

NATIONAL SECURITY: **Are We Asking the Right Questions?**

by Paul C. Warnke

In the area of national security, it is probably a good deal easier to raise questions than to supply answers. Anyone who has ever tried the latter can only hope that his successors will be better at it. But he may also find himself hoping that he, and the American public generally, can begin to do a better job of asking the right questions. Until we do, there is little purpose and even less justice in railing about the size of our defense budget. The military-industrial complex, with the soaring cost of its care and feeding and its dire consequences for the quality of American life, is the inevitable answer to the questions we have asked and the demands we have made in the name of national security. Our military-industrial complex exists because we have asked for it.

We can never cut it back to size and free up a fair share of our budget dollars for competing and compelling causes until we begin asking the right ques-

tions—about how our defense effort squares with the real world and with our genuine national security. Without the right questions directed to the right people we can never get answers that will permit us to design, or even to recognize, a defense budget commensurate with our over-all interests and objectives.

In not too oversimplified terms, the concept of security we evolved after World War II was to make sure that non-Communist countries stayed that way. During the years when “Who lost China?” was the popular security question, nobody in the national-security business, at least, craved identification as one who had “lost” some other strayed member of the non-Communist community.

The Eisenhower Administration pursued the concept of security by adhering to the doctrine of “massive retaliation.” As the answer to the question of how we could prevent Communist take-overs,

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we could point to our nuclear striking force. But this answer became less and less plausible as our monopoly in intercontinental missiles dissipated. Neither we nor our potential adversaries could continue to believe that the United States would react to any and every Communist provocation by initiating a nuclear exchange in which our own society would be devastated.

Nor could we accept an "all-or-nothing" doctrine of defense that would leave us bereft of any ability to respond with conventional force to conventional attacks on friendly nations. So "massive retaliation" gave way to the more common-sense notion of a "flexible response" adequate to counter, and hopefully to deter, instances of aggression for which we would be unwilling to risk a nuclear holocaust.

But the cost of the capability to respond flexibly can be immense if an American military response must be contemplated whenever an international development disfavors our national interests. And this expense can be infinite if the adequacy of that capability must be measured in terms of a clear superiority in every aspect of armed might.

In a world in which we are not the single "great power," any such total military versatility and invincibility is clearly unprocurable—at any price. Until we begin to refine our questions and direct them toward realistic and realizable security goals, we will continue to ask the impossible and get answers that are unacceptable.

In the broadest sense, we now ask our government: make us safe from any attack by any foe. The answer is a defense budget in the neighborhood of \$80 billion a year. It is an answer that is increasingly unsatisfactory. It certainly does not satisfy the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who recognize that this amount is inadequate to buy the American people anything like full protection. The Armed Services Committees of Con-

gress can prove that a lower budget means less over-all military strength and less capacity to do things by military force, for a defense budget of \$80 billion obviously provides the capability to meet contingencies that a budget of \$50 billion must ignore. But before concluding that the \$50 billion budget will leave us weaker and in greater danger, we need political judgments as to what unmet contingencies are apt to occur and—if they do occur and if they are unmet—what vital national interests may be adversely affected. We need the further political judgment of whether the \$30 billion thus freed can be spent on problems of greater risk to our national security and in areas of greater benefit to the over-all quality of American life. We need the answers that will put in perspective any incremental gain in physical security.

In the age of intercontinental ballistic missiles, we cannot now, with any amount of money, buy physical safety from a Soviet attack of indescribable devastation. But the real pressures for a ballistic-missile defense—and perhaps even its lulling designation as the "Safeguard" system—derive from our unwillingness to accept emotionally what we have every factual reason to comprehend.

Nor can we curb the infinite expansion of the military-industrial complex by continuing to demand margins of superiority over our potential adversaries all across the spectrum of military armament. We should ask, instead, which leads are meaningful in terms of security or political advantage, and which are not. "Superiority" in nuclear missiles, for example, is too expensive if all it gives us is a status symbol. And "inferiority" is no cause for alarm or even embarrassment if what we have is enough to deter any Soviet effort at a pre-emptive strike.

