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MORALS AND STRATEGY

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MORALS AND STRATEGY

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The community of intellectual and moral leaders of the nation have tended to treat with an aloofness that certainly reflects a feeling of moral opprobrium those who labor in the field of national defense, especially those who contribute to the intellectual content of that field. They frequently speak or write as if those professionally involved with national defense have somehow betrayed their intellectual heritage.

For example, in a review of John Strachey's book on The Prevention of War which appeared in The New Leader, one reads:

> For about half this book the American reader finds himself marching over grounds probably more familiar to him than to Strachey's English readers -- more familiar, perhaps, because unfortunately the RAND Corporation is located in Santa Monica instead of Sussex.

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> With urbane captiousness Strachey expounds the developed views on retaliatory capability, credibility, first strike, second strike, equations of deterrence, etc., of the American Clausewitzes: Messrs. Kahn, Morgenstern, Brodie, Kissinger and others. And as anyone who tries to keep up with it knows, the intellectual refinement of this literature has reached a point of such byzantine preciosity that one wonders whether there has ever existed in the history of the world a politician or a military commander capable of comprehending it, or acting upon it.

I would say that the answer to the implied question of the last sentence is "No," which is a bit irrelevant. I offer the passage not because of what the reviewer says but because of the feeling that pervades it, which is one of distaste. He doesn't say that these people (Kahn, Morgenstern, Brodie, Kissinger) are immoral, but he implies that there is something a little unspeakable about their work.

Now Mr. Peter Ritner, the reviewer, is unavoidably involved in the activity which he dislikes. For one thing, his taxes help pay for it. And if he means to protest against it only by this kind of statement, then his protest is extraordinarily weak. In other words, he is by default of real opposition a collaborator, and by much more than his monetary contribution. For there are certain benefits in this system which he is not only enjoying, but which he probably insists upon -- I mean those things which we generally imply when we talk about national security.

Once the decision is made that one is interested in maintaining certain national interests by force of arms if necessary, or at least by the provision of arms, then it is difficult to discern the limits that morality imposes

on one's efforts to prosecute that end. The end certainly entails the acceptance of certain well-established means. Nevertheless, the intellectual and moral community to which I referred often finds itself looking back nostalgically at its lost innocence. One frequently encounters, therefore, controversies in which there is a wilful confusion between virtue and ignorance. Let me offer a few examples.

I know of only one outstanding issue since World War II when it seemed to me that a moral issue was genuinely involved in a debate on national security. This happened not to be a politically important debate, because there was never any chance that the decision would be different from what it was. This was the practically hidden debate which was occurring in the early days of the atomic era -- in the late 40's, that is -- and it was carried on very largely sub rosa. It concerned the argument of the "preventive war school."

A small group of people, who were to be found mostly though not exclusively within the military, thought that the time to wipe out the menace of the Soviet Union was now. "Now, while we have monopoly of the Atom Bomb, and before they get it. We can't afford to let them get this instrument. Our bombers ought to be on the way -- the sooner the better." This in general was the voice of that school, which had a number of rather prominent adherents. One of them, Major General Orville Anderson, achieved public notice in the autumn of 1950 for advocating this idea, and at the same time got himself fired as Commandant of the Air War College.

In political terms this view was absolutely unimportant. Certainly the great majority of people in this country,

including the Administration of the day, were totally opposed to it. And I believe it was essentially an immoral proposition. Why? Because it required willingness to carry out tremendous destruction of innocent lives for the sake simply of sparing ourselves fear, a vague fear of ultimate danger.

One could also consider the decision in World War II to use the two atomic bombs over Japan, the only two in our arsenal at the time they were used. However, I think that most relevant comments on that issue concern the imputed necessity of dropping the bombs. After all, the immorality of doing so was somewhat overshadowed by the fact that shortly before the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs were dropped, there were 100,000 deaths from the great fire-raid on Tokyo with conventional incendiaries and high explosives.

I happen to believe that it was unnecessary to drop those bombs when we did because (1) our invasion was not scheduled until November, and we had the months from August to November to see whether or not the Japanese would yield, and (2) we were suffering very few casualties during that period, so that we could have afforded to wait. But if dropping those bombs was militarily unnecessary, which was not clear at the time, was it also for that reason immoral? In a context in which the Tokyo forms of attack were not regarded as immoral, it is not clear to me that it was immoral to use the atom bombs.

It is always desirable before we strike a moral pose to be clear about what we know and what we don't know. One case I have in mind is the great shelter scandal of two or three years ago. I call it that because I believe the intellectual community behaved scandalously. One image,

totally irrelevant and really trivial, was repeated ad nauseum. It pictured a man sitting at the door of his shelter keeping his neighbors out with a gun. "Isn't this what we are inviting?" the argument ran; "Isn't this what is going to happen?"

