

Naval War College Review

Volume 12
Number 10 *December*

Article 2

1959

Concepts of General and Limited War

R. E. Osgood

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

Recommended Citation

Osgood, R. E. (1959) "Concepts of General and Limited War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 12 : No. 10 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol12/iss10/2>

This Article 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.

SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE READER

The material contained herein is furnished to the individual addressee for his private information and education only. The frank remarks and personal opinions of many Naval War College guest lecturers are presented with the understanding that they will not be quoted; you are enjoined to respect their privacy. Under no circumstances will this material be republished or quoted publicly, as a whole or in part, without specific clearance in each instance with both the author and the Naval War College.

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW was established in 1948 by the Chief of Naval Personnel in order that officers of the service might receive some of the educational benefits of the resident students at the Naval War College. Distribution is in accordance with BUPERS Instruction 1552.5A of 23 July 1958. It must be kept in the possession of the subscriber, or other officers eligible for subscription, and should be destroyed by burning when no longer required.

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the Navy Department or of the Naval War College.

ERRATA SHEET

Page 17 line 4 change "arument" to "argument"

Page 31 line 24 delete next to last word.

Page 39 line 8 change "GOUBB" to CLUBB"

Page 45 line 7 change "Gaghdad" to "Baghdad"

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
REVIEW**

**Issued Monthly
U. S. Naval War College
Newport, R. I.**

CONCEPTS OF GENERAL AND LIMITED WAR

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 18 September 1959 by
Professor R. E. Osgood

It is a great pleasure to be back again and to discover how much more you seem to know since I left. I am going to assume that your general level of sophistication in strategic matters is so great that I can dispense with this terrible semantic bind of defining general and limited war and assume that no very precise definitions are necessary in order to get us off the ground.

Of course, there are a variety of acceptable definitions and I would just as soon settle for a definition of limited war that would make it anything that is not unlimited, because in my mind there is a tremendous variety of possible kinds of limited war, and there is no definition that permits a precise characterization of all of them. All these definitions simply designate points along a spectrum of armed conflict that is differentiated principally by the scope of the political objectives that are at stake, by the dimensions of the conflict (which reflect, in part, the kinds of weapons that are used), and by the geographical scope of hostilities.

I think it is remarkable that we can now take for granted things we could not take for granted when I was here in 1955, because there seems to be a very widespread consensus, in the government and outside the government, concerning the meaning and the significance of both general and limited war. Let me just summarize some of the components of this consensus so that we can start off with a common understanding.

The first part of this consensus seems to be a widespread agreement on the fact that there are many possible varieties of war and that general war is something distinct from, and must be thought about and dealt with differently than, a limited war, despite an area in which one shades into the other.

Secondly, there seems to be a widespread agreement that it is desirable to impose some limits upon all kinds of war, including general war, because war is an instrument of policy and not an instrument of vengeance or retribution; but that the closer war comes to the general end of the spectrum, the more difficult it becomes to control it as a rational and effective instrument of policy.

Thirdly, there seems to be a widespread agreement that it is essential to be prepared for general war in order to deter major aggressions, but that this preparedness is not sufficient to deter a variety of limited aggressions. That is, preparation for general war is not sufficient to deter a great variety of less-than-major aggressions, since the would-be deterrer is himself deterred from responding to limited aggressions at the extreme cost that would be entailed in general war, and since aggressions can be posed in ambiguous and indirect forms that never provide a suitable opportunity for responding with general war.

And, finally, part of this general consensus seems to be the conclusion that, therefore, we must supplement our capacity for massive retaliation with other deterrents, including our capacity for local resistance, and including our capacity for less-than-massive retaliation, based upon a series of graduated reprisals; and that if deterrence fails, we must be prepared to repel limited aggressions by means that are commensurate with the objectives at stake — commensurate with the threat — without precipitating a general or a total war.

Well, this consensus, I think, represents a significant advance over three or four years ago, when I don't think all its elements were widely taken for granted. But this consensus could be quite deceptive if it led one to think that we have solved the problems of general or limited war or that there is a significant area of agreement about the details of strategic doctrine. For this general consensus conceals a crucial area of disagreement on the specifics of strategic doctrine — on the specific requirements of our overall strategy.