We should keep in mind that what the Soviets themselves are doing may

not always provide a useful measure of the appropriateness of our own defense expenditures. We sometimes seem to proceed on the assumption that we are not doing enough unless we more than match what the Soviets spend in every area of armed might. We rarely inquire whether the Soviets are spending too much. Instead, when there is criticism of our ABM deployment, we accept as valid the answer that, after all, the Soviets have already deployed an ABM of their own. Maybe we should ask whether theirs is a poor investment. While vaunting our superior sophistication in other things, both economic and social, we at times come perilously close to adopting Soviet answers when it comes to the allocation of our defense dollars on strategic weapons systems.

In the area of conventional forces, we waste the time and the talents of our military leaders when we leave them to prepare their budget requests on the basis of assumptions devoid of political validity. Our military planners, in fact, are major victims of our defective interrogatory technique. The problem is not that their advice is too often ignored. It is that their answers frequently don't matter because we've asked them the wrong questions. It's neither fair nor fruitful to ask them to develop a military machine that will help achieve a set of foreign-policy objectives which haven't been articulated—and which, when developed, can prove impervious to military solution.

In order to obtain the proper weapons systems—in the proper quantities and supporting the proper number of military personnel—we need a much clearer idea of the circumstances under which we will be willing to use them. The Systems-Analysis group within the Office of the Secretary of Defense serves an essential function in developing the most effective means of performing the various military missions. These civilian experts constantly dis-

cuss issues of relative cost effectiveness with the different Armed Services. But neither the civilian nor the military personnel of the Pentagon should be asked to speculate on the nature and number of instances in which they'll be asked to provide military force in furtherance of national objectives. Our current force posture—designed to fight two wars while handling another contingency somewhere else in the world—is the product of such speculation.

This “two-and-a-half war” concept did not arise from an informed prediction of international developments. It derived, during the last decade, from what Pentagon planners saw as the need to buttress conventional military forces neglected during our years of reliance on a nuclear strategy of “massive retaliation.” But we lacked then, as we lack now, an accepted perception of our national-security interests; we had no measure for the adequacy of our conventional military capability. As a consequence, our forces are not shaped to fit a policy—and the risk always exists that the policy itself may be influenced by the military forces on hand. We need not conclude that our analyses of force requirements in the early '60's were wrong. But we do need to ask if, in today's world, our national scale of priorities justifies the expense of preparing to fight the Soviets in Europe, while we simultaneously fend off Chinese aggression in Asia and deal elsewhere with some lesser adversary.

It may be that I unduly discount the risk that Russia and China may resolve their differences to the point where they could even consider concurrently engaging us in large-scale conventional warfare. But it is difficult to imagine that either nation would deem the nuclear threshold sufficiently high to block an early resort to strategic forces. Before we commit ourselves to further funding against such an eventuality,

we should ask the National Security Council to consider the likelihood of this kind of dispersed Armageddon, and to shun a policy that might make it thinkable.

A bumper sticker of the recent past read: "Support Mental Health or I'll Kill You." Sanity in foreign policy compels the recognition that we can't use military means to make the world behave the way we'd like it to behave. We can't use it to compel a country to be free and democratic. And we're aware, at least tacitly, that however we may deplore aggression and strife anywhere in the world, most of it cannot affect our national security and most of it does not call for an American military response. But I don't think we've told those who originate our defense planning enough to permit their reasoned response to our basic questions about how national security can best be assured.

When we ask them to define the necessary dimensions of our military forces, referring them to our existing treaty commitments is not enough. No treaty negates our right to determine the character of our reaction on the basis of our perception of the national interest. Our one absolute commitment is to the preservation of our own independence. And we might fairly ask whether that independence does, in fact, turn on the viability of every international basket case with anti-Communist credentials.

To accept the facts of modern life, we need not adopt the extreme position that no defense effort is availing and that no measure of security can be obtained through expenditures for weapons systems. What is required is that debate about the level of defense expenditures—and about the kinds or quantities of armaments that we can prudently purchase—focus on the real risks and on the means realistically available to meet them. In national de-

fense, as in our personal finances, we can afford to carry just so much insurance—particularly against the rarer tropical diseases. Our present preoccupation with physical security may be anachronistic when only two nations in the world can pose a physical threat and when neither could carry it out except at the cost of its own existence as a modern society.

