discussing them in a chapter on JCS backgrounds would have been not only redundant but illogical.

Third, Mr. Baldwin states that my conclusion that the JCS as a corporate body had virtually no impact on the size

of, or the ceiling on, the defense budget is debatable, but he does not offer any evidence to counter the conclusion which is carefully documented in Chapter Three. He states further that the caveat about the service chiefs being able to request what they want within that ceiling is somewhat contradictory. It is not. Determining the size and distribution of the defense budget are separate evolutions and the role of the chiefs is different in each.

Fourth, Mr. Baldwin implies that I am ignorant of the fact that the JCS pull strings behind the scenes in the operational area. Nothing could be further from the truth. Specific examples of backstage maneuvers between the JCS and field commanders are given on page 154 (Taylor-Harkins) and page 167 (Wheeler-Westmoreland). Moreover, on page 12, there is an entire paragraph devoted to this facet of the policy process.

Fifth, Mr. Baldwin accuses me of being off base and unfair to General Westmoreland and the JCS in my discussions of their conduct during Vietnam. If my judgments about Westmoreland's strategy in Vietnam are harsh, I am in good company. In all my discussions with Westmoreland's contemporaries and superiors, I heard very few words of praise about his methods. Indeed many comments are unprintable. If General Westmoreland were as successful as Mr. Baldwin says he was, two questions arise. Why did President Johnson relieve him and why did he not achieve his goals?

Mr. Baldwin also argues that my appraisal of the role and attitudes of the JCS during the war in Vietnam is "singularly wrong." To substantiate this claim, he states that in early 1965, before the commitment of ground troops to Vietnam [sic], the JCS had advised their superiors that 1 million men and years of war would be required for victory in South Vietnam. The clear implication is that I did not mention

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this fact in my book and that I have therefore not given credit to the prescience of the chiefs. Readers should note that on pages 164-65, I state that in June 1965 the JCS advised the President that it would take 750,000 to 1 million men and up to 30 years to insure the victory. How Mr. Baldwin missed this section I do not know.

Moreover, I criticized the JCS for giving implicit support to war policies, with which they disagreed, by staying on the job. Whether resigning en masse would have provoked a public discussion, I do not know. Certainly a group resignation had a greater chance of provoking such a debate than an individual resignation. What I do know, and Mr. Baldwin does not dispute, is that by staying on the Chiefs became associated with the policy and became involved in such unsavory byproducts of the war as protective reaction strikes, provocation strategies, secret bombings, and dual reporting systems.

Sixth, Mr. Baldwin takes me to task for omitting Senator Taft's famous Fortress America speech and General Bradley's subsequent rejoinder. (Actually, the famous speech was General Bradley's talk on 20 March 1952 before the Pasadena Chamber of Commerce in which he castigated the "Gibraltar theory" of defense advocated by "Hoover and Taft" as selfish and defensive.) Mr. Baldwin feels that this episode is important because it helped to lead to the so-called politicization of the JCS. I do not mention this episode specifically, but (on p. 17) I point out that one of the complaints about the JCS is that they have been politicized by the party in power and thus become partisan political spokesmen. Moreover, (on p. 103), I note that in 1952 many Republicans and conservative Democrats, including Taft, complained that the JCS had become too closely identified with the partisan policies of the Truman administration and demanded that President Eisenhower replace them en masse.

In my view, these parts of the book cover the issues raised by the Taft-Bradley incident.

Seventh, Mr. Baldwin states that I did not mention Vietnamization. Not so again. This policy is discussed on page 169.

Eighth, Mr. Baldwin makes several references to the length of the book and the sources. He is apparently disturbed because the book is "only" 210 pages (approximately 80,000 words). In my view there is very little correlation between book length and quality. Maxwell Taylor's famous book *The Uncertain Triumph* was only 203 pages and 64,000 words, while David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*, which Mr. Baldwin disparages, runs to 688 pages and 500,000 words! The length of my book would be considered a problem only if it left out significant and relevant areas, which mine does not.

Mr. Baldwin is also concerned about my use of public sources. However, his review does not make a convincing case as to where or how those sources are wrong or misleading. Mr. Baldwin makes his charge but does not give specifics. Moreover, he ignores the fact that my interviews are a check or temporizer on these public sources. To buttress my point about my use of public sources, I would like to quote from a letter I received from a man who served on the JCS during the Vietnam years in regard to my analysis of the relationship between the JCS and the Secretary of Defense:

... I was greatly struck by the depth to which you had been able to penetrate in your research and writing, the sound observations and conclusions which you reached [without access to classified sources].

I have no doubt that when the archives are opened and the relevant material is declassified, I could write another and better book, but this is not likely to take place until the end of this century.

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It seems to me that what really concerns Mr. Baldwin are any judgments that are critical of military officers and conservative military traditions. Based upon his long association and friendship with this nation's highest ranking officers, his feelings are understandable. I leave it to the readers to make the ultimate evaluation. One of my purposes in writing the book was to provoke precisely this sort of dialogue about one of the least understood structures in the American political system. I think I have succeeded.

Polmar, Norman. *Strategic Weapons: An Introduction*. New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1976. 161pp.