What do I mean by overall strategy? I mean a rather complicated thing. You can think of overall strategy as having several components. The first component is the estimate of the nature and the seriousness of the threats to our political objectives. Secondly, there would logically follow an estimate of the kinds of contingencies in which we might have to employ military force to support our objectives against these threats. Then, thirdly, we would determine the kinds of military responses that we would undertake in these various contingencies, and from that would follow, logically, the kinds of capabilities we needed; and, from capabilities, the kinds of weapons and forces. And another component, of course, would be our declaratory strategy, that is, what we would say or not say about all these various elements of overall strategy.

Well, so much for the general introduction. Let me speak about some of the disagreements in the specifics of strategic doctrine. These disagreements come to their sharpest focus with respect to the capabilities, the forces, and the weapons — that is, the tail end of this logical sequence of components in overall strategy — because that is where strategic doctrine really comes to grips with the practical problems that are at the core of strategy in general. That is where it comes to grips with the essence of strategy, which is allocating scarce resources among superabundant and often conflicting strategic functions, none of which is likely to be fully supported.

Now, this allocation can only be made in terms of priorities among the various strategic functions and in terms of the kind of marginal utilities you think you will get by allocating “X” quantity of dollars or other resources to one strategic function as opposed to another. These priorities and marginal utilities, in turn, depend upon what you think the nature of the threat is; they depend upon your estimate of the kind of contingencies that might arise, upon what kind of responses you think will meet these contingencies, etc. So you see that all these components of overall strategy are interdependent, but the disagreements upon strategy

really come to a focus when you come to the payoff, which is translating your overall strategy into capabilities, forces and weapons, and, of course, money.

Disagreements about the specifics of strategic doctrine are inherent in the unprecedented uncertainty that surrounds strategic calculations in this age. Why is there such unprecedented uncertainty? Why these tremendous imponderabilities in making strategic calculations today as compared with other days? There are a number of reasons, I think.

First, of course, is the tremendous rate of technological military innovation. Secondly, there is the dependence of strategic calculations on weapons, and on estimates of their effects, which have never actually been tested on the battlefield. Thirdly, there is the dependence of strategy and strategic calculations on weapons which, if they were used, might destroy all rational relationship between force and policy. And, finally, there is the dependence of strategic calculations upon deterrence as opposed to resistance — deterrence, of course, being a complicated psychological phenomenon which involves a lot of mind reading and a lot of guesswork.

Disagreements upon the specifics of strategic doctrine are intensified by the recognition now that the military establishment must be designed to deter and to resist limited aggressions as well as major aggressions, and that the requirements of general war are not completely adequate for deterring and meeting limited war. The recognition of this fact since the Korean war obviously confronts us with a much more diversified and complex strategic problem than we thought we had before the Korean war. But accompanying this diversification of strategic demands, there has been a relative decline in the resources — economic, material and human — that are available to meet these diverse strategic functions. That is, there are more functions to support, at greater expense, but no proportionate increase in the resources available. This is bound to lead to many disagreements on the specifics of strategic doctrine, since strategy must carry a greater burden of choice.

I won't have time to explore the various positions of different services, individuals, and groups in the United States or abroad on the variety of strategic issues around which these very important disagreements revolve. I will simply content myself with presenting some of my own observations on two issues that are central to the concepts of general and limited war. I am sure that you will detect the controversial elements in my presentation. One issue is the role of our capacity for massive retaliation and the kinds of instruments of massive retaliation, or strategic striking force, that we need; and the second crucial issue is the balance between the capabilities for general and limited war.

Now, let me take the first one. What can we rely upon our capacity for massive retaliation to deter, and what kind of capacity for massive retaliation do we need? A very crucial question! But I don't think you can decide it until you first decide what deterrence is, and what constitutes deterrence. What is deterrence? Deterrence, I would say, is that psychological effect that takes place when "X" causes "Y" to refrain from taking an action because he anticipates "X's" counteraction. One can think of several logical components in deterrence — that is, considerations which a rational person, nation, or regime would logically take into account in deciding whether to refrain or not to refrain from taking an action in the light of "X's" possible counteraction. What are these logical components? First, the value of the objective that is at stake. What is the importance that "Y" attaches to this objective that he intends to achieve by a proposed action? Secondly, the estimated effectiveness of his action in achieving this objective. These two considerations together, constitute the net benefit that "Y" expects; it is a product of the value of the objective and the anticipated effectiveness of his action in achieving it. The third component is "Y's" estimated cost of undertaking this action to achieve the objective. And finally, there is the estimated probability of "X's" counteraction — in other words, the credibility of "X's" threat of counteraction.

Now, weighed together, these four considerations, you might say, compose a benefit-cost-risk calculus. Whether or not a power

making such a calculus is deterred by his apprehension of a counteraction depends upon whether his proposed action seems less desirable than some alternative action or than no action at all; and each of these alternative actions presumably also has its benefit-cost-risk calculus. Now, "Y" will refrain from acting if he calculates that the cost of his action will be too high in relation to his estimated benefits, considering the risk of "X's" counteraction. But "Y's" estimate of the probability or risk of "X's" counteraction depends upon "Y's" estimate of the benefit-cost-risk calculus that faces "X" when "X" considers undertaking a counteraction. Have I left you? It's awfully simple really; but so much confusion revolves around deterrence that I think it is worthwhile analyzing the very obvious component elements that a rational person would take into account.

The deterrent effect of a capacity for massive retaliation, you see, depends upon threatening "Y" with a cost that is disproportionate to his anticipated benefit; but the trouble is that when "Y" can inflict comparably disproportionate costs upon "X" in return for "X's" counteraction, then the probability of "X's" counteraction is diminished. For this reason it is now generally agreed that massive retaliation can be relied upon to deter only those actions that threaten the security of the United States most intensely, most directly and most unambiguously, for only then would our costs seem proportionate to the objectives at stake — or at least enough so to discourage the aggressor from taking a chance that we might not massively retaliate.

The next question that arises in respect to this first crucial strategic issue is, "What contingencies might we reasonably expect our strategic striking force to deter?" I think that there are two kinds of contingencies, and again I am not telling you anything new: first, an all-out Soviet attack upon the United States designed to eliminate the United States as a competing center of military and political power; and, secondly, a direct, large-scale but localized Soviet or Chinese attack designed to acquire a major political or strategic area outside American territory, which the United States is probably incapable of protecting with resistance forces.

The next question that follows logically from this, going down the line of the components of overall strategy, is, "What kinds of massive strategic responses — what kinds of capabilities and weapons — are required to deter these two kinds of contingencies?" I think that here it is absolutely essential to establish some definite criteria of minimum capabilities required to deter these two kinds of contingencies. Otherwise, the claims of these capabilities and the strategic functions they are designed to support are logically limitless, whereas the essence of strategy, as I said, is the allocation of scarce resources among superabundant and often conflicting demands, none of which is likely to be fully satisfied.

The next question that arises then is, "What kind of massive strategic response is required to deter this first kind of contingency — that is, a direct all-out Soviet assault upon the United States itself?" By definition, the deterrent of this kind of act must be based upon a second-strike capability; and this second-strike capability, it is generally acknowledged, must be of a kind to convince the Russians that they would receive unacceptable damage, which is merely a shorthand way of saying that the Russians must think that there is an unacceptable risk of our imposing a second strike cost which they will consider disproportionate to their anticipated benefit. Let us assume that the Russian objective in this all-out strike is the elimination of the United States as a competing center of military and political power. I can't conceive of any lesser objective for which they would take such great risks and costs. In order to speculate about what kind of capability for massive retaliation we require in order to convince the Kremlin that the risks and costs of such a strike are too high, we ought to examine the relationship among all the components of deterrence as the Kremlin might see them, assuming that there is a high level of rationality in their calculation and a large element of caution. I don't have time to go through that rather laborious process of reasoning here, so let me just give you my conclusion; and that is that unless the Soviet leaders are sure that the United States is about to launch an all-out attack upon the Soviet Union, they

will not take such a pessimistic view of the opportunities for promoting their interests through "peaceful coexistence" that they would deliberately risk the kind of national disaster that could be inflicted by, say, 40 or 50 megaton-size bombs hitting their targets in the Soviet Union. If you don't think that is sufficient cost to be unacceptable in terms of the kinds of benefit that they anticipate, let's make doubly sure and say that we ought to be able to deliver on a second strike enough damage to obliterate all the major cities and industries of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, if the Kremlin decision-makers are sure of an imminent American attack, I don't think that there is any way we can deter them from striking first, simply by threatening retaliatory costs, since there is no way logically that we can convince them that they would be worse off by striking first then striking second.

