



16. Old Strategies Revisited:

Douglas MacArthur
and George C. Marshall
in the Korean War



Surprise is the most vital element for success in war.

—*Douglas MacArthur*¹

NSC-68 SUGGESTED a danger of limited war, of Communist military adventures designed not to annihilate the West but merely to expand the periphery of the Communist domains, limited enough that an American riposte of atomic annihilation would be disproportionate in both morality and expediency. To retaliate against a Communist military initiative on any but an atomic scale, the American armed forces in 1950 were ill equipped. Ten understrength Army divisions and eleven regimental combat teams, 671 Navy ships, two understrength Marine Corps divisions, and forty-eight Air Force wings (the buildup not yet having reached the old figure of fifty-five) were stretched thinly all around the world. The Air Force atomic striking force, embodied now in eighteen wings of the Strategic Air Command, was the only American military organization possessing a formidable instant readiness capacity.² So much did Americans, including the government, succeed in convincing themselves that the atomic bomb was a sovereign remedy for all military ailments, so ingrained was the American habit of thinking of war in terms of annihilative victories, that occasional warnings of limited war went more than unheeded, and people, government, and much of

the military could scarcely conceive of a Communist military thrust of lesser dimensions than World War III.

When troops of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea invaded the Republic of Korea on June 24, 1950, they therefore imposed upon the United States a strategic surprise in the deepest sense. Perceiving the invasion as Soviet-sponsored and believing a failure to resist would amount to a new Munich, President Truman attempted instantly to shift his military gears and to halt and punish the Communist Koreans not with all-out atomic retaliation but with military strength proportioned to the threat. To respond with atomic weaponry would have seemed indeed disproportionate both in morality and in expediency; it would have risked both a holocaust of Soviet retaliation and the possibility of using up the relatively small store of atomic bombs against a minor power, to cite only two of the considerations of expediency. To proportion the American response to the scale of the Communist challenge proved hazardous, however, not only because of the inappropriate condition of the American armed forces. Any strategy other than the now familiar strategy of annihilation proved so frustratingly at variance with the American conception of war that it upset the balance of judgment of American officers in the field and threatened the psychological balance of the nation itself.

For all that, the authors of the North Korean invasion of South Korea had also miscalculated the American response. Despite the weaknesses of the American armed forces, hardly another place on the boundary between the Communist and non-Communist worlds could have been so well selected as a setting for the frustration of a Communist military venture by the military resources of the United States. Korea is a peninsula which at the narrowest point of the Strait of Tsushima is little more than a hundred miles from Japan. Therefore Korea lay within ready reach of the largest concentration of American troops outside the United States, the four divisions of General Douglas MacArthur's army of occupation in Japan, and within ready reach also of American sea power.

The troops in Japan were not well trained, partly because Japan offered so little ground for that purpose. Like nearly all American Army formations in early 1950, their units were understrength. Infantry regiments had only two battalions instead of the standard three, and artillery battalions only two batteries instead of three. But the American troops were at least close by, and the Korean peninsula

was accessible to air power vastly superior to anything the North Koreans could muster even without the atomic bomb, and to naval power which, though its ships were getting old and often had to be removed from mothballs to get into the fight, remained far and away the premier force of its kind on the globe.³

In fact, American naval power and the peninsular configuration of Korea for a time gave the war, from the American perspective, a heartening similarity to the Pacific war of 1941-45. The Army units thrown into Korea from Japan suffered severe initial defeats, and by late summer it was touch and go whether the Americans and South Koreans could retain a foothold on the peninsula around the port of Pusan. But even the initial defeats could be regarded with the consoling reflection that America had suffered similar defeats in the Pacific not long before and had quickly recovered, while the pattern of recovery in Korea began to become discernible even as the defeats continued. It was air and sea power that assured against complete ejection from Korea. Together the Air Force and the Navy carried enough ground troop reinforcements to the Naktong River line around Pusan to begin to equalize and then to turn the numerical balance of combat effectives against the North Koreans. Meanwhile, as long as numbers remained inadequate and combat skills and weaponry on the ground deficient, the Air Force and the Navy added enough fighting power to hold the Naktong line. The Navy anchored the flank on the Sea of Japan with offshore bombardment, and Air Force and Navy planes gave tactical support all along the line.⁴