It is sometimes forgotten, even by the specialist, that the nuclear balance which describes the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union does not rest on amorphous concepts and doctrines, but on concrete weapon systems with specific characteristics and capabilities. If the academic, the military officer or the concerned citizen desires to delve further than the policy pronouncements of his leaders or the superficiality of the press, it is essential that the weapons which react to, justify, and even motivate policy must be understood. To ignore this fact is to ignore sound analysis in national security studies. Can one seriously examine for example—except in moral-philosophical terms—the Schlesinger re-targeting doctrine enunciated in January 1974 without first exploring the weapon developments which were its impetuses? The answer, obviously, is NO!

At first glance Norman Polmar's volume, *Strategic Weapons*, provides a useful resource for the type of analysis cited above. As stated in the preface by Frank R. Barnett, the monograph "seeks to fill a longstanding need for an outline of the development of strategic weapons and a description of their basic

characteristics." If the posited purpose is met, it follows that the book will be a useful addition to any reference library oriented to the subject, and a complementary piece to the more standard annual reference works (particularly, *The Military Balance* published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London).

The book does partially fulfill its stated promise and does provide a useful and convenient listing of the strategic weapons systems deployed over the past 3 decades; however, the work is seriously marred by far too many errors of interpretation and fact. Beyond use as a mere listing, the book must be read with considerable discrimination and care. Polmar's use of quoted material is all too often not referenced, thus preventing the reading of statements in context. Second, since the book is very uncritical in its acceptance of the U.S. position as the author understands it, the interested reader may utilize his time more fruitfully by reading the *Annual Defense Department Reports* which are readily available and have improved greatly in quality over the past several years. Third, information on the accuracy of weapons systems (specifically CEP's) is omitted. While precise missile accuracy data is classified, public sources do make such information derivable.

Despite the author's impressive qualifications, which include editing a section of *Jane's Fighting Ships* and lecturing at the Naval Academy, he makes several errors not expected of the specialist. For example he states (p. 8) that a 50-kiloton (K.T.) weapon could devastate an entire city, which is patently false unless one is talking about a small urban area. One simply must be more precise. Polmar resorts to the simplistic weapons effects statements which typify uninformed commentary. For example, he equates the effect of four 1.5-megaton (MT) weapons to 300 of the variety dropped

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on Japan. A simple calculation informs us that the posited four weapons would only have one quarter the effect of the 300 weapons cited (the equation for destructive effect being: $NY^{2/3} = D$, where N = number of weapons, Y = yield and D = destructive effect).

Belying a complete misunderstanding of the retargeting policy announced in 1974, the author states that massive retaliation has failed to inhibit international and intrasocietal conflict and seems to imply (p. 9) that the new doctrine will somehow redress this impotency. If this implication is correct, the author is seriously in error. For not only does the history of the nuclear era prove the error of the imputation of such a utility for nuclear weapons, but not even the most liberal reading of recent official statements will divulge such an intent. Similarly, Polmar seems not to understand the strategic doctrines which have evolved since the opening of the atomic epoch. He states: "Traditionally, intercontinental missiles have been viewed primarily for attacking opposing strategic offensive forces in a doctrine known as 'counterforce'" (pp. 64-65). This is simply and obviously false. The basis for massive retaliation and assured destruction has traditionally been the promise of destruction of the opposing society, not its means of mass destruction. It was only for a brief period (2 years) in the Kennedy administration that the counterforce option prevailed. Even the spectacular developments late in the Soviet ICBM programs offer the promise, but not the capability of a counterforce strike.

Polmar discusses the Cuban missile crisis and seems to be rather muddled about the facts. He states, for example, that U.S. Jupiter missiles were apparently removed from Italy and Turkey as a part of the U.S.-Soviet accord ending the crisis. The evidence to the contrary is well known, voluminous

and convincing. Notwithstanding the fact that missiles in Italy were never the subject of any Soviet demand, President Kennedy had previously ordered the removal of the missiles in Turkey in the summer of 1962. The fact that they were not removed may be explained by bureaucratic inertia or diplomatic considerations, but in no way was the removal of the missiles linked to settlement of the crisis.

In a short, 11-page chapter, Polmar discusses the weapons programs of other nuclear and near-nuclear countries. This chapter provides scant useful information and includes one error that typifies lay comment on the proliferation question. Polmar states that "... Israel can produce plutonium for nuclear weapons." Since the production of plutonium from irradiated reactor fuel requires chemical separation in reprocessing facilities, and since Israel is not known to have such facilities, Polmar's conclusion does not necessarily follow.* Such imprecision adds to the fog; it does not dissipate it.

The shortcomings cited above are not comprehensive but merely illustrative. Had Polmar restricted himself to the data of deployment, capability, and number deployed of each respective system he would have provided a useful addition to the literature without qualification; however, such is not the case. For the reader desiring elementary information regarding strategic weapons systems Polmar could be useful, but he should look elsewhere for careful interpretation.

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*For further clarification the reader may refer to the reviewer's article, "Nuclear Terrorism and the Middle East," *Military Review*, April 1976, pp. 3-11.