Well, if you will accept this argument, it should not be impossible, I would think, to estimate the dimensions of national disaster that a given number of American strikes would inflict, and from this to determine the nature and the size of the American strategic striking force that would be required to achieve these strikes. At least the targets are finite, although the factors that determine the assignment of weapons to those targets are multitudinous and quite variable. If we could make this kind of estimate, then we would at least have a measurable basis for saying we were either over-insured or under-insured in this particular segment of our strategy. The fact that we can't be sure what the Russians will find unacceptable should not be an argument for imposing no logical limits short of hitting every available military and non-military target. To me, that smacks of seeking absolute security, which is certainly a will-of-the-wisp.

Whatever we require in a second-strike capability to deter this hypothetical Soviet assault, I should think it would be substantially less than the first-strike capability that would be required to support a counter-force strategy, even if only one-third of our force could get through on a second strike. By counterforce strategy I mean a strategy designed to destroy a sufficient number of Soviet retaliatory weapons and bases to limit a Soviet second

strike to acceptable levels of damage. The material requirements of the finite second-strike deterrent would be less because the primary targets would not be the thousands of Soviet strategic nuclear bases and installations, from which their missiles and planes would already have left, but rather a finite number of cities and industrial facilities. Furthermore, I should think that the best way to convince the Soviet leaders that Russia will receive unacceptable damage on a second strike, regardless of the damage she can inflict upon us, would be to build a relatively invulnerable strategic striking force, principally by hardening bases, by increasing concealment, by dispersion, and by mobility; and, of course, all you gentlemen will know that mobility means submarines and Polaris as well as SAC.

Therefore, for a second strike, an invulnerable minimum-deterrence strategy should be as good, or about as good, as a counterforce strategy. Moreover, in ten or fifteen years it seems to me that it will be the only kind of strategy that is technically and economically feasible, considering the great proliferation of the number of Soviet missiles, the number of bases, and their invulnerability. But there are other advantages to this conception of finite deterrence, based upon an invulnerable strategic striking force. One advantage is that such a strategy is less apt to invite a pre-emptive or a preventive attack, because its very existence indicates that it is to be used for something besides a first strike and, therefore, it is not so subject to being set off by false information, it is not so provocative, and it does not provide the Soviet Union with such an incentive to strike first. If you accept that argument, I think it follows that the Soviet Union's possession of a relatively invulnerable strategic striking force would reduce the likelihood of a Soviet preemptive or preventive strike by making her less apprehensive of an American first strike, by rendering her striking force less subject to being touched off in full force by misinformation, and by making the Soviet Union less dependent upon striking first. So we both have an advantage in each having a relatively invulnerable strategic striking force, if you grant the premises. There is another advantage, I think, to the kind of

strategic striking force or strategy that I am describing, and that is that this kind of force will relieve the United States from the necessity of launching its full retaliatory strength instantly. Such a force will not only be less provocative; it will be cheaper. And it will also provide an opportunity, which I think will become increasingly important, for terminating a strategic nuclear exchange that might result from miscalculation, or even accident, before both sides engaged in a massive nuclear exchange that neither wanted.

Now let us consider what kind of strategic striking force is required to deter this second kind of contingency? Let us ask what kind of strategic striking force is required to deter a major Soviet ground attack upon Western Europe? This deterrent depends upon a first-strike capability, if, indeed, our capacity for massive retaliation can deter this kind of contingency at all. Applying the calculus of deterrence that I suggested, one can reason that any capability that could impose sufficient cost to deter the Soviet Union from making an all-out attack upon the United States, could also deter her from undertaking a major attack upon Western Europe, since the Soviet Union would place a higher value on knocking out the United States than on the latter objective, and since we would have the advantage of a first strike in this second contingency. But the catch here is that there is a difference in the credibility of our counteraction. In the case of this first strike against a major attack on Europe, the credibility of America's capacity for massive retaliation simply cannot be taken for granted now that we have lost our monopoly of the atomic bomb and delivery capability. With the growth of the Soviet capacity to inflict disaster on the United States, the probability of the United States deliberately incurring the cost of massive retaliation in response to anything less than direct attack upon the United States itself has grown doubtful.