Air Force support operations were handicapped because the newly independent Air Force had neglected tactical air support while concentrating on readiness to deliver the atomic bomb, and the Fifth Air Force and Eighth Army in Japan in particular had not carried out exercises in air-ground coordination. The speed of the new jet aircraft, the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Stars, added new complexities to the coordination problem. Nevertheless, the Air Force could break up North Korean assault concentrations and transport. It used five groups of B-29s in an interdiction campaign against the North Koreans' rail and road network. As time went on, it improved its control and communications for tactical air support, with tactical air control parties distributed down to each American regiment and ROK (Republic of Korea) division, and with Mustangs flying from Korean airstrips. Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, commanding the Eighth Army, said: "If it had not been for the air support that

we received from the Fifth Air Force, we should not have been able to stay in Korea."⁵

Meanwhile, as in the later Pacific campaigns of World War II, tactical support from Navy and Marine Corps aircraft was excellent. Before the battle for the Pusan bridgehead ended, four Navy carriers were sending their planes into the fight: first the fast carrier *Valley Forge* (CVA-45), then *Philippine Sea* (CVA-47), and the escort carriers *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116) and *Sicily* (CVE-118). Except when they were fighting with the First Provisional Marine Brigade, Navy and Marine Vought F4U Corsairs and Douglas AD Skyraiders lacked their accustomed systems of liaison with the ground troops and maps to match the troops', but a North Korean prisoner replied when asked which American weapon he feared most by saying, "the blue airplanes."⁶

From the first, General MacArthur's experience of the Pacific campaigns of 1941-45 assured him that he would have the weapons to transform defeat into rapid and complete victory, once America flexed its muscles and ample reinforcements arrived. Since his first counteroffensive against the Japanese in New Guinea, MacArthur had made a specialty of the amphibious end run. In Korea, the initial defeats persisted longer than he expected, and the battle for the Pusan perimeter became more desperate than he anticipated; but he never removed his eyes long from his maps of the west coast of Korea and of Inchon, the port serving the capital city of Seoul.

An amphibious attack there would offer the great psychological and political reward of a possible quick recapture of Seoul. Because the main highways from north to south bunched their way through Seoul, an attack there could also disrupt the logistics of the North Korean forces on the Naktong line. Most important, MacArthur conceived a force landed at Inchon as an anvil upon which his Eighth Army and the ROK forces would break the North Korean army as his troops in the south attacked from the Naktong line to fight a battle of annihilation.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff feared that Inchon was too far away from the Naktong and that consequently a landing there would turn into another Anzio, with MacArthur's two forces too distant from each other for effective mutual support, they suggested a more shallow amphibious envelopment. But MacArthur believed that the North Korean forces had already strained themselves to the verge of collapse and that the Inchon landing with the cutting of the routes through Seoul would precipitate their disruption; a less distant

landing would merely cause their withdrawal to a new line. "The amphibious landing," MacArthur said, "is the most powerful tool we have. To employ it properly, we must strike hard and deeply into enemy territory." "The deep envelopment, based upon surprise, which severs the enemy's supply lines, is and always has been the most decisive maneuver of war. A short envelopment, which fails to envelop and leaves the enemy's supply system intact, merely divides your own forces and can lead to heavy loss and jeopardy."⁷

Other factors caused the Joint Chiefs and the Navy to feel additional misgivings. Inchon might be strategically located, but it was a poor place for staging an amphibious assault. To reach it, attacking ships would have to find their way, without normal navigation lights, through a narrow and tortuous channel, where if one of them foundered the vessels ahead would be trapped and the following vessels blocked. The tides, thirty-three feet at their maximum, were the highest in the Orient and produced five-knot currents. They also deposited huge mudbanks which accounted for the difficult navigation. To ensure enough depth of water for the LSTs, an invasion would have to take place at the highest tide, which in the autumn of 1950 meant on or about September 15, October 11, or November 3. To utilize the highest tides would require a landing just before nightfall, so that the invaders would have little daylight in which to consolidate their position before they might be counterattacked. The landing would have to take place not on a beach but on a seawall, and it must proceed immediately into the streets of a city. An island, Wolmi-do, dominated Inchon harbor and would have to be bombarded and captured before the main landings, thus telegraphing what was about to happen. In any event, an amphibious operation proceeding from Japan had to be based on a country full of enemy spies, and prolonged indecision in the fighting on the Nakdong line at last permitted the assembly of enough troops in time to give only three weeks of intensive preparation. Nevertheless, MacArthur persisted over the objections of the Joint Chiefs and the Navy, and as he predicted, the 1st Marine Division went ashore successfully on September 15.⁸