So far as a government program was concerned, the first question to be asked was: "Would a particular shelter program help to protect life in the event of war?" That is a statistical question, and it requires knowledge to answer it, not feelings. It is a problem one can study, and incidentally it has been studied -- by some of the unspeakable RAND people. But people who had given it no study at all were confident they had all the answers.

A second question to ask about a shelter program is, "Would it help to deter war?" One of the arguments frequently made at the time was that it would do the opposite. If true, that would be both pertinent and important. But on what basis was the truth of that assertion established? The answer is: on no basis at all, except strong distaste for the idea. I consider as merely preposterous the argument that people and their governments will be readier to resort to total war with nuclear weapons simply because there are shelters scattered around.

A third pertinent question follows the other two, "What would it cost financially?" Inasmuch as we are already spending about 51 billion dollars annually on national defense, which includes buying some very offensive weapons like long-range missiles, why not spend say one per cent of that amount on so purely defensive a medium as shelters? How could shelters be more "provocative" than missiles?

This is one of the numerous instances where the answers to all the pertinent questions can be determined, but only by a diligent search for the facts. Often the relevant research carries us only a small part of the way that we would like to go, but it's the best we can do. For example, that last question, "Would it help deter war?" is one on which we are not likely to get a firm answer. But systematic and disciplined speculation is a lot better than random, emotionally-motivated thoughts.

One can think of a number of cases that involve fundamentally the question of the knowledge we have of our major opponents, the Russians and the Communist Chinese. It is clear that we do have a great deal of knowledge at least about the Russians. That famous statement of Sir Winston Churchill's that the Russians were a mystery bound up in an enigma hidden in a riddle was untrue even at the time he made it. And since then there has been a great amount of very skillful research by a number of quite talented people, among whom, I am happy to say, there are a number with my own organization, The RAND Corporation. Some of our national debates, however, have been couched in terms that would suggest that such knowledge does not exist.

One such argument concerns the Korean War. There was not much debate about whether we should enter the Korean War. Later a few troubling issues did arise. One was whether the United States should use nuclear weapons. Mr. Truman made some random remarks at a press conference to the effect that the government had not ruled out consideration of the use of these weapons. Mr. Clement Attlee, then British Prime Minister, at once made a hurried trip to

Washington to persuade Truman to give no further thought to the use of nuclear weapons. I am sure we would not in any case have used them throughout the war, even though we had at that time an effective monopoly of atomic weapons.

There are a number of reasons why we did not use those weapons -- reasons which have nothing to do with morals. One was that we had only a small stockpile, which we wished to hold in reserve for what our leaders thought was the more threatening situation in Europe. Another reason is that our military people did not at that time think that nuclear weapons had much tactical utility, in which respect they were simply in error. At any rate, the reasons why we did not use the weapons were quite special to the occasion, and for the most part technical. I thought at the time that it was the better part of wisdom that we did not use them. My present attitude is that I'm not so sure. The Chinese Communists intervened in that war after we had been fighting for about five months and after we had suffered defeats without being provoked to use nuclear weapons. Would they have intervened if we had used them? The answer is not clear, but it is worth considering.

Something else happened at the end of the war for which we paid very bitterly. This was a much larger issue than the decision concerning the use of nuclear weapons. When the Communists showed an interest in discussing an armistice, which they communicated through the Russian delegate to the U.N. headquarters in New York, Mr. Truman immediately stopped an offensive which our forces had recently initiated and which was going extremely well. This was done for the sake of making a gesture -- a sort of goodwill gesture. Somehow we feel it is morally good

to make such a gesture. We learned soon afterward that at the time we made it the Chinese Red Armies had been in a state of incipient collapse. When we stopped the offensive we gave them a chance to save themselves, to restore their army from a condition of absolute demoralization. The result was that the negotiations for the termination of that war dragged on for something over two years. I submit that had we continued that offensive -- as nations have always done in the past -- until an armistice was actually signed, the negotiations would have lasted perhaps a week rather than the two years; at any rate they would have been concluded much sooner and would have been much more favorable to us. Further, the Chinese would not now be calling the United States a "paper tiger." One perhaps dismisses this kind of label, saying it does us no real harm. I think it does. I think it does us harm in a way that may ultimately cost lives.

The Berlin crisis, which is a continuing crisis, affords another opportunity for examining certain presumably "moral" attitudes. One attitude frequently encountered is that surely we ought to be able to negotiate with the Russians a mutually satisfactory settlement of the issues outstanding. Let us, in other words, reach a compromise. Those words "negotiation" and "compromise" have in our times certain moral overtones. I must ask simply -- and, of course, the Administration is obliged to ask -- negotiate what? compromise what? It seems quite clear from even a casual study of the record that every change that has been made since the end of World War II, every change in the <u>status quo</u>, has been a change in the Russian favor, without exception. Often these changes have been brought about

illegally through a fait accompli which we did not thereafter challenge.

