

Naval War College Review

Volume 28
Number 1 *January-February*

Article 8

1975

The Barometer

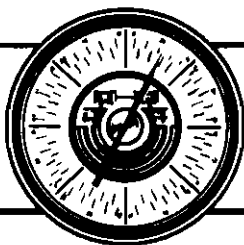
Ashok Kapur

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Kapur, Ashok (1975) "The Barometer," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 28 : No. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol28/iss1/8>

This Additional Writing is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.



THE BAROMETER

(Ashok Kapur, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, comments on Lt. Comdr. K.R. McGruther's "The Role of Perception in Naval Diplomacy," September-October issue.)

I agree with the focus on perceptions in naval diplomacy, but I believe if lessons are to be drawn from American naval-diplomatic behavior in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan crisis, the lessons must be correct ones.

I am not convinced that from the outset that American strategy (e.g., Nixon/Kissinger approach) was based on the certainty of Indian military victory over Pakistan as is stated on page 7. Until Indian forces reached Dacca and Indian forces had overcome amphibious obstacles, it was not clear that India had the military capability to isolate Pakistan's forces and obtain a surrender. Hence there was a possibility that Indian forces could get bogged down, and then the psychological effect of the *Enterprise* would/could have been more telling. In this connection it should be noted that the Indian Government was under tremendous pressure from the Soviets to finish the military campaign within a week or 10 days because the diplomatic pressure in the United Nations was strong. In this case, the U.S. strategy was probably to play on Indian military uncertainties. If anything, the talk about the arrival of the *Enterprise* goaded the Indian military into quicker and decisive action. To say that the United States is the "winner" implies

that this is what it wanted. But is this what the author wants to say?

The foregoing directs attention to the effect of the American signal(s) on India. The second point directs attention to the element of uncertainty in Nixon-Kissinger thinking. Here the hypothesis is that instead of America being able to create uncertainty in the other side's thinking by raising a question of American unpredictability (page 12), Americans are taken in (according to this hypothesis) by exaggerating their ability to confuse others with their so-called unpredictability. I am not sure if the 1971 crisis should be treated along with the Cuban crisis of 1962 and the Middle East crisis of 1973. There is need for more evidence to demonstrate that the *Enterprise* mission into the Bay of Bengal snatched the initiative from enemy hands (Indian? Soviet?). Neither militarily nor politically does such an inference seem warranted. The history of the crisis from March-October-December 1971 has yet to be written, but it seems that the framework of Indian decisionmaking was actually laid out in March 1971, and the rest was the implementation of a game plan which assumed Nixon's tilt against India and Moscow's preference for a peaceful and political solution.

We should note that if ambiguous signals produce uncertainty in the enemy's mind they also produce confusion for one's allies and potential allies. There is some evidence, albeit unconfirmed, that until the last day or so, Chinese forces did not move in the

76 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Himalayas but both Yahya Khan and China started some moves when the *Enterprise* appeared to be committed to tip the balance in the East. In this case, American naval diplomacy may have created an impression of parallelism, even of Sino-American "collusion" which Nixon and Kissinger may not really have wanted to convey. The Shanghai communique of February 1972 revealed such parallelism, but it is interesting that the Chinese insisted on talking about the subcontinent more than the Americans did. Subsequently, the American side has had to backtrack with the Indians, to emphasize that the idea of parallelism and collusion is "fanciful." Yet it was the naval expedition which started talk about parallelism and collusion in the first place. Thus, there is a case for selecting one's signals carefully, bearing in mind the values and attitudinal prisms of the adversary or enemy.

Finally, I think a general proposition should be made. To convey commitments it is not simply enough to send a task force. To convey commitments one needs to convey one's certainties and to hide one's uncertainties or to offer "if-then" propositions, to offer rewards and punishment. Furthermore, for a great power like the United States, why should it always be necessary to make tangible commitments. Surely its reputation, its word, should carry some conviction.

— ψ —

(Maj. John D. Whitehouse, USA—a former British subject—comments on Comdr. Maria Higgins' "Winston S. Churchill's Legacy to the Royal Navy, 1911-1915," November-December 1974.)

Unfortunately, as is so often the case among great men whose genius, dynamism, and tenacity are legendary, historical fact becomes confused with mythology and a sense of veneration which ultimately clouds the final judgment of what the great man intended to

achieve. In this regard it would seem that Commander Higgins' article on Winston Churchill and his legacy to the Royal Navy is no exception.

The article in question seems to overstate the accomplishments of Churchill while begging the question of the anticipated achievement of the Royal Navy in World War I. Assuming that the purpose for which the navy had been built was to inflict complete, unquestionable defeat on the Imperial German Navy, the effort was a failure. When the opportunity arose at Jutland, instead of a clear and smashing victory in the expected style of Nelson, the British Fleet was found wanting and the battle itself inconclusive both tactically and strategically. Jutland made clear the fact that British technology was in an advanced state of decay, that command and staff procedures were, to be charitable, faulty, and that damage control procedures had been sadly neglected. British gunnery was less effective by far than that of German ships, and the one British aircraft carrier, which could have had value to the British in a reconnaissance role (*Campania*) was ordered back to port as she tried to rendezvous with the fleet. The circumstances and events at Jutland certainly seem to disprove Commander Higgins' thesis that when war came the British Fleet was ready.

Much of the credit and/or blame for what was achieved in expanding and improving the Royal Navy between 1904 and 1914 should also go to Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher, who was First Sea Lord from 1904 to 1910. Nevertheless, even Fisher, whose dynamic personality was similar to that of Churchill's, did not prevent the inclusion of significant design faults into such ships as Dreadnought, Iron Duke, and Queen Elizabeth class and the battle-cruiser Tiger. High numbers of ships were out of commission at any one time. As the Commander in Chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, wrote in 1914: "... wholesale

breakdowns caused me uneasiness . . .”

Assessed in bureaucratic terms, Churchill's legacy to the Royal Navy, 1911-1915, does seem to be enormous. The truth appears to be closer to the fact that, despite all his efforts, the Royal Navy had not been aroused from a sense of complacency that had descended on the Empire. Indeed, in view of the steady industrial and technological decline of Great Britain starting in the 1870's, no one and nothing could have reversed the inevitable effects of years of decay, neglect, and inefficiency, hidden though they were under a veneer of polish and ritual. For all the reforms instigated by Churchill, the British Fleet at Jutland remained Victorian in outlook and technologically incapable of fulfilling its desired mission, i.e., decisively defeating the German Fleet. For the true believer, this analysis may be hard to swallow, but history bears out its accuracy.

A final lesson can be learned from Commander Higgins' article that one must never lose sight of—the fact that an armed force must be capable of

performing well, indeed decisively, in combat. Imaginative pay and social reforms are meaningless if combat efficiency does not increase proportionately. This is perhaps an area where we can improve today. We have the technology, but we appear to pay less attention than we should to the military virtues of courage, honor, and discipline.

The genius of Churchill lay best in his vision and was exemplified by his efforts to prepare for and fight two wars. The fact that his successes are fewer, than would at first appear to be the case, cannot be blamed on him. The catastrophic and unbelievably fast decline of British power might have occurred differently had it not been for Churchill, but it would have happened all the same. To prevent a similar occurrence on our side of the Atlantic, we must realistically appraise the past by putting cause and effect in their correct perspective. Then, unlike the British, as Barnett observed, we would be studying history and not merely copying it.