It was fortunate that despite all the possibilities of forewarning, Communist resistance was light. MacArthur had gauged accurately the overstretched condition of the North Koreans, as he had judged accurately every circumstance connected with the landing. The Marines' amphibious warfare skills made the tactical execution possible, but the strategy was entirely MacArthur's. Admiral Halsey telegraphed him saying: "The Inchon landing is the most masterly

and audacious strategic stroke in all history."⁹ However extravagant Halsey's praise may have been, MacArthur put a tiger ashore and not another stranded whale. The desired disintegration of the North Korean army occurred. That army, already overextended, collapsed between the counteroffensive of the Eighth Army from the Nakdong line and the attack of the X Corps—the 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions at Inchon and Seoul—on its main line of communication. After Inchon, MacArthur's forces recaptured South Korea on the run and then advanced across the thirty-eighth parallel into North Korea almost without resistance.¹⁰

But if Inchon was probably Douglas MacArthur's greatest single triumph, it was also his last. It was an immensely successful reapplication of his World War II experience; but after Inchon, the experience of 1941-45 too mechanically reapplied began to play MacArthur false.

The betrayal began, in a limited way, in his next amphibious operation. After he, the government in Washington, and the United Nations had agreed in deciding to continue the advance across the thirty-eighth parallel into North Korea in order to reunite the peninsula, MacArthur withdrew the X Corps from South Korea by sea for another amphibious landing, against the port of Wonsan on the east coast of North Korea. In addition to the usual advantages of the kind of amphibious envelopment he had practiced so often since New Guinea, MacArthur saw a movement against Wonsan as guaranteeing early possession of a good harbor in the North and carrying the X Corps into the North with less wear and tear on men and equipment than in an overland march across the rugged Korean terrain. Unfortunately, withdrawing the 1st Marine Division through the limited facilities of the port of Inchon, taking up half the capacity of the port for several days in October, badly hampered logistical support of the Eighth Army as it marched from Seoul into the North. Inchon had already been overtaxed, and after this disruption, the Eighth Army operated with supplies stretched dangerously thin for the rest of the campaign, partly because the inbound tonnage lost with the outloading of the 1st Marine Division was never made up. The other division of the X Corps, the 7th Infantry, marched through South Korea to Pusan and outloaded there, imposing less strain upon port facilities but more upon itself.

After all this effort, ROK troops captured Wonsan for the United Nations before the 1st Marine Division had sailed from Inchon. By the time the X Corps arrived in Wonsan harbor, the overland march

of the ROK forces had already gone on to Hungnam harbor farther north, and UN troops had linked up Wonsan and Pyongyang across the peninsula.¹¹

These needless difficulties produced by the stereotyped repetition at Wonsan of a previously successful strategy were minor troubles, of course, compared with those occasioned by the subsequent descent of Chinese Communist forces upon MacArthur's scattered troops farther north. But the larger troubles stemmed in part from a similarly complacent misapplication of earlier experience. MacArthur reacted with apparent indifference to a series of warnings that invasion of North Korea would provoke Chinese intervention. One of the main reasons for his lack of concern seems to have been his confidence that if the Chinese should happen to come in, his air power could effectively interdict communication between China and the battlefield, isolate the Chinese armies, and thus frustrate their efforts and expose their troops to destruction. In the Pacific war of 1941-45, air power had consistently isolated in this fashion whatever Japanese island garrisons MacArthur had earmarked for destruction. When Chinese threats were translated into the actual appearance of the first Chinese troops to challenge UN advances in North Korea, MacArthur reiterated the idea that "there are many fundamental logistical reasons against" a large-scale Chinese involvement in the Korean peninsula.¹² When the UN commander at length became convinced that nevertheless the Chinese were attempting a large-scale intervention, he ordered his air forces to destroy "every means of communication" between China and Korea, in particular the bridges across the Yalu River, the stream which forms three-fifths of the boundary between the two countries.¹³

