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## The U.S. Navy's Role in General War and Conflict Short of General War

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# **NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW**

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## **THE U. S. NAVY'S ROLE IN GENERAL WAR AND CONFLICT SHORT OF GENERAL WAR**

A lecture delivered  
at the Naval War College  
on 10 December 1958 by

*Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, United States Navy,  
Chief of Naval Operations*

It is always a pleasure for me to speak to the Naval War College and to take on your barrage of searching questions.

Each officer here has been purposely selected to step aside from the daily main stream of immediately urgent problems. Your mission now, while you are here, is to think, to reassess and scrutinize established ideas, to size up new approaches to our problems, and, above all, to work on those problems.

In the coming years you are going to carry some very heavy burdens, and certainly you will have grave responsibilities. This is the year which has been allotted to you to prepare yourselves for those demanding years ahead.

For this reason, I am eager not so much to recount factual matter this morning, which you can absorb quietly by reading, nor will I speak to you about the Navy this morning. What I would like to do is to present to you a challenge — a challenge of a new outlook on some very serious problems that confront the United States. You are going to hear a lot more questions than answers from me this morning, but they are serious questions with which all of us are now faced, and will be faced until we either get some answers or quit.

I would like to start with a scrutiny of basic attitudes. It is obvious that our enemy is the Sino-Soviet Bloc. This is where the threat to us and to the entire Free World comes from.

How do you look upon the Soviet Union? If you look upon it as a traditional state, buttressed by great military strength, you are probably fairly optimistic that over the long haul we can contain it by military strength alone.

But most of us, I think, would vigorously protest that we do not look upon the Soviet Union in exactly this way. Instead, we would say that the Soviet Union was in the hands of a dedicated revolutionary group which believes that it is destined, as a party, to turn the entire world communistic and to rule it from Moscow.

But, regardless of our protests, many of us tend to slide into the error of judging the Soviet regime by traditional nation-state standards. We pride ourselves in liking to think in logical terms. We thus feel more at ease in judging an otherwise puzzling situation. The danger here is — and you can see frequent evidence of it — that we tend to believe the Soviet objectives are limited, that skillful compromise can solve our problems, and that the Soviets can gradually be educated to believe that reason is the best guide of conduct. In short, some of us erroneously believe that if we sit and wait, the situation will evolve within the Soviet Union to our satisfaction.

What I am getting at is simply this: as a people, we have indeed been very clearly informed by those who are running the Communist Bloc that we are their enemy, that we will be their victim, and that they intend to eradicate our way of life. For them, a campaign of attrition against us is the order of the day, and this has been going on for over forty years. For them, waging such a war of attrition is a virtue, for the world demands it — so they assert.

Our people have not squarely faced up to this problem. It is not surprising that the Communists are encouraged by the successes they have had. In short, they have clear, simple objectives and the will to pursue those objectives. They feel that they have nothing to lose and the whole world to gain.

Why are we, as a people, so unwilling to face up to this fact? Why can't we realize that we cannot react violently to one provocation and then sink back into lethargy? Why do recurring offers of Soviet peace stir a new, but vain, hope? Why do we tend to believe that the Soviets will give up their philosophy and watch their Communist edifice collapse?

One of the basic reasons lies in our national character. We are optimistic if we are left to our own devices. We find compromise a desirable solution when we think that honor itself is not sacrificed. We find deliberate, sustained hatred and aggressiveness alien to our spirit.

Therefore, when we are not faced with a dramatic Communist push we like to believe that things are not so bad after all. We tend to judge the Soviet leaders by the standards we use to judge a neighbor, an ally, or a traditional nation-state. I am stressing this simple, basic subject because confusion over the enemy threat can set off a whole chain of decisive, but disastrous, evaluations of that threat.

Let's look at this matter more closely. First, let me summarize what I believe is the Soviet approach to reaching its objectives. We must, of course, allow for every contingency in Soviet actions. The action which is most talked about is the possibility of a Soviet sneak attack against the United States.