One might argue that in order to counter this depreciation in the credibility of our first strike in response to a major attack upon Western Europe the United States needs to convince the Soviet Union that she can deliver such an overwhelming counterforce first strike that the Soviet Union can inflict on the United

States only acceptable retaliatory damage — say, the destruction of three or four American cities. However, if such a capability exists now, I should hazard the guess that it will become inherently unfeasible in five or ten years. And, in any case, how could either power really know, with sufficient assurance to act on the basis of its knowledge, whether or not the other had such a counterforce capability?

Does this mean that our strategic striking force cannot deter a Soviet attack on Europe, despite the fact that this is NATO strategy? I would say that, depending on the nature of the attack, not necessarily. If we can deliver unacceptable first-strike damage on the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union can, in turn, deliver unacceptable damage upon us, then the Soviet Union will probably, nevertheless, have much less incentive to launch a major attack on Europe, considering the less risky and costly alternatives available to her, than the United States would have to respond massively rather than surrender this crucial objective. At least, this proposition is plausible as long as the Kremlin does not think that it is urgent to eliminate West Germany by military means. Moreover, the credibility of America's massive strategic strikes is greatly enhanced, I think, by NATO's "shield", however, inadequate it may be. For this shield confronts the Soviet Union with the necessity of undertaking large-scale aggression to gain her objective. She cannot simply make a quick grab and confront us with a *fait accompli*, while inherent in any large-scale conflict in a vital strategic area is a great risk of strategic nuclear exchanges. Moreover, this shield has an important supplementary deterrent effect by virtue of its dependence upon tactical nuclear weapons, since tactical nuclear weapons are a more credible response, I think, than strategic nuclear responses; while at the same time they have within them a greater inherent risk of leading to total war than conventional weapons.

I conclude that, insofar as any strategic striking force can deter direct Soviet aggression in Europe, the same force and the same strategy required to deter the Soviet attack on the United

States would be adequate to deter a Soviet attack on Europe. However, no strategic striking force, however formidable, can be safely relied upon to deter a variety of more indirect and ambiguous forms of possible aggression in Europe, such as a gradual isolation and absorption of Berlin — aggressions which do not depend upon a large-scale Soviet attack. I think that a direct large-scale attack is the least likely and least profitable alternative open to the Soviet Union. Whatever we may say we are willing to do, or think we are willing to do, the evidence is everywhere, I am afraid, that the threat to precipitate a total war in response to a limited aggression in Europe is becoming more and more implausible to our allies, to us, and presumably to the Soviet decision-makers; and I don't think that any feasible accretion in our strategic striking power can halt or reverse this trend.

From this analysis, then, I think it appears that we should aim to build an invulnerable strategic striking force capable of destroying a finite number of targets, which would constitute a national disaster that no rational Soviet regime would deliberately incur. Rather than try to construct a counterforce strategy, we should try to create within the next five or ten years a situation in which neither the United States nor the Soviet Union believes it has the capacity to strike first and receive acceptable damage in return, and in which neither believes that the other has this capacity. This situation might guarantee what is, indeed, a rather delicate strategic nuclear stalemate at the moment, and it might even mark the decline of the arms race in this particular military sector. If this situation were to come about, then both massive nuclear strikes and instant massive retaliation would be clearly irrational; and it would then be imperative and feasible to have recourse to limited strategic strikes in conjunction with a strategy of graduated nuclear reprisals. The role of limited strategic strikes, I think, would be a very restricted one but, nevertheless, a very important one. It would be the role of persuading the enemy that he has more to gain by peaceful accommodation than by incurring the additional costs of a strategic nuclear exchange. It would provide a kind of a hedge against unlimited strategic nuclear ex-

changes arising from accident and miscalculations, a function that will be especially important in the age of many nuclear powers.

Let me turn now to the second crucial strategic issue that I set forth: What is the proper balance between the capability we seek in strategic striking power and the capabilities that we seek in forces and weapons designed to deter and to wage limited war? As the military planners despair of enlarging the total defense budget pie, the division of the pie among various strategic functions has become more and more a crucial source of disagreement.