In posing new questions about our national security, we need not repudiate the expert witnesses on whom we have relied in the past. Granted, the results achieved have not been uniformly satisfactory. But we should resist the temptation to blame our Vietnam troubles, for example, on the advice of our military men. In my view, we've consistently been asking them the wrong questions about Vietnam. Such issues as measuring the pace and permanence of pacification involve political judgments that only an objective Vietnamese politician could make, if one could be found. Our commanders are probably right in thinking that a virtual U.S. military occupation is the best way to control an insurgency, but it does little to advance our announced political goal of self-determination for the South Vietnamese.

It has been suggested—by Candidate Goldwater in 1964 and by Senators on both sides of the aisle in years since—that victory in Vietnam requires only that we tell our military leaders that we have decided to win and then leave the war to them. This ignores, I think, our lack of an agreed definition of victory and our unwillingness to go all-out to achieve military conquest. Indeed, no satisfactory answer can be given to the question why we are in Vietnam, because we never asked the question in time. In late 1967, Secretary Rusk explained our presence as necessary to contain a projected one billion Chinese armed with nuclear weapons. But if the original purpose

of American participation in Vietnam was to contain China, we never asked whether adoption of an attrition route to victory was consistent with that purpose. Certainly there are more promising avenues to the close-in control of China than by killing off the nationalistic North Vietnamese.

Much of the failure to examine the underlying political rationale stems from a fear of poaching on military preserves. But, in the absence of all-out war, our military means surely must be kept consistent with our political objectives. They can't be and they won't be unless we insist that our policy-makers articulate these objectives.

Perhaps the first step toward useful answers in the realm of national security would be to abandon the partisan prose. "Missile gap" allegations from the 1960 campaign, like the outlandish charge of a "security gap" in 1968, have only made it more difficult for incoming administrations to pose the relevant questions. What should worry us is a "question gap" that leaves us without meaningful answers, both on national-security policy and on how it should be translated into military capability. In making decisions on defense planning we're constantly in danger of putting the hardware before the horse sense.

There are growing signs of a healthy willingness to question some of the items in the defense budget. But the absence of an over-all policy from which these individual items derive makes the debate revolve largely around tangential issues.

For example, in examining the request for additional attack carriers, it is sensible to ask whether one nuclear-powered carrier is preferable to the two that could be built with conventional power for the same price. It's important to note the age of some carriers in our fleet and the alternative possibility of land-based aircraft. But the real questions remain unanswered. They concern

the relationship between our tactical air power and our security interests. Fifteen nuclear attack carriers will indeed permit the flexible application of that power anywhere in the world. But where in the world, and against whom, will we want to apply it, and what should we pay for this capacity?

Without an updated justification for our carrier fleet, we can make no value judgments on the need for new fleet defense aircraft. The mission intended for the F-111B (the Navy version of the TFX) was to stand well off from the fleet for hours with a highly sophisticated missile capable of shooting down hordes of enemy bombers at great range. But debate about the F-111B focused on its weight, its expense, and whether Boeing might have done it better. The Navy succeeded in substituting the F-14A, which on paper provides a superior dog-fighter but continues with the basic mission of fleet defense. The case for continuing this multi-billion-dollar program should not rest on the merits of the airplane. The question we should ask is: what are the chances that our fleet will be sent to sea when there is a real risk of the kind of mass air attack that only the Soviets could mount? Perhaps we should be persuaded that this is plausible, but I think those responsible for our foreign policy should be asked to convince us.