Simple prudence on our part demands alertness for this type of attack. But certainly it does not demand hysteria or obsession. There is no real evidence that the Soviets have directed their energies toward such an attack. It is true that they have developed a long-range air force, but heavy bombers constitute only a small part of this force. We have seen what the Soviets can do with a project when they give overriding priority to that project. I think it is obvious that a deliberate intention to cripple the United States as soon as feasible by a sneak attack has not had such priority in the Soviet Union.

What, then, is their way of achieving their aims? I think we have ample evidence, not very difficult to find, that their means to an objective are not primarily military — and that includes navies as well as air forces and armies. The Soviets will never make the mistake of becoming militarily weak. But they prefer to gain their objectives through the *threat* of force and, on the other side of the coin, through the *prestige* of real military strength.

I believe that we have consistently erred as a nation in attributing to the Soviets an intention to gain their objectives solely by the use of military force. This implies that their military men have been given a mission of conquest for the Soviet Union.

The evidence, however, points the other way. It is a group of professional political conspirators who carry out the mission of the Communist World. Their design is to disintegrate the institutions of the Free World and to remake civilization. For them, military strength is an important instrument in political warfare, but it is only one of the several different means by which to gain their objectives, step by step, in the cautious manner of conspirators.

They have shown — and they now show — a rare skill in the psychological use of good military strength. They have often gained their ends without having to commit their forces, and that is important. But, more important, they are schooled in the discipline of the prudent use of military force. Their cardinal rule is that the destiny of Communism must not be jeopardized by hair-brained risk. This has been so in the past and it seems likely to continue in the future. This helps to explain why we miss the boat so often in trying to deal with such an enemy.

He has a clear objective. He disposes all of his resources in all of his territory in one integrated campaign to gain that objective. He fights in the fields of politics, of economics, of psychology, and of culture. He fights hard all of the time on all fronts and in every area. He aids and abets troublemakers throughout the Free World. He can increase or reduce pressure. He can talk gently, or he can bellow. Across the entire spectrum of this type of warfare he uses his resources to weaken the Free World, to confuse it, to frighten it, and, finally, to make it feel helpless.

The main point is, of course, that he is committed to making this kind of Communist war against us, and he never doubts this. For him, it is normal. For him, he must carry out that kind of a battle or he, himself, becomes an enemy to the revolution. We in the Free World somehow or other refuse to take this very seri-

ously. Theoretically, we recognize it, but we do not really act as though we took it seriously at all.

Let me offer an illustration of how we unconsciously adapt ourselves to the Soviet ground rules. If you face up to the facts, you will have to admit that one of the ground rules laid down by the Soviets is that the battleground of the cold war is on Free World territory. It is never within the Soviet Bloc.

If you reflect upon this for a moment, I think you will also have to admit that most of the Free World has tacitly accepted that the Soviet Union will meddle or attack beyond its borders but that the Free World may not make trouble within the territory under Soviet control.

When the Geneva Summit Meeting was in preparation, you probably remember that the Soviets stated flatly Eastern Europe was not acceptable as a subject of discussion. Their attitude during and following the Hungarian uprising also followed exactly the same pattern. However, when Great Britain and France attacked Egypt, the Soviets had a great deal to say, including the threat to destroy France and Britain.

We witnessed a similar situation when Syria falsely claimed that Turkey was about to attack her. And, recently, the Soviets declared themselves involved when we responded to Lebanon's request for aid. What they say in effect is that what happens in the non-Communist World is their business, but what happens in the Communist World is nobody else's business. Unfortunately, the Free World has let itself be conditioned to accepting that Soviet point of view.

The Free World shudders at the thought of any Western interference within the Communist orbit. It also shudders when the Communists threaten to interfere with a Free World situation. I am merely laying bare for you a tacit principle of the entire cold war. It is not very pleasant to contemplate. Something very dangerous happens to the man who comes to accept that the other fellow will always carry the ball.