A standard history of naval operations in the Korean War aptly states that the task which MacArthur now gave to air power was "to sever the Korean peninsula at the Yalu and Tumen Rivers, to undercut the peninsula, and to float the entire land mass into mid-ocean where interdiction, in concert with a naval blockade, could strangle the supply lines of the Communists and thereby force their retreat and defeat."¹⁴ So far in the war the Korean peninsula, surrounded by water on three sides, had proved enough like the Pacific islands that MacArthur had grown accustomed to conquering that his World War II methods had in general served admirably all over again—cutting off the enemy from assistance by sea through naval blockade, using naval gunfire and carrier air power to supplement decisively land-based air power and the fire power of ground troops, em-

playing the amphibious envelopment as a strategic trump card. Unfortunately, a new experience was now to demonstrate that between an island and a peninsula the strategic difference is fundamental. The Pacific war of 1941-45 could be fought to decisive victory at relatively low cost precisely because of the uniquely complete isolation that sea and air power could impose upon islands. But outside MacArthur's theater in World War II, the Italian campaign was proportionately the most bitter and costly that the Western Allies fought, because while Italy is surrounded on three sides by water, daily bombing of the Brenner Pass was not enough to isolate the German forces in Italy from assistance from the continental land mass to which Italy is joined. In Korea as in Italy, the fourth side of the peninsula was to make all the difference.

MacArthur's airmen tried heroically to isolate Korea as they would have isolated an island. The Fifth Air Force turned over to carrier-based aviation the task of trying to close the Yalu bridges. This task was bound to be extremely delicate. The Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted that MacArthur restrict his aerial attack to the southernmost spans of the Yalu bridges, which were undoubtedly in Korea and not in Manchuria. In attacking, the planes must not violate Manchurian air space or reply to any fire from the Manchurian side of the river. The Air Force had no planes that could carry a bomb load heavy enough and yet fulfill these conditions. If B-29s had attempted high-level precision bombing against the southern spans of the bridges, in the course of making their "run-ins" for adequate sightings they would have had to fly over Chinese territory as the Yalu looped far below them. Thus the Navy took on the job with the successor to the trusty old SBD Dauntless, the AD Dauntless II renamed the Skyraider, carrying two 1,000-pound bombs or occasionally a single 2,000-pound bomb, and with the F4U Corsair, carrying a 500-pound bomb or eight 100-pound bombs with various combinations of rockets. Grumman F9F Panther jets flew high cover against the possibility of interception by Russian-built MIG jets.

Against untouchable anti-aircraft opposition from the north bank of the Yalu and some interference from MIGs, the Navy fliers dropped spans of three bridges and damaged four other bridges. But as World War II had demonstrated and the subsequent history of the Korean War was to confirm, permanent interruption of river crossings by means of aerial attacks on bridges is practically impossible. Anyway, the time was now November, 1950, and the Yalu soon froze so

solidity that the Chinese could cross it anywhere. The Korean battlefield could not be isolated from China.¹⁵

The battlefield was not sealed off from enemy reinforcement and supply as MacArthur had counted on, and large Chinese forces threw MacArthur's troops into a retreat which did not halt until the armies were again south of the thirty-eighth parallel and the Communists had again captured Seoul. In the face of this unanticipated disaster, MacArthur's attitude changed abruptly from complacent optimism to the despairing belief that none of Korea could be saved unless the war were widened to include aerial attacks, employing the atomic bomb, against the sources of Chinese power and a naval blockade of China. Fortunately, a new commander of the Eighth Army under MacArthur, Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, thought otherwise. Under Ridgway's ubiquitous battlefield leadership the Eighth Army stiffened, recaptured Seoul, and slowly pushed the enemy northward toward the thirty-eighth parallel, while MacArthur's excessive pessimism on the heels of his earlier excess of optimism set events in motion toward his recall from command.¹⁶

For a variety of reasons, President Truman refused to accede to MacArthur's proposals for extending the war to China. The Truman administration regarded the Soviet Union as the most dangerous Communist state and Europe as the crucial arena in the confrontation between Communism and the Western world. Extension of the war in the Far East, the administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, would only weaken the West in its dealings with Russia and endanger Europe by tying up still more American forces in a secondary arena. In the words of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Bradley, extending the war to China would be provoking "the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."¹⁷ In any event, against the vast Communist mainland of China with its immense population, no decisive strategy seemed possible. To attack China might well mean losing America's own sanctuary in Japan, the great UN base which the enemy never touched. To use the atomic bomb either in China or in Korea, the administration believed, would run unacceptable risks of extending the war and of antagonizing America's allies while promising no comparable rewards, since neither China nor Korea seemed urbanized and industrialized enough to offer suitable targets. Furthermore, the atomic bomb was in short supply, which seemed to offer a highly practical reason for not expending it in a secondary theater.¹⁸