The Senate, by almost a two-to-one margin, recently approved going ahead with the Advanced Manned Strategic Aircraft (AMSA). Supporters of a new nuclear bomber, while granting its redundancy, refer to the risk that our intercontinental ballistic missiles may work imperfectly. But no new bomber can provide the ability to destroy the Soviet missile forces and thus prevent nuclear retaliation. Nor, we are told, do we aim at any such "first-strike" capability. Our strategic forces are intended to deter and thus, in an age of sophisticated air defense, strategic

missiles must remain our primary deterrent. How, we might ask, is that deterrent affected by a decision to proceed with a new manned aircraft on the premise that it is needed because the nuclear missiles may not work? Moreover, our continued expenditures for anti-bomber defense are rationalized as serving to discourage the Soviet Union from developing a new supersonic bomber. Do we expect our bomber to be that much better, the Soviet air defense that much poorer, or the Soviets that much smarter in deciding that manned bombers are obsolete?

Sound defense decisions outside the procurement area are equally impossible until we acquire a better sense of policy direction. In the military assistance field, continuation of our military advisors in Latin America obviously preserves a degree of United States influence. But shouldn't we ask, on a country-by-country basis, whom we are influencing, toward what ends, and how this serves our national interest?

As a military matter, reversion of Okinawa to Japanese administrative control primarily involves the question of our unrestricted freedom to use it as a military base. But politically we should ask whether there may ever be circumstances in which we will want to use Okinawa for military operations which the Japanese are unwilling to support. In situations where the Japanese conclude that such use is not in their security interests, can it be essential to ours?

British withdrawal from East of Suez will leave a "great-power" vacuum in the Indian Ocean. Do we need bases and boats to fill it or can we count on nature's abhorrence, and the people of the area, to do that job? The considerations that led to British colonialism in the Nineteenth Century, when empire was profitable, can't justify an American military presence in this century if it means little more than a bigger de-

fense bill. The White House and State Department assert that we will not replace the British. But unless we tell our military planners to forget it, we may find ourselves continuing to pay for that possibility.

The asserted unavailability of a "peace and growth dividend" will be a self-fulfilling prophecy if we use the peace to catch up on every item of our defense arsenal stunted by Vietnam priority needs. Before we can fit our defense program to our national interest, we must decide when and where we may seek to advance those interests by the application of military force. If our national security in fact demands a kind of Western Hemisphere "Brezhnev doctrine," we need the means to enforce a non-Communist orthodoxy. If we plan to support regimes in Southeast Asia against overthrow by their internal political rivals, we have to face up to the budgetary consequences. And if we must conclude that our security requires us to resist and repel external aggression wherever it appears in the world, then our present defense budget is indeed too little and too late.

But I doubt that these are the premises on which our foreign policy will proceed in practice. And I think that the theory underlying our defense budget should be consistent with what we plan in practice to do. This violates, I recognize, the principle of ambiguity in the conduct of foreign policy. There are admitted disadvantages in tipping off a hostile power as to the circumstances under which we may go to war. A degree of uncertainty is undeniably a valuable factor in deterring aggression. But the gray area should not be so large as to delude those who, if under attack, would have our best wishes but might expect our armed support. A coherent defense program can never be constructed if we continue to leave the architects confused about the purposes we want it to serve. ■

Memo of the Month

Dear Old Golden Rule Days

Paul Junior High School
Washington, D.C.
September 9, 1969

DEAR PARENTS:

I want you to know that we here at Paul are deeply concerned about the safety of your children.

Several things have been done to assure us that every person in the building is given greater protection. They are as indicated below:

1. Self-locking doors with panic bars have been installed on all entrances.
2. All gates to the playground are locked at 9:30 A.M. so that entrance to the building can be gained through the main entrance only.
3. Increased staff surveillance of buildings and grounds.

We have further requested that the Juvenile Court handle criminal attacks as criminal attacks and not as the mere exuberance of youth.

We have also urged that the following measures be taken immediately:

By the Superintendent of Personnel:

1. Provide two additional custodians to monitor entrances.
2. Provide a night watchman.

By the Chief of Police:

1. Establish short beats in the immediate area (to include building and playground) of all schools.

By the Teachers:

1. Limit hall passes to the absolute minimum.
2. Inform students that the punishment for threats and/or violence is immediate suspension and possible expulsion or incarceration.
3. Inform students of the seriousness of jeopardizing building security by opening latched outside doors, the penalty for which is immediate suspension.

Very sincerely yours,

/s/ EDWARD ARMSTEAD, JR.
Principal