I will not, in the time remaining, try to answer this question directly; but I shall state the obvious, to begin with: Despite a widespread consensus on the increased threat of limited aggression since the Korean War and since the growth of Soviet nuclear power, the proportion of resources allocated to the forces and weapons suitable for limited war has been dwindling ever since the Korean truce. Two factors have aggravated this tendency: first, the tremendous expense of maintaining a modern strategic striking force, especially since the post-Sputnik scare; and, secondly, the tremendously expensive transition to tactical nuclear forces, which has been made at the expense of conventional forces.

You may or may not think that the forces of general war have received a disproportionate share of the allocation of scarce defense resources. Differences of view on this question seem to rest on different assessments of the logical components of overall strategy. One can think of such assessments in terms of a series of questions. The first question is, "How serious is the threat of limited aggression?" There is a widespread and comfortable assumption that the Communist powers have abandoned the military realm now and have contented themselves with operating on the political and economic realm, and therefore the military threat, limited or otherwise, is really significantly diminished. Of course, this is clearly not true of Communist China, and the assessment ignores the risk of a conflict arising in the Middle East that is not even initiated by the Soviet Union or Communist China, in

which we might nevertheless become involved. But more important than that I think this comfortable assumption ignores the fact that the Communist tactics and strategy — the choice of whether they pursue their aims chiefly by military or other means and what emphasis they place upon each — is a transitory response to the opportunities that the Communist leaders think they see in any particular phase of historical development. That phase will change when conditions and opportunities change.

Moreover, I think this comfortable assumption ignores the political liability of our being so dependent upon nuclear weapons and upon our general war capacity in a period in which the credibility of our massive retaliatory response is gradually depreciating. This liability is a serious one, even assuming that no military aggression occurs. I am thinking here, for example, of the effect on our allies, who must calculate that we could only leave them defenseless — because we would not assume the costs of coming to their aid — or else precipitate them into a suicidal war (even if it were limited from our standpoint). And I am thinking of our vulnerability, as long as we have this unbalanced military force, to the Soviet skill in manipulating our over-dependence upon nuclear weapons for political and psychological purposes, as in the case of Berlin.

The second question one should answer in making up one's mind about this second crucial strategic issue is, "What kinds of contingencies can be deterred or resisted by limited-war capabilities?" There seems to be a general agreement that strategic and tactical nuclear capabilities are not sufficient to deter many forms of limited aggression and that they are unsuited to resisting them if deterrence failed. Then there seems to be a widespread agreement that limited aggressions outside Europe in the Far East and Southeast Asia and in the Middle East are more likely than inside Europe. I would go along with those two widely-accepted propositions.

But are limited, ambiguous, indirect forms of military aggression impossible in Europe? This question is a crucial source

of disagreement, since calculations of capabilities and forces and weapons depend so heavily upon the answer. Government spokesmen say, "Yes, limited, unambiguous and indirect forms of aggression in Europe are, if not impossible, so unlikely that it is not worth devising forces to meet this kind of contingency, beyond those that could hold a kind of probing action or a border raid." Government spokesmen prefer to speak of a military threat in Europe only in terms of that kind of contingency which would involve Russian troops confronting American troops. Nevertheless, General Norstad has gone so far as to call for some intermediate response in NATO's shield to meet "less-than-ultimate incidents," as he calls them, with the shield's "residual" conventional capacity, if possible, yet he has at the same time, gone along with the government spokesmen in flatly denying the possibility that a limited war in Europe is possible. He has called the NATO shield nuclear and has left the impression that any nuclear war would soon become total. There may be something to be said for denying a limited-war function of the shield as a declaratory policy, given the limited conventional forces that are available; but I think it has a rather overpositive and not too convincing ring. It cannot be reassuring to our allies. I detect signs that Mr. Khrushchev is beginning to think that this is a declaratory strategy and nothing else.