Yet MacArthur's proposals for the extension of the war were con-

sistent with beliefs about strategy and military policy which had taken deep root in the preceding century of American military history. To carry the war to the Chinese mainland might open unforeseeable hazards, but once China threw its manpower into the Korean peninsula and kept its troops supplied and fighting there despite efforts at aerial interdiction, the future of the war if confined to the peninsula was all too foreseeable: stalemate was the best outcome the United States and the United Nations could well expect, except possibly at an inordinate expenditure in American manpower to drive back the Chinese through the Korean mountains toward the Yalu where each American advance would strengthen the enemy by bringing him closer to his bases. Extending the war would be a desperate gamble, but no other means offered much hope of clear-cut decision without intolerable infantry casualties. And when MacArthur said "There is no substitute for victory," "War's very object is victory," he was voicing a view of the nature of war that was not only a commonplace among Americans since the Civil War and the Indian war but that could readily seem a reasonable extension of the American military's own now customary strategy of annihilation.¹⁹

Nevertheless, MacArthur's proposals involved risks which the President, the principal cabinet officers, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed too great to be run. After MacArthur had indulged his opinions too openly in defiance of orders to clear his public statements with Washington, the President on April 11, 1951, announced the general's relief from command.²⁰

MacArthur's departure from the Far East did not terminate the attempt to make Korea in effect an island, where China could not reinforce or supply her armies. Apart from the question of using the atomic bomb, there could not be much strategic bombing in the World War II sense of that term, because the sources of North Korea's ability to make war, except for manpower, lay outside the country. The same thing would also have been largely true of China, if reasons of policy had not put China out of bounds for American aerial attack. But air power could attempt to prevent equipment and supplies from crossing Korea between the Manchurian and Soviet borders and the front lines. The narrowness of the Korean peninsula seemed to offer an excellent opportunity for that method of interdicting the flow of logistical support which permitted the Communist armies to function, and American strategy continued to rely on air power to turn the balance in favor of the UN ground forces

UN air power therefore attempted to knock out the Communist transportation system south of the Yalu. The airplanes concentrated first upon North Korean railroads, the principal carriers of supplies and the most vulnerable. The Fifth Air Force gave its attention mainly to the railroads west of the central mountain ranges, naval aviation to those east of the mountains. The terrain increased the railroads' vulnerability; there were hundreds of bridges and tunnels. Nevertheless, though the UN maintained almost undisputed command of the air, months of continuous, day-by-day pounding by hundreds of aircraft failed to destroy the utility of the North Korean railroads.

When bridges were knocked out, the Communists built bypasses in less vulnerable, low places where rivers could be forded. Often the railroads had to get along with shuttle trains between breaks in the tracks, with human energy called upon to carry the loads across the broken sections. The effort imposed on the Communists was stupendous; but with their huge resources of manpower, the Communists were able to produce the necessary effort. The capacity of their eastern railroad system was reduced from 5,000 tons per day to 500 tons per day, and sometimes almost to nothing; the capacity of the western system shrank from 9,000 tons per day to 500 to 1,500 tons. Yet the Communists remained generally able to carry about half their armies' required tonnage by rail.²¹

The Communists responded to the attacks upon their rail systems by bringing more and more trucks into Korea and greatly increasing their use of the highways. The highways were bad by Western standards to begin with, merely dirt and gravel roads; but that made maintaining them according to Chinese and Korean standards all the easier. On roads and railroads both, the Communists did their repair work mostly at night. The UN command attempted night air strikes, but on a limited scale and with limited results against targets that demanded precision. When air attacks constricted every other form of movement, the Communists could still achieve remarkable results with men on foot carrying supplies on A-frames on their backs. Against a transport system that was primitive to begin with, but which had plenty of human labor to call on, aerial interdiction could not cut off the flow of supplies and reinforcements as it had around D-day in Normandy, when its target was the transport network of an industrialized society. In 1940 Alexander de Seversky had qualified his predictions about air power by saying: "Total war from the air against an undeveloped country or region is well-nigh futile; it is one

of the curious features of the most modern weapon that it is especially effective against the most modern types of civilization."²²