It is in this area particularly that sophisticated knowledge about Russian behavior is extremely pertinent. We find that these minor aggressions are in fact probes, many of which are trivial -- pin-pricks, affronts against our dignity rather than anything else. For example: the demand that members of the American Government, whether civilian or military, show their papers at the checkpoints, even though the provisions of the agreement for the occupation of Berlin specifically rule out the necessity of U.S. officials showing their papers; or the request that all troops mounted on trucks should dismount when the caravan is stopped for checking on the Autobahn, despite the fact that the agreement clearly specifies -- or, at any rate, originally specified -- that they should not have to dismount.

The tendency of the uninformed is to say that a person of wisdom grants these things, which are obviously not important. But a person of wisdom does not grant these things, because they are important. They are important because they are intended by the Russians as probes to see how much we will tolerate, and to achieve gradually accumulating gains through steady erosion of our resistance. Informed people are generally convinced that we should resist vigorously the most minor aggressions; that it is not wise to ignore pin-pricks; and that initial resistance will save us from more serious confrontations later on.

The Cuban crisis of October 1962 seems to bear this out. One of the important questions to ask about the Cuban crisis is why did the Russians put missiles and

bomber aircraft into Cuba only to show themselves ready to take them out the moment they were confronted with our readiness to use force? The people who put them in were, after all, no tougher, no more aggressive, than the people who took them out; they were in fact the same people. It is clear that they put the missiles in not because they were willing to take great risks, which clearly they were not, but because they thought from our preceding behavior that we would let them get away with it, that we would make some kind of adjustment to their being there. This would then put them in an ideal situation for negotiating a new settlement in Berlin. What I am trying to suggest is that we must have flashed them the wrong signals in the year and a half preceding that week of crisis.

Among the signals we flashed to the Russians was, first of all, our conduct during the Bay of Pigs episode. A second signal was our tolerating the Russian military buildup up to the point of their putting in long-range missiles. We let them send a large number of troops there and put in all kinds of other military installations, including surface-to-air missiles. We tolerated all of this without real protest, benevolently saying periodically that the one thing we would <u>not</u> let them put in were long-range (or intermediate range) missiles. But our protests were by word and not deed, and inasmuch as we tolerated so much, can we blame the Russians for disbelieving us? We could have been spared the confrontation that finally did take place in October 1962 if we had previously convinced the Russians that we would not in fact tolerate missiles and bomber aircraft in Cuba. Was it really so hard to persuade them of that?

Incidentally, one of the things the Cuba episode proved, at least to me, is the benefit in terms of wear and tear on the nerves of being strong. When the crisis broke, I personally lost no sleep about it. I felt utterly confident that this crisis would not deteriorate into war. This confidence separated me from some of my friends, and I'm sure it annoyed them. I felt this confidence simply because I had information which convinced me that we were enormously superior in every important branch of arms to the Russians, and that they knew it. And knowing a few other things about the Russians, I was about as confident as one can possibly be under those circumstances that no conflict would come of it. I was sure that when they realized we meant what we said, they would yield. They would and could take no other course.

When that crisis was resolved by their yielding to our specific demands, Walter Lippmann and Joseph Alsop, among others, rushed forward with a round burst of applause for our government for its wisdom in granting the opponent a broad avenue of gracious retreat, thus sparing him excessive humiliation. This we presumably accomplished by limiting our demands. Here is another example of emotion getting the better of our knowledge. This attitude might apply to other people but we know enough about the Russians to doubt whether it applies to them. I mean "Russians" not ethnically but in terms of the particular and peculiar characteristics of Bolsheviks.

Throughout the Cuban crisis, Khrushchev acted absolutely in the classic Bolshevik pattern. The old Bolshevik pattern of precepts, which is available to us for study, includes a positive disdain for "humiliation."

Had Khrushchev been more concerned with it, he could easily have done things to conceal to some degree whatever humiliation attended his retreat. He seemed not to be interested in doing so. He probably regarded the conspicuous acceptance of humiliation as a virtue, since it proved he was a good Communist in the Leninist sense. Mr. Lippmann and Mr. Alsop were talking about a western and especially about a pre-World War I kind of diplomacy and a pre-World War I kind of diplomat, not a modern Russian one.

Concerning negotiations, it is obvious that they should always be calculated to serve the national interest. If this is disputed, I would ask: What other interests should they serve? After all, we enter these negotiations as a national entity. The persons empowered to carry out negotiations for us are empowered to do so for the country by the national Administration. World peace is also a national interest of the United States, and the charge cannot stand that the Administration is likely to be forgetful of that.

But before making any far-reaching decisions of national policy, whether for negotiations or for anything else, we must take full account of the nature of the situation and the nature of our opponent. In many important instances there is far more relevant knowledge available to us than the proponents of some policies are able to understand. The entire burden of my argument is that this knowledge should be further cultivated, and it should be applied.