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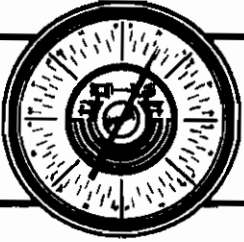
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THE BAROMETER

(Lt. Comdr. Edwin R. Linz, USN, comments on Colonel Grace's article "The Need To Be More Professional: What-ever That Means," May/June 1975.)

Colonel Grace has provided an interesting discussion regarding professionalism within the military (NWCR, May/June 75). His thoughts regarding discipline and devotion to a cause are commendable and form an appropriate cornerstone upon which we can build a more professional service. However, I must take exception when he attacks systems analysis as a civilian malady thrust upon us by "intellectuals" and the root cause of many of our post-WW II shortcomings.

What Colonel Grace is really telling us is that the appropriate direction for the military professional is a prompt return to the good old days of "gutfeel" decisionmaking. He chides the McNamara era for overemphasizing economic aspects and suggests that military professionals would have been better advised sticking to the traditional approaches rather than racing to embrace the "whiz-kids" and their new ideas.

To clinch his argument, Colonel Grace puts forth two supposedly damning indictments against the systems approach: first, that economic theory has a notoriously bad track record in its own field (implying that until economists start having respectable results in economics, they should keep out of other fields), and, secondly, that the whole sad history of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam is rather dramatic evidence that the systems

approach just does not work with "primarily military problems."

A closer look at these indictments suggests that both neglect the reasoning behind the original adoption of the systems approach and that neither demonstrates more than the obvious, i.e., no single-minded approach can give all the right answers all the time.

As soon as financial constraints are imposed, one can no longer limit himself to questions of "strategy, logistics, tactics, and command" alone, as Colonel Grace suggests; the major problem facing the military planner is more often financial in today's environment. And such has been the case throughout the past 30 year period—the development of the SSBN being a notable exception.

Thus the real argument revolves around the issue of whether economic or military considerations should determine policy. So long as Congress sees fit to limit military expenditures—and the trend seems to be more toward closer scrutiny rather than less—the military must be prepared to try to extract maximum defense per dollar allotted. This has been a fact of life since the end of WW II and will undoubtedly continue into the future. Only a clear and present danger to our national survival will alter the criteria.

In retrospect, the introduction of systems analysis into military planning and decisionmaking by McNamara, Enthoven, et al. was remarkable mostly because it had not happened sooner. The Military Establishment had been

operating for 15 years as if WW II funding and psychology were still present. Many an admiral and general were stunned to think that a civilian, who obviously knew little or nothing about warfare, could question the desirability of purchasing a new weapons system or, for example, the relative benefit of 20 ASW aircraft vs. 10 for the same mission. It gradually became apparent, however, that the most professional manner of working within financial constraints was the cost-benefit-analysis, and that financial limits were here to stay. The only alternative was enlightened guesswork, i.e., the seat-of-the-pants approach.

The shift to cost-benefit-analysis techniques did involve some over-reaction in the use of the new jargon, and Colonel Grace is correct to criticize this. But jargon and terminology were not the cause of our exit in Vietnam; the financial and political limitations imposed by the American people were

undoubtedly more causal. Perhaps without the systems approach our record since 1960 may have been even less successful.

Rather than decrying the adoption of the systems approach to the military problem as a misguided attempt by "intellectuals" to alter centuries of sound decisionmaking experience, I would suggest that the true military professional should utilize the best management and decisionmaking techniques available at the time. Until some approach other than systems analysis can be demonstrated to operate more successfully in our climate of financial constraints, the truly professional military planners will continue to use cost-benefit-analyses. If we wish to be more professional in this regard, we should learn from past errors not that the approach itself is bad, but rather that we still have a lot to learn about weighting alternatives in a military context.

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