Still, the aerial interdiction campaign, in combination with the Communists' limited transport, did much to guarantee that the Communists would not conquer the entire peninsula. When they reached Seoul and the area of the thirty-eighth parallel, the Chinese were close to the end of their logistical tether. The primitiveness of their logistical support cut both ways. While it reduced the effectiveness of aerial interdiction, it also reduced their possibilities for accomplishment. The failure of aerial interdiction to achieve all that was hoped for it in Korea does not necessarily mean that no campaign of aerial interdiction can ever succeed, against any army or under any circumstances. Even in Korea, atomic weapons might have produced very different results. Furthermore, the aerial interdiction effort in Korea was handicapped by the fact that once the effort was well under way, the front was essentially stable, so that the Communist armies' needs were smaller than they would have been in more fluid warfare. General James Van Fleet, Ridgway's successor in command of the Eighth Army, believed that "If we had ever put on some pressure and made him [the enemy] fight, we would have given him an insoluble supply problem."²³

The limitations of aerial interdiction in Korea are linked to another gloomy feature of the Korean War, the return of indecisiveness to the battlefield. Not until General Ridgway took command of the Eighth Army and halted its retreat just below the thirty-eighth parallel in the winter of early 1951 did the Korean War pit against each other two armies of approximately equal strength and determination. Once that occurred, fluidity disappeared from the war, and a stalemate reminiscent of World War I set in. Despite General Van Fleet's observation about air power and the Communist supply problem, it seems most likely that if the UN command had chosen to seek a decisive victory, the only available means would have been to fight bitter battles of annihilation against the Chinese and North Korean armies. The price of battles of annihilation would have been acceptance of UN casualties high enough to make the endeavor more tragic than triumphant.

Though the Korean War visited upon American strategists so many frustrations, it did reopen to the military the national purse strings. In doing so, it raised again the issues posed just before its

outbreak by NSC-68, but so quickly buried by the exigencies of the budget.

Congress enacted three wartime tax increases, and the combined impact of the rate increases and an economic boom stimulated by the war was to raise federal revenues from \$36.5 billion in fiscal year 1950 to \$47.6 billion the next fiscal year, \$61.4 billion in fiscal 1952, and \$64.8 billion in fiscal 1953. Expenditures for national security purposes rose from \$13 billion in fiscal 1950 to \$22.3 billion, \$44 billion, and \$50.4 billion, respectively, in the following three fiscal years. These increased defense expenditures went first, naturally, into creating the necessary instruments to fight the war in Korea. Frightened by the unreadiness the Korean War demonstrated, however, and by its unarguable evidence that the deterrent powers of the country's atomic weaponry had not been complete, government and military leaders generally agreed that the growing funds available for national security must be used to seek a larger security beyond the immediate demands of the war.

There was less than general agreement about the methods which the quest for a larger security entailed. The Truman administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff disagreed with General MacArthur's proposals to widen the war not so much because they did not share his philosophy of the nature of war or his penchant for a strategy of annihilation, but because they thought Korea and Asia were not the main theater of conflict with the Communists but a diversionary theater. They still feared an all-out Soviet attack on Western Europe or the United States, they feared in fact that the North Korean invasion of South Korea was a feint to draw away their attention from the vital theaters, and they did not want to be taken in by the feint. Therefore they early proposed to use much of the enlarged defense budget to make better preparation for the all-out Soviet aggression they still thought likely.

Too zealous a devotion to the President's earlier policy of defense economies made Louis Johnson expendable, and late in 1950 President Truman replaced Johnson as Secretary of Defense with the President's favorite man for all crises, General George C. Marshall. Marshall announced that the major objectives of the Defense Department's programs were to build and maintain military forces which would keep up a position of strength for a period of indefinite duration, and to aim "at greatly increasing the readiness of American industry and manpower for full mobilization." Marshall proposed to create the industrial and manpower base for rapid mobilization for

all-out war. "This is a move," he said, "to place us in a strong position from which we can go rapidly to the extent that may be developed as necessary."²⁴

To establish an industrial base for full mobilization, Marshall sought to distribute defense procurement in the current emergency among the largest feasible group of suppliers, "not merely to obtain as quickly as possible the matériel required for the current build-up but also to equip additional plants and assembly lines." He wanted to develop as broad a base of defense supply expertise and capacity as possible, to be able to mobilize swiftly for another war on the scale of World War II. To create the manpower reserve for mobilization on that scale and for that kind of war, Marshall took up again his old advocacy of universal military training. When the Korean War began, President Truman had shelved UMT, presumably for the duration of the immediate crisis. Marshall persuaded him to reintroduce UMT as an administration proposal to Congress in January, 1951. In June, 1951, Congress responded to the extent of passing the Universal Military Training and Service Act, which at least endorsed the principle of UMT, though it continued the immediately effective selective service system and postponed implementation of UMT.²⁵

Thus Secretary Marshall used the Korean emergency to return to mobilization plans and preparations similar to those which preceded World War II and designed to permit the country to respond rapidly to a Soviet military challenge along the lines of Hitler's military challenge. By the time Congress passed the Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951, however, the Korean truce negotiations were almost in the offing, and however trying the negotiations proved to be, their existence made the theory of the Korean War as a feint for all-out Communist aggression elsewhere seem increasingly unlikely. As the threat of a massive Soviet attack receded, so did the persuasiveness of Secretary Marshall's 1940-style mobilization strategy.

Attention turned instead to Communism as a problem likely to be present and likely to impose military challenges through a very long run, and to the deficiencies which unreadiness in Korea suggested for America's ability to counter permanent pressure and permanent menace. Attention returned, in short, to issues which had been raised by NSC-68. It returned to issues which the President had also raised in his statement accompanying his first request for a wartime tax increase in July, 1950, but which later had been obscured by Marshall's emphasis on mobilization capacity. "The purpose of these proposed

estimates," Truman had said before General Marshall's return to office, "is two-fold; first, to meet the immediate situation in Korea, and second, to provide for an early, but orderly, build-up of our military forces to a state of readiness designed to deter further acts of aggression."²⁶ Attention turned again, especially in the months following Marshall's retirement on September 17, 1951, and replacement by Robert A. Lovett, from Marshall's mobilization strategy to a strategy of deterrence.

The difference was important. The American military posture in June, 1950, had not deterred limited Communist aggression. If it was American atomic strength that had deterred larger Communist aggression, presumably the deterrence had been possible because of the state of readiness of the Strategic Air Command. To deter acts of aggression, limited or unlimited, the Korean experience suggested that it was not capacity for mobilization that counted most, but rather the state of readiness. Potentially the United States always had possessed the ability to mobilize enough strength to roll back an Asian Communist invasion of South Korea. But apparently the Communists had gambled on an invasion because the United States in 1950 had possessed only the potentially mobilizable strength to resist in Korea, not adequate ready strength, and therefore the Communists believed they might well be able to confront America with the *fait accompli* of an all-Communist Korea before potential strength could be mobilized. If in any case deterrence failed to prevent a general nuclear war, only the forces in being at the outset would be likely to have much effect upon the course of the war anyway.

If a strategy of deterrence depended upon forces in readiness, an effort to implement deterrence of both general and local war would have to take two directions. To deter a general Communist attack, America's nuclear retaliatory force would have to be maintained and strengthened. During the period of the American atomic monopoly, the size of the American atomic striking force had not seemed of major importance, as long as the force was big enough to be likely to get through to devastate Soviet cities and industry. With the Soviets now developing their own nuclear striking capacity, however, the American retaliatory force had to be large enough and resilient enough to survive a Soviet first strike and still devastate the Soviet Union.

Anticipating Soviet nuclear parity with the United States by 1954, NSC-68 had therefore proposed a considerable expansion of American nuclear forces. When the Truman administration returned to the

issue of deterrence, it decided that a deterrent nuclear retaliatory capacity demanded development of the H-bomb, an expanded stockpile of nuclear weapons, an intensified state of readiness in the retaliatory force, and a retaliatory force of greatly increased scale. The Korean War enlarged the Air Force to 95 wings by mid-1952; the administration proposed to raise it to 143 wings by the middle of the 1950s. With wartime defense budgets, the Air Force was able to accelerate its development of jet bombers. The ten B-47A Stratofortresses ordered in 1948 grew to a fleet of 405 B-47Bs by June, 1953. Eventually there were 1,317 B-47Es, plus 255 reconnaissance-version RB-47Es and 35 RB-47Hs. The B-47E could carry 10,845 pounds of bombs over a combat radius of 2,013 miles, at a cruising speed of 498 miles per hour; its ferry range was 4,035 miles. The first prototype of the B-52 intercontinental jet bomber flew in April, 1952, and the first production models began arriving in August, 1954. B-36 production ended that month.²⁷

To deter a less than general Communist attack, the Korean experience suggested a need for conventional surface strength in readiness. The Truman administration continued to look to Europe as the most vital area of danger, and it labored mightily to create a ready ground defense there. It sought to flesh out the mutual security commitment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of 1949 with NATO armed forces in readiness, and to that end it secured allied agreement to the appointment of a NATO Supreme Commander and brought General Eisenhower from the presidency of Columbia University back to active military duty to fill the post. It strengthened the American Seventh Army in Germany, it tried to persuade western Europeans and Germans to accept a German military contribution to European defense, and at the Lisbon Conference of February, 1952, it won NATO endorsement of a goal of ninety NATO divisions, half on active duty, by the end of the year.²⁸

The European allies never moved as rapidly as the Truman administration would have liked or the Lisbon agreement suggested, and acceptance of German remilitarization proved a predictably recalcitrant problem. The Europeans knew that their real military hopes rested not upon their own strength but upon the willingness of the United States to defend them and upon the American deterrents. Though much that the United States did in Korea made the Europeans nervous and unhappy, American intervention there served to give them symbolic assurance that the United States could in fact be counted on to fight for its allies. Assured of that, the Europeans

were not prepared to strain economies just recovering from Hitler's war in a defense for which their own unaided strength would not suffice. NATO defense achievements consistently fell short of announced NATO goals.

Despite Korea, the American effort to achieve an effective strategy of deterrence was itself distorted by the same preoccupations with general rather than limited or local war and with western Europe that had perhaps tempted the Communists to strike in Asia in the first place. Nevertheless, and despite much that was reminiscent of World War II in the response to the Korean crisis, by 1952 the Truman administration and its military commanders were at last making basic intellectual adjustments to the strategic revolution ushered in by nuclear weapons. American military strategy was no longer inclusively defined as the use of combats. Rather, within the rubric of protecting and advancing the national interest, the acknowledged first purpose of American military strategy was now not to use combats but to deter adversaries from initiating combat. The Korean War rescued NSC-68 from oblivion and made it the foundation of American strategy after all.

The Korean War was so unpopular, and deterring a repetition of such a war consequently seemed so important in the early 1950s, that the problems implied in adopting a strategy of deterrence were not all immediately apparent. But problems there were. A strategy of deterrence was a thoroughly negative kind of strategy. Even granting the negativeness also of American policy as long as containment of Communism was its principal objective, policy was likely to develop positive goals which so negative, defensive, and even passive a strategy as deterrence might not adequately serve. In time, also, tensions might well develop out of the incongruity between a deterrent strategy and the historic American conception of strategy as the use of military force for offensive purposes. More promptly evident, though not immediately apparent in all its complexity, was the question of how reliably deterrence could work.



17. Strategies of Deterrence and of Action: The Strategy Intellectuals



... we should be as ready to profit from opportunities in the Soviet orbit as the Soviet bloc feels free to exploit all the difficulties of the non-Soviet world.

—Henry A. Kissinger¹

THE NEW EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION embraced deterrence still more enthusiastically, with fewer backward glances toward plans for mobilization on the pattern of the World Wars. Apart from the asset of Dwight Eisenhower's winning personality and prestige, the Republicans captured the Presidency in the election of 1952 largely because of voter discontent with the prolonged and puzzling Korean War. The new administration intended both to extricate the country from the Korean entanglement and to ensure against further involvements of the Korean type. It was able to succeed in the former aim, to end the fighting and the weary truce talks, for various reasons, including its political ability to be more flexible in negotiation than the Truman administration—few Americans could believe that Republicans were soft on Communism—and perhaps primarily, because Stalin soon died. Many in the new administration also believed that a threat to use atomic weapons in Korea, the message being conveyed to the Chinese through India, was decisive; this conviction was important in conditioning subsequent policy. For the second goal, guarding against a repetition of Korea, the new administration turned to an explicit strategy of deterrence, aimed at deterring local and limited as well as general wars.²