To what can a situation like this lead? It is simply this: you approach a situation where the enemy defines the issues, where the enemy makes the challenge, where the enemy selects the ground on which the conflict is to be waged, and where the enemy chooses the weapons.

This is very well worth reflecting upon, because it points up the power of purpose contrasted with the weakness of drifting. Lest you misinterpret that remark, I mean that the people of the United States, as a people, are drifting — not just the Administration, Truman or Eisenhower, not just Congress, not the Democrats, not the Republicans, but we, as citizens of the United States, are drifting. We cannot brush this off on somebody else's shoulders for the burden is on the shoulders of each of us.

I would now like to examine the role of military power today. Here, again, let's take a long look at some of the common working concepts which we have taken for granted.

In the first place, our nation has grown accustomed to thinking that the only problem of the United States lies in deterring an all-out Soviet surprise attack against us with nuclear weapons. This is a legitimate problem in itself, and all aspects of the threat to the United States must be examined, including that grave one. But to become totally preoccupied with this contingency alone can leave us helpless before the many other courses of action available to an imaginative enemy and, of all things we should have learned by now, we should have learned that the Soviets are imaginative.

Once having decided that prevention of an all-out attack on the United States represented the military facts of life, there was a temptation for us to try to make our military strength for strategic retaliation do the job of preventing the Soviets from any type of aggression. I do not mean by this any type of military aggression, but I mean any type of aggression, political, economic, as well as small military aggressions.

Massive retaliation, which became a slogan, reigned for a time under the guise of a practical concept and a simple solution.

**What happened? The Communists continued the expansion of their influence and prestige, regardless of our ability to destroy them, regardless of the strategic nuclear threat.**

A strategic nuclear stalemate has now come about. The Soviets fully realize — we have told them, and they are convinced that we mean it — that a sneak attack against the United States is filled with the risk, or probably even the certainty, that we will destroy Russia. They know, we know, everybody knows if they attack the United States, Russia itself will be wiped out. It will be destroyed. Thus, just as long as we have sufficient strength to assure them of significant retaliation, the possibility of an all-out attack becomes very remote.

The possibility should become even more remote once POLARIS is functioning in sufficient numbers. POLARIS brings out more clearly a misconception that we have had about deterrence. To deter general nuclear war, we must have a real, demonstrable, and, preferably, an invulnerable capability to inflict wide-spread destruction.

A true deterrent has no gradations. It does not need a condition of more deterrent or most deterrent. For these reasons, the Navy of the future may have only a relatively small percentage of its forces devoted to the all-out nuclear deterrent problem, but these forces will be virtually invulnerable. Regardless, however, of how much we think POLARIS can contribute, regardless of how much we realize that POLARIS can destroy Russia, it is not the only problem and it is not even the greatest problem. Therefore, while we have to have POLARIS, we do not need it in large numbers.

It is clear that if the Soviets had an intention to build up as rapidly as possible to attack the United States, their long-range air force would have long since been a true intercontinental force. They have demonstrated their capability of building this equipment, but intercontinental types of aircraft still constitute only a small part of their long-range air force.

I am not emphasizing these factors to challenge the necessity for preparedness against a sneak attack. That is necessary.

But that preparedness has been overaccomplished. We are over-insured for that one contingency. I simply stress that we must widen our sights to include the necessity for adequate preparedness against the more probable enemy courses of action. These enemy courses of action, which can be decisive in the long run, fall far below the flash point of general war.

Gentlemen, every American likes a bargain. We all prefer a quick and simple solution to our problems. This is fine, when we are working among ourselves or with allies who share our way of thinking. But it will not work with the Communists. It certainly cannot be applied to the military facts of life today.

We are not engaged in any tennis match where losing a set or so can be made up later. We are engaged in a power struggle in which the enemy is out for attrition. Through consolidated strength and rigid controls, he intends to make his day-by-day victories irreversible.

By tradition and temperament, we Americans think of the "white" of peace or the "black" of war. We are not very much at ease with the dragging, nagging cold war that is neither peace nor general war but that vast "gray" area in between. This gray area is the area of Communist warfare and the area of attrition. It is the avoidance of dramatic Soviet military attacks, but the constant nibbling all the way around the periphery of the world. And those nibbles are going to come faster, and faster, and faster.

Lebanon followed Suez, although there was quite a time in between; Taiwan followed closely on the heels of Lebanon; Berlin followed closely on the heels of Taiwan; and, several days ago, the Governments of Finland and Iceland fell.

The Government of Finland fell because of the economic pressure that was applied to it. The Soviets decided they did not like the leaders of Finland, so they broke the government. Finland did not want to break it, but the Soviets put direct economic pressure on her and said, in effect: "Either change your government or this pressure continues." And Finland changed her government. That will happen again. There are no Communists in the Finnish

Government; they are anti-Communists, and that is why they were broken.

The Icelandic Government fell for a different reason and because of a different kind of Soviet pressure: Soviet political pressure from the Communist Party of Iceland. This is power demonstrated in the way they intend to use it. This is the power that we, as Americans, are going to have to combat. You cannot combat that kind of power with strictly military force. It is in this gray area of cold war that we have been living for the past thirteen years, an area in which we will go on living for a long, long while in the future. It is high time, therefore, for us as a people to face up to this and to coldly plan to operate on this basis for generations ahead.

Nations usually die not from being clobbered from without, or from beyond their borders, but because of what happens to them from within. They die because they lose their stamina, their will, their willingness to work, and their character. Take Germany, for example. She was clobbered twice, yet she is now a strong nation in Europe. Nations die because the people of the nation become so self-interested, perhaps even so selfish, that they allow that self-interest to interfere with their public interest. Their selfish interests become paramount, while their public interests take second place. They use public affairs to make private gains.

The history of the first democracy of the world, which fell, proves that this has been going on for a long time. Athens was the first city to have a democratic form of government. When it started out, it was one of the most powerful city-states in the world, and it lasted for a long, long time. It died not because of what Sparta could do, for Athens defeated Sparta over and over again. It died not because of what the Macedonians did to it externally.

It died because the Athenians no longer would support their State, no longer would they give their services, no longer would they go out on the battlefield to fight, and no longer would they internally resist the pleasures that come from soft living.

Philip of Macedonia made slaves of the Athenians. He made happy slaves of them, so that they were people who were perfectly happy and contented. All Philip asked was tribute, for them not to engage in any external affairs, and for them to be satisfied with living their lives out, which is a terrible thing to contemplate.

What happened to Egypt and Rome? Let's look at France.

France is a nation of great people. Why does de Gaulle have the strength that he has in France at the present time? De Gaulle may have faults, but he has one great virtue. It is a virtue which Frenchmen now recognize. He works for France. He does not work for de Gaulle. He does not work for a party. He works for France. Right or wrong, everything that he does in the international arena he does for the glory of France. He will bring France up, and she will come up, by doing things which others may not like. But when de Gaulle dies, what happens to France? What can happen to France? Is there a large group of Frenchmen who are willing to follow de Gaulle? Will de Gaulle generate a successor of his own qualities? These things are serious things.

If we, as a nation, should ever come to convince ourselves that situations like Berlin, Greece, Lebanon, Korea, Quemoy and Taiwan are really little pieces of real estate of no decisive value, we shall then surely be on the road to disaster. It is quite true that any one of these situations, if taken by itself in terms of narrow logic, does not seem vital. But if they are all taken together, and with the others that are certain to come along, they can be decisive.

To what conclusion does all of this lead? Simply to this: the real aggression of Communism is on the day-to-day scene. It is not likely to be in an all-out nuclear attack against us so long as we maintain an adequate strategic nuclear deterrent. We have already witnessed how many people readily equate our defense against local aggression as the first step in a chain reaction leading to all-out nuclear warfare.