What kind of contingencies outside of Europe should we plan to deter or resist by limited-war capabilities? The official position here, I take it (and I am basing my views here on the latest statements in the Defense Department's appropriations hearings in January or February, 1959) is that the only kind of conflict that can be kept limited is a minor incident like the most recent ones at Quemoy and Matsu and in Lebanon and that, certainly, another limited war of the size of Korea is flatly impossible. Therefore, there is no sense, it would follow, in building limited-war capabilities to counter anything larger than these minor incidents. Does this mean that the government relies upon massive retaliation to deter or meet these possible limited contingencies? I don't think it does. I think rather we are relying upon the deterrent effect of tactical

nuclear weapons. Here again, I suspect we are shaping — in this vast area of uncertainty — our estimate of contingencies to fit our capabilities. In my mind there is a wide range of possible limited wars, including a large-scale limited conventional war outside of Europe, and with this estimate many military men, as you know, agree. Moreover, I think that the efficacy of tactical nuclear strikes as a deterrent against limited forms of aggression outside Europe is quite dubious considering the many opportunities for indirection and ambiguity.

The final question I think one should answer in deciding about the balance between strategic striking force capabilities and limited-war capabilities is, "What capabilities, forces, and weapons are required for limited war — for deterring or meeting limited aggressions?" The official position has been somewhat modified from the time that President Eisenhower held that what was good enough to deter a big war would be good enough to deter and fight a little one. Now Secretary of Defense McElroy says that limited-war and general-war capabilities are about the same thing — not exactly the same thing, but about the same thing — in that limited-war capabilities are applicable to general war and general-war capabilities, with only a few exceptions, are equally applicable to limited-war situations. Conceding that there is some overlap between the capabilities suitable for general and limited war, I would hazard the generalization that no military officer (at least in the Army and Navy) responsible for planning seems to agree with this optimistic estimate of the kind of capabilities that are needed. Again, the official view seems to rest on a confidence in the deterrent effect of tactical nuclear weapons. As for the size of the limited-war capabilities that we need, the official view is that they are quite adequate, and I think that this follows logically from the official estimate of the kinds of contingencies that might be limited, because if a limited war is confined to the Lebanon and Quemoy-Matsu type, we probably do have adequate forces, despite the fact we were stripped awfully thin in at least one of those contingencies and had to get a deficiency appropriation to cover one of them.

In any case, the forces capable of a conventional ground response have been greatly reduced. The arguments upon which they have been reduced are important to take account of. The first argument is that military assistance to our various allies compensates for the presence of our own troops. I think that this is a half truth, to put it mildly. The second argument is that nuclear firepower substitutes for manpower. I think that this is less than a half truth. Nuclear firepower does not substitute for manpower if it is not credible that you are going to use it, or if you will not use it in a wide range of contingencies; and it doesn't always substitute for manpower even if you do have to use it. According to Army studies, a bilateral tactical nuclear war would actually demand far more manpower than a conventional war. Secretary McElroy has not mentioned these two arguments recently, but in the hearings of January or February, 1959, to which I referred he relied on another argument for the reduction of our conventional ground-resistance forces. He said that the quality of the soldier has been so improved by virtue of the raise in salary that he has received and by virtue of the elimination of the lowest mental grades from selective service that this compensates for the reduction of manpower. No comment.

I cannot help but conclude from this analysis that while the credibility of our general-war capacity to deter anything short of a direct attack upon the United States itself has diminished — has been gradually eroded by the growth of Soviet nuclear striking power — we have at the same time become steadily more dependent upon strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, which are suitable for little else except general war. While the threat of limited aggression has grown more and more serious and more diversified, our capabilities for deterring and resisting limited aggressions by means short of general war have been steadily reduced in order to maintain our strategic striking power. In effect, the government, I feel, has applied very stringent criteria of minimum adequacy to limited-war capabilities on the basis of some optimistic and dubious strategic assumptions, but the only criteria of adequacy it has applied to strategic striking power are those imposed

by the size of the available defense budget and by certain customary conventions concerning the way in which that total pie should be divided among the services, operating against an exceedingly ambitious counterforce strategy.

Well, I am obviously in no position to determine what the exact allocation of resources should be to general-war and limited-war capabilities within this total defense pie. I suspect that both capabilities are inadequate, if one is prudent. But I think that any reasonably well-informed person is in a position to raise some critical questions about the basis upon which the present allocations have been made. I must say in conclusion that I wish that we — the richest nation in the world — would determine the size of the total defense pie with less deference to the alleged demands of a balanced budget and a luxurious standard of living.