

LIMITED WAR

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE - NOVEMBER 18, 1960

General Harrold and Gentlemen:

I was very happy to accept General Harrold's invitation to return to the National War College and to resume the series of debates in which I have engaged with successive classes for the last few years. When I was Chief of Staff, I used to feel that an appearance here was a form of insurance against embarrassment in other public arenas. If there are chinks in his forensic armor, a speaker on this platform is sure to have them exposed - if not in the course of his address, surely in the subsequent discussion period. Now, as a retired Officer lately in the utilities business in Mexico, I no longer have this need for fortification. Instead it is the desire to talk old military shop again after a long sojourn in a country where I have to veil my military identity for fear of being mistaken for Zachary, ^{Taylor} who has few admirers about Mexico. I will say, though, that by virtue of the power business I can claim to have generated more light in Mexico than I ever did in four years in the Pentagon.

The same letter from your Commandant, inviting me to speak on the subject of Limited War, inclosed the syllabus of your course on Strategy and Warfare. I was interested to see how the course is subdivided into the components of modern warfare - particularly in the sharp division in the treatment of general and limited war. This indication of the loss of unity in the concept of war is relatively new - it certainly would not have been found in the syllabus of the corresponding course in my day at the War College. What has occurred to cause this division?

Another way to put the question would be to ask why is there a need for a talk on limited war today. Is it some particular brand of war like guerrilla, mountain or desert warfare which requires a special chapter in the manual of the

tacticians and strategists of the present and future? Its title suggests an incompleteness of character which deprives it of the fullness - one might almost say the "gloriousness" - of general, unlimited war. From this suggestion of curtailed scope, it is a short step to wonder why a nation prepared for unlimited war should regard limited war as a subject worthy of specific concern.

Thus it is that we may allow ourselves to be misled by words and many fall into the Great Fallacy that general war readiness includes and replaces the need for limited war readiness. I hope that the separate treatment accorded Limited War in this course indicates that the War College has abjured this error. To be sure of avoiding it, we need to return to fundamental definitions and give recognition to the eternal verity of Clausewitz' definition of war as the continuation of politics by other means. Surely, the existence of A-bombs, missiles and military satellites and their possible application to the destruction of human life and property have done nothing to change the only justification that there has ever been for war - namely, the use of force to gain national ends at a price offering the victor the hope of ultimate reward. Indeed, these indiscriminate, vastly destructive weapons are by their nature such that we can never use them against an adversary similarly equipped and still call the conflict "war" in this historic sense. It would be international suicide without hope of reward for participants or bystanders and would have no right to share in the use of the term, war, at all. Limited war as military conflict short of this kind of suicide is thus all that there is left of war in any rational sense. It is the use of force limited to those weapons, tactics and techniques which offer the prospect of breaking the will of an opponent without destroying friends, allies and self in the process. It is, in short, war in the only form that statesmen can afford to contemplate in guiding the destiny of their respective nations. Limited war, far

from being a part of a greater whole, is war itself as it can still exist as an instrument of policy. Thus I conclude that your syllabus on Strategy and Warfare is right in concentrating attention on limited war but question its right properly to include ^{the concept denoted by} general war ^{fly-leaf} under the same ~~title~~.

How did this confusion of terms arise? Possibly from the fact that the first use of atomic weapons occurred in the last phase of what we would now call a conventional or limited war. Anticipating that these new weapons - "absolute weapons" we called them - would quickly replace all others for use in any major conflict, we soon became accustomed to considering this kind of war as an advanced form of ~~past~~ conflict in the old sense and the only form of warfare worthy of serious consideration for the future. Our early monopoly in atomic weapons, the expectation that this monopoly would last for years and the conviction that these weapons would provide a cheap way of preserving a Pax Americana, all contributed to strengthening this illusion.

As a result, our principal military preparations since World War II - with the exception of the period of the Korean War - have been directed at improving our readiness to a fight a general, atomic war (you will note that I am obliged by custom to continue to use this term, unsatisfactory as it is). Every defense budget of recent years testifies to this fascination with the Big War. Evidence which soon appeared that our atomic monopoly was lost and that the Russians had made impressive strides in bombs and missiles has done nothing to change this attitude.

Indeed, Russian progress accelerated the imbalance in our preparations. If the Russians had H-bombs, the reaction was that we needed more of them. The same for bombers. The same for missiles. Thus, the gap widened between the weapons systems applicable to general war and those applicable to limited war.

The new bombers were designed only for the delivery of atomic and hydrogen weapons

The new carriers were built with insufficient storage space for ^{large} significant quantities of iron bombs. The fighters were developed to fly at such speeds as to be of little use in support of ground combat. The war reserves of conventional ammunition were allowed to dwindle to the point that it became difficult, if not impossible, to support a conventional war of significant size.

Has this been a sound course to follow? There has arisen in recent years a vocal minority to say that it is not. You know the argument, I am sure - I will only sketch it now for completeness.

In a period when the United States and the USSR both have the capacity for destroying each other, it is highly improbable that either side will embark on deliberate, general atomic war. It is true that every effort must be made to assure the USSR of the certainty of its destruction if tempted to commit aggression, but this does not mean an endless increase in megaton weapons and delivery means. There is a finite number of these weapons which, if sure of reaching target, amounts to all that we need. However, their protection from surprise attack is just as important as numbers because it determines ultimate availability.

But if general war has become highly unlikely, limited wars retain their historic probability and will continue to do so until human nature has finally abjured violence in any form as a way of obtaining contested ends. Limited wars ^{were} [remained] common even during the period of our atomic monopoly, in ^{clear} ~~pressured~~ demonstration of the inability of a strategy of Massive Retaliation to maintain the world peace. With the rise in the Russian strength in atomic weapons and long-range missiles, we are seeing the predicted rise in Soviet bellicosity and provocative actions. It is not hard to conclude that, if general war means self-destruction, the United States and its allies must be ready to meet these provocations by military means short of general war - or ^{else} surrender. This is the thesis which those of us hold who believe that there is a pressing need to re-appraise our military strategy, abandon Massive Retaliation as its mainstay and

adopt a program of rearmament in preparation for coping with limited war.

In the remainder of my talk, I will discuss what such a program would require and what we might hope to gain from it.

As the starting point of such a program, we would first need to determine the kind and size of limited war forces to be maintained. The old way of basing that determination on the amount of money left over after providing for the needs of general war can hardly be defended as a form of rational war-planning. A considerably better way would be to start from the political commitments which may require limited forces for fulfillment, war-game the situations which seem most likely to arise and thus develop some semi-scientific basis for estimating requirements. These war-games will, of course, take into consideration the use of allied forces and thus provide guidance ^{at the same time} to the military aid for allies needed to supplement our own preparations.

The case study of possible theaters of limited war should throw considerable light not only on types and size of forces required but also on training and equipment requirements, on strategic time-space factors and on logistical needs. The responsibility for this kind of study rests squarely on the Joint Chiefs of Staff but much of the work would be done by the unified Commanders who, in an emergency, would be charged with the conduct of the limited war campaigns.

What would such a study develop with respect to limited war requirements? I can only guess in qualitative terms that it would establish a need for a larger Army and Marine Corps, an increased emphasis on the support of land operations by the Air Force and the Navy and a sweeping program of modernization of the so-called conventional weapons systems of all services.

We have talked a great deal ^{in the past} about the modernization of limited war forces but have done little about it - primarily because it costs money. Furthermore, this money will produce nothing so impressive or glamorous as a big missile or an

atomic submarine. Modernization of limited war forces often means nothing more than buying somewhat better rifles, machine guns, trucks and bull dozers - indeed, many times it is only a matter of replacing worn-out equipment by new equipment of the same ^{model} type. Such a procurement program offered little appeal in the past either to the Department of Defense or ^{to} the Congress. As a result, the Army remains largely armed with World War II types of weapons while its Soviet counterpart has been completely re-equipped once and is now receiving a second series of post-war equipment.

It is not that imaginative improvements in equipment are not needed or are not possible. If a small fraction of the research and development effort expended on general war weapons had been directed to the requirements of limited war, we would not be in our present backward situation. The development of small yield atomic weapons was never really pressed by the Department of Defense, which continued to add megaton weapons to the glutted national stockpile long after they were ^{then need} not ^{was past} needed. Now the development of this vital limited war weapon is caught in the atomic test cessation - while the enemy presumably continues to improve his own.

Other areas of improvement of conventional weapons are found in the application of improved fragmentation principles to projectiles; in the use of non-lethal chemicals; in the development of ^{antibiofuel} reconnaissance ^{devices} ~~drone~~s and in many forms of improved ground and air mobility. The shortage is money - not ideas.

Our new program must first make provision for larger, better equipped forces in being to spearhead the attack in limited war. Thereafter, to provide a follow-up, we must look to the condition of our reserves in manpower and supplies. Bear in mind that limited war is not small war - it may be any form of conflict short of the intercontinental exchange of megaton weapons which constitutes general, atomic war. The war-games I previously mentioned should give a fairly accurate idea of what the needs will be for this back-up. In the case of the Army, the reserve needs in manpower will be met by the National Guard and the Organized Re-

reserves which, fortunately, have been greatly improved in recent years. The reserves in supplies and equipment should be found in the logistic system in time of peace, in sufficient quantities to bridge the gap while awaiting new production after the outbreak of war. Insofar as the Army is concerned, the reserves presently available are greatly deficient for the purpose. A program to improve limited war capability will have to provide considerable funds to raise the level of logistic readiness.

Logistic obstacles have always been one of the reasons for a reluctance to face up to the requirements of limited war. Whenever the study of a particular situation has been made and a tentative troop and supply list prepared, our authorities have been aghast at the tonnages required and the ponderousness of the entire operation. This condition is in part the fault of the logistical perfectionists who would throw in everything up to the last bath unit and Post Exchange detachment - then add a fat percentage as a safety factor. The resulting tonnage to be moved is soon found to be exorbitant, often exceeding the reception capacity of ports and airfields in the target area. At this point, it is all too easy to throw up one's hands, say the whole thing is impossible and drop the matter.

The answer is not to recoil from the obstacles but to do something about them. The first thing is to limit the troop lists to basic, hard necessities. The next is to conduct a continuous campaign to lighten the weight of items of military equipment. A third is to make logistical studies of important areas such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East to determine where the logistic bottlenecks lie and how to remove them. If British and U. S. naval power had accepted the ports and waterways of the world the way they were found a couple of hundred years ago, it would not be possible to project naval power about the oceans as it is done today. By the same token, we can not have freedom of movement for limited war forces without a kindred attention to strategic logistics. Among other things,

I feel sure that studies will confirm the need for forward stockpiles of heavy equipment in such places as the Philippines and on either side of Suez.

Thus far, I have tried to establish that a program for improving our limited war capacity should first verify and satisfy the requirements of limited war in terms of units, equipment, reserves and logistical flexibility. Concurrently, it is important to make sure that we use to the best effect those resources which are made available. Thus we need to have a look at the plans for the command, organization and training of limited war forces.

As you know, limited war forces are at present either assigned to unified commanders or held in the United States under service department control. I have no concern for the readiness of the first category; I do for the second. These forces in the United States - Army, Navy, Marines and Air Forces - are a heterogeneous collection of units of varying sizes, types and levels of training and readiness. They have rarely - if ever - trained or planned together. There is no single headquarters responsible for their readiness for movement. There is no air or sea transportation earmarked for their use. If an expeditionary force had to be marshalled and dispatched in a hurry, I am sure that the performance would be very bad indeed.

My suggestion for improvement is to establish a joint headquarters in the United States charged with planning, training and executing the movement of limited war forces from the United States to destination, at which point they would normally pass to the control of the overseas commander responsible for the campaign. A limited precedent for such ^a headquarters is found in the First Allied Airborne Army set up in Europe after the experience of the Normandy landing, to plan and execute airborne assaults. I felt that the headquarters thoroughly justified its existence in coordinating the Army, Navy and Air Force units involved in these complicated airborne operations.

I would meet the need for transport by the pre-designation of certain transport units - probably only aircraft - for planning and training with specific Army units with a spearhead rôle in limited war plans. It should be clear that no single plane would be immobilized or diverted from normal mission by this pre-designation - except for limited periods during joint exercises. However, the responsibility for providing transport in an emergency would be fixed. ^{with them} Joint plans could be developed to a point of assuring a prompt dispatch of the forces involved.

Joint exercises would be conducted regularly by the ^{new} joint headquarters, this being the only time the force would pass from service department control. These exercises would verify readiness and establish time-space factors to permit realistic war-planning. These exercises, particularly ^{those} if conducted abroad, should have a valuable political effect in showing our readiness to go promptly and effectively to the aid of our friends.

The foregoing measures are suggestions directly related to improving our limited war capabilities. There are some other ~~indirectly~~ related steps which are important not only for limited war improvement but for our overall defense posture. The first is to develop a system of follow-up on defense preparations so that we ~~may~~ know what we are capable of doing any present moment.

Oddly enough, no such check on current capabilities is a part of the routine procedure of the executive branch of our Government. While the National Security Council receives regular reports on the composition of the military services, these reports are mere tabulations by service of the principal units of that service. No attempt is made to interpret what these tabulations mean in war-making capacity. In my four years as Chief of Staff, I was never asked once how big a war the Army was capable of fighting now. The number of Army divisions received much attention but no one ever inquired how many months of combat these

divisions could sustain. I never heard corresponding questions directed at the other services.

This deficiency in our book-keeping stems from the way we keep the defense budget in terms of services. This is an old complaint of mine and I won't subject you to a rehash of the argument. Suffice to say that until we allocate our money by operational functions, we will never know what we are capable of doing either in the present or in the future.

The foregoing represents my thoughts on why and how we need to concentrate on the requirements of limited war. The ~~forms~~ ^{focus} of effort should be on establishing needs in relation to possible commitments, then designing ~~an~~ an orderly program to produce the necessary forces properly organized, equipped and trained to do the job. There remain several other collateral matters worth considering because they often arise in discussing this matter of limited war.

The first is the question whether in this world of tensions a limited war can be kept limited. Is it realistic to expect to wage such a thing now or in the future? The tone used in phrasing the question usually implies the answer is NO, so why waste time preparing for limited war? My answer would be that we will never know till the time comes but that it is certainly unnecessary and, indeed, highly dangerous to assume that any limited conflict will degenerate inevitably into ^{inter} continental atomic war.

In justifying this reply, we can first make the obvious point that there have been a spate of limited wars since the advent of atomic weapons and they have remained limited. But, you will say, neither side undertook to use atomic weapons.

I would agree that the use of atomic weapons of any size is likely to accentuate world tensions and increase the hazard of general war. I am equally sure that the heightened fears of political leaders will bring great pressures to bear on actual or potential belligerents to refrain from using atomic weapons in such a case. It is for that reason that I have insisted on the need to be able to fight only with ^{conventional} conventional weapons - the ~~better~~ ^{with} for capability. There is no particular reason to fear the consequences of limited war if atomic weapons are not used.

I probably should have said that there is no particular reason to fear the consequences provided we are ready to act quickly. It is the lingering fire which ^{scatters} weathers the sparks. Another Korean-type ~~of~~ conflict similarly

drawn out would indeed be most dangerous to world peace today. That danger is a primary reason why we need to improve our limited war readiness.

There is a related point of interest - the obvious desire of the USSR to convince the West that any kind of military resistance to Communism is useless. "We have you outgunned with our missiles", K would say, "and we have you outmanned with our divisions. So you can't win either way. Let's give up all thought of war-like solutions, let's disarm (without inspection) and abandon the forward bases which are a primary cause of tensions. Then we will live in a peaceful world - defenseless before Communism".

To say that limited wars can't be kept limited and to act in consistency with that assumption plays into the Soviet hand. All that I am sure of is that we must be ready for limited war, ready to act decisively and quickly despite the roar of Communist threats which any such action will release. The only alternative is to surrender the parts until the whole is lost - a course of action unthinkable, I hope, to all of us here present.

Another question is our ability to utilize our limited war strength once it is in existence. I have already mentioned the strong likelihood of Soviet threats of general war if we resist their machinations anywhere with military force. We have only to recall the commotion K. created at the time of Lebanon, when we took military action, and more recently in connection with Cuba, where he fears military action. Will we have the cool and resolute leadership to use our military assets after they have been created? Will our alliances stand the strain which American so-called aggressiveness would create?

Here again it is impossible to be dogmatic about the future. Obviously, it will depend on the character of the men in high position in our Government and their foresightedness in preparing the nation and our friends for the stormy times which lie ahead. Their lot will not be an easy one - they must

face decisions which will be very tough indeed because of the uncertainty of their consequences. But one thing seems completely clear. They must be able to face these decisions with full confidence in the military instrument which in the last analysis must enforce their decisions. If it has been so tempered as to have complete flexibility and unlimited usefulness in any kind of fight, that knowledge will reinforce the will of leaders whose natural fears will otherwise be ^{enhanced} reinforced by the ^{knowledge} knowledge of ~~any~~ weakness. If we seriously doubt our readiness to act against a background of strength, we must ^{indeed} despair of any action against a background of weakness. So I say that we must maintain balanced military strength across the boards to assure that there is no excuse for any weakness in leadership when the chips are down and the stakes are high.

So much for my prepared text today. I have talked about limited war first because it was my assigned theme and second because I firmly believe that it has been generally neglected in the pursuit of a strategy of Massive Retaliation. As unlimited atomic warfare has priced itself beyond the range of choice of statesmen who comprehend its nature, limited war remains as the only form of warfare worthy of the historic name. A readiness to wage it is an essential part of a Strategy of Flexible Response. It is not a specialty or monopoly of any one military service. There is an important - yes, indispensable - rôle for all services to play - indeed, for all components of our national Government.