We know that the Soviets do not want the all-out nuclear exchange any more than do we. When they sponsor a local war, or

when they shoulder us in a situation like Berlin, the Soviets are really in control of the situation. If they meet firm resistance in that situation, they talk, and the action peters out. If they do not meet resistance, it is another addition to their power. The situation never again arises because that situation has then been included within the Soviet Bloc.

Here, then, is the area in which we must expect to take them on, and where we will *have* to take them on. This is the area where the true imbalance of our preparedness now exists. If we buckle in this area through lots of talk and inadequate preparedness or inadequate willingness, we are submitting to defeat by attrition.

Under such circumstances, there will be no death agony. There will be a prolonged, gradual, almost painless ebbing of the life and of the spirit of the Free World.

Remember that the Communist aggression calls for a lot more than the proper type of military preparedness. Military preparedness in itself *is* vital, but Communist aggression calls for a lot more than that. The problem which we face is one for the entire nation, for every individual. Our country has always been dedicated to the pursuit of happiness. But far too many of our people have narrowed this to the pursuit of material happiness. The Soviets, on the other hand, are dedicated with a discipline to the pursuit of power. This is what is involved in Berlin, in the Taiwan Straits, and all over the Middle East — power.

Too many Americans are prone to react to these situations by extremes. One reaction is that a small area of the Free World is not worth fighting for. The other reaction, often coupled with the first, is that the Soviets will initiate general war if we contest Communism campaigns in any one of these local areas. Neither reaction is worthy of us. The first reaction throws overboard our principles and our honor; the second brings on psychological paralysis in the face of every Soviet move.

In this power struggle of today, general war is remote because the Soviets do not want it and are not going to jeopardize

their power base for any non-Soviet territory. This has been proved over and over again. Every time they have been faced with the possibility of a fight, they have walked back the cat. Berlin is a challenge, and the Soviets would like to see us fold, a victim of our own fears. If we stand firm in this and all of the other day-to-day pressure areas, they will turn off the heat on Berlin and wait for another day and another place. We cannot give in to attrition, and this is where the decisiveness and the struggle will surely and eventually lie.

Gentlemen, the cold war in which we now are engaged will last just as long as we shall live. How we make out in this war will be largely dependent upon what we, as a nation, are willing to do, how hard we are willing to work, whether we have enough strong men to shoulder the public interest and let their private interests go.

The creed of service and action has been the creed of the Navy for a long time. As naval officers, you have great responsibilities for the future of your country, responsibilities of example, of advice, and, quite frequently, of action.

May you have the knowledge, the power, and, above all, the willingness to carry those responsibilities.

## **BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH**

### **Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, United States Navy**

Admiral Burke was graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1923. After various duty assignments, including post-graduate training in Ordnance Engineering, he had his first command in the U. S. S. MUGFORD in 1939.

During World War II, he served in destroyers in the South Pacific and, later, as Chief of Staff to Admiral Mitscher, Commander Fast Carrier Task Forces. In January, 1945, he became Chief of Staff to Commander EIGHTH Fleet, and in September of the following year he became Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.

Following a year of duty with the General Board, Admiral Burke assumed command of the U. S. S. HUNTINGTON, after which he returned to the Navy Department as Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Organization, Research and Policy Division). In January, 1950, he became Navy Secretary of the Research and Development Board.

During the early part of the Korean War, Admiral Burke was Deputy Chief of Staff to Commander U. S. Naval Forces, Far East. In the spring of 1951, he assumed command of Cruiser Division FIVE. While on this duty he was ordered as a member of the Military Armistice Negotiating Team in Korea.

Admiral Burke became Director of the Strategic Plans Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations in December, 1951. After serving as Commander, Cruiser Division SIX from April, 1954 to 20 January 1955, he was Commander Destroyer Forces, U. S. Atlantic Fleet. Since 17 August 1955, Admiral Burke has been Chief of Naval Operations.