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*Military Planning
Today
Calculus or Charade?*

Carl H. Builder

Project AIR FORCE



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PREFACE

This monograph was written as a more complete response to a question recently posed by a senior military leader during an informal conversation with several planners and analysts, including the author. The question (paraphrased here) was, “How can we define and explain the military capabilities we *need* at this time of great change?” The author’s short response, then and now, is “We can’t.” What *can* be defined and explained are the military capabilities that can (and cannot) be provided at any given level of funding. There is no single, correct answer. The following text is an amplification and defense of that response.

This monograph was prepared using concept formulation funds in Project AIR FORCE’s Strategy and Doctrine Program. Its purpose is to stimulate thinking in the United States Air Force and elsewhere about the future role of air power in the context of the changing national security environment and U.S. national security strategy.

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SUMMARY

The military planning calculus introduced by Secretary of Defense Robert Strange McNamara in the mid-1960s still provides the structure for defense planning today, even though the Cold War is over and national security has shifted from a seller's to a buyer's market. Built into that calculus is the idea that we start with our national objectives, the threats to those objectives, and proceed logically through the design of the needed military forces to the bottom line—the presentation of the bill to be paid by the American public.

However appropriate that calculus may have been at the height of the Cold War, when the nation's very survival appeared to be on the line, it is no longer. Under the circumstances of the Cold War, the American public did what it had to do: It paid the bill. Now the extortion of the Cold War (metaphorically, at the point of a thermonuclear-tipped missile) seems to be receding like last night's nightmare.

The American public shows signs of wanting to express its preferences on the size of the insurance policy it wants for national security, given the many competing claims for the borrowed money in its purse. Defense planning, instead of toting up the bill to meet declared objectives and threats, may instead have to offer alternative military capabilities (and risks) over a range of prