

1976

The Barometer

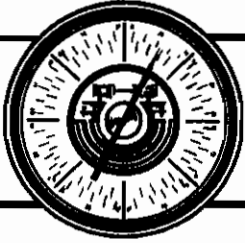
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THE BAROMETER

(Lt. Comdr. Edwin R. Linz, USN, comments on Mrs. Tuchman's article "How Will History Judge Us?" Fall 1975.)

In the guns vs. butter trade-off, Mrs. Tuchman appears to be telling us that we have our priorities all wrong. She chides us for choosing armaments instead of "unpolluting lakes and rivers, building sewage plants, converting garbage to fuel, . . ." et cetera. The only workable deterrence, she states, is "a society felt by its citizens to be so desirable that they will be ready to spring to its defense." Therefore, because we spend so much on "sterile hardware instead of on the things which make life richer and give us a society worth defending," we have not only chosen an inherently futile strategy of national defense but have also contributed to the further disintegration of society, such that history will record our century as "The Terrible Twentieth."

I must disagree with Mrs. Tuchman on both counts. While few would dispute the desirability of more spending on nondefense areas, the problem is to decide which segments of defense spending, if any, are appropriate for reduction or deletion. In the United States it is the citizens themselves, through their elected representatives, who must continuously confront this basic conflict. Some, such as Mrs. Tuchman, lobby for greater social expenditures; others interpret the same historical data as a mandate for increased defense spending. The resulting compromise, reflecting the inputs not only of historians but also of every

other element of society, is the annual Federal budget.

If this delicate balance of budgeting is upset by interest groups more powerful than their numbers, there may be cause for concern. If this is Mrs. Tuchman's complaint, she should be more explicit. It would seem, however, that her lament is more general: everyone has it all wrong, we are "wasting the national substance on a supererogatory arsenal of overkill" based on a misguided perception of deterrence. Instead of modern weaponry, Mrs. Tuchman would have us deter aggression with but a strong national will. Deterrence, she says, "lies in the nerve and the heart."

But surely such notions must be classified as more romantic than practical in the 20th century (whether it ultimately be judged as Terrible or Terrific). Certainly no amount of Polish national pride was sufficient to deter Hitler's Wehrmacht. And much of the current Soviet preoccupation with armaments can be traced to their sad history of invasion by better equipped Western neighbors. Although British willpower (as personified by Churchill) was undoubtedly a key factor in the defense of the home isles, the contribution of scores of RAF aircraft and of military technological innovations (such as radar) were equally important. In short, recent history has demonstrated that no nation can afford to unilaterally disarm without either a powerful patron as its ally or running the risk of domination and/or invasion by less idealistic antagonists.

More importantly, technological

advances continue to reduce the time frame in which an effective defensive effort can be mounted. When ballistic missiles can arrive in minutes, does it make sense to rely only on a strong national will to resist? Whether Mrs. Tuchman *likes* it or not, a credible deterrent in these times must include both sophisticated hardware and the will to use it in defense.

The debate, therefore, is really about sufficiency. When does a country exceed its logical requirements? Mrs. Tuchman apparently suggests that logical means minimum, but even here there are considerable grounds for debate as to what constitutes minimum. Other concerned citizens argue that because we are facing the possibility of national annihilation, minimum is not enough—and this group is willing to sacrifice additional sewage treatment projects for increased national defense expenditures.

Mrs. Tuchman mentions Trident and multiple warheads as examples of obvious overkill, "a gigantic boondoggle of weaponry." Yet what, other than unilateral disarmament, does she suggest to replace current SSBN's and existing missiles as they age and become less technically viable? Should we ignore their approaching obsolescence, or should we search for an equally effective deterrent to help carry us through the next 20 years?

Because the search for new weapons is indeed a *search*, there are inevitably errors involved, some spectacular and costly, but most explainable. Certainly any defense organization must seek to minimize such wastage if it is to retain the confidence of the public. But as in any area so technologically dependent—whether it be weapons procurement or the development of alternative sources of energy—funding considerations must be sufficiently broad to allow for the occasional dead-end project.

Sufficiency of deterrence, therefore, is an exceptionally complex issue, which

will—and should—continue to be debated by Congress. Until, however, someone can assure his fellow citizens that current weapons will be an effective deterrent for an indefinite period into the future, a realistic defensive strategy for this era must include not only the will to defend one's nation, but also a continuous flow of sophisticated—and expensive—hardware.

There is little evidence to suggest that current defense expenditures have become "as disruptive a factor as war itself"—the 14th century scenario depicted by Mrs. Tuchman. Certainly many citizens deplore the level of defense spending as too high, but others have equally firm convictions that it is too low. In contrast to the widespread insurrections of the 14th century, there have been few, if any, public demonstrations (in the United States regarding the *levels* of defense spending; most Americans seem to have been reasonably satisfied that an appropriate mix of guns and butter has been attained.

Regarding Mrs. Tuchman's second assertion—that history will record the present century as "The Terrible Twentieth"—one can only challenge her scope; the ultimate decision will be made by later historians. Obviously for any period of history a case can be made by its participants that it is not up to previous standards. (Many parents have been saying this for centuries!) Yet our century may have made, and indeed may still be in the process of making, significant achievements of which Mrs. Tuchman is currently unappreciative and/or unaware. Certainly mankind's liberation from the confines of earth began with 20th century space travel. Later historians may credit this achievement with the same importance that Mrs. Tuchman ascribes to the discovery of America in 1492. At any rate, the debate on the merits of the 20th must necessarily remain moot until time gives later critics the benefit of hindsight and greater objectivity.

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(Lt. A.D. Fryer, USN, comments on Mrs. Tuchman's article "How Will History Judge Us?" Fall 1975.)

Mrs. Tuchman's address may have elicited a knee-jerk response from many War College students, and I suspect, so did Vice Admiral LeBourgeois' challenge to midcareer officer professional development. The questions raised by Mrs. Tuchman's comparison of our present national drift and the events characterizing the 14th century concern the gap between historical or political perspectives and the ability, indeed desire, to propose and implement changes that may be perceived as being desirable.

The challenge facing midcareer naval officers, however, is not a political one of determining governmental or even broad DOD goals, but rather one of success in achieving those goals. Naval leaders of tomorrow must be capable of providing the technical (tactical and strategic) capabilities to implement national goals, as defined by the government. The determination of these goals does not lie within the spectrum of naval leadership responsibilities. Those whose personal ethical or political convictions require them to seek greater input to this governmental determination of national goals than that of the private citizen in the voting booth have a like moral obligation to the Navy, to pursue those ends as a civilian. The moral obligation, of the naval officer is to maintain the skills and capabilities to defend the society commensurate with its will to be preserved. Questions concerning the strength/composition of this will may well be valid, but their resolution is not a military responsibility.

Preparation for debate on the questions Mrs. Tuchman poses is desirable for the informed, concerned citizen. Such preparation for the naval officer may, and probably will, preclude some more vital preparation for duties within his profession. It seems that the present

technical and managerial skills of the naval officer corps are even now barely adequate for the tasks our missions (as defined by the political process) require.

Mrs. Tuchman's observations were inappropriate for her audience. Her concern for national priorities, and Vice Admiral LeBourgeois' concern for the midcareer naval officer's ability to debate that subject contribute little to the ability of that officer to succeed in carrying out his responsibilities in the naval service. The rebuttal that broadly educated senior officers are required as advisers at upper levels of government only confirms the expansion of military roles to include political ones, not necessarily to the benefit of the Navy or the public. That Mrs. Tuchman perceived the alteration of national priorities a suitable subject for a midcareer officer audience may suggest the degree to which the officer corps has become a political vice military profession. More butter and fewer guns is a question for the national political arena and the intellectuals.

Those officers unable to morally support the governmental goals do themselves, and the service, an injustice to remain in uniform. Dissent concerning the best means of mission accomplishment is probably healthy, and internal vehicles for that dissent exist. But the Machiavellian who uses the naval service to promote his own politics does his society a disservice. There is no basis for the origin of social or political reform by the military leadership in this country. Mrs. Tuchman's remarks were addressed to the political officer and the informed, concerned citizen. If the mandate of the society were the alteration of priorities Mrs. Tuchman advocates, the concerned naval officer would do well to examine his conscience as to his personal commitment to supporting the will of the majority in this new context. For in the final analysis, the military must march off smartly when it has its orders, and

anyone not prepared to do so is sailing under false colors.

In reality, broadening the educational background to clarify philosophical perspectives is desirable, but like space and weight considerations in ship design, compromises must be made. In today's Navy, they should be made in favor of those technical and managerial

skills that accommodate success in implementation of the Navy mission. There are suitable alternatives for those who cannot accept the terms of service. An officer corps of moral eunuchs? No, one prepared, technically and ethically, to carry out the will of the majority, rather than impose its will upon that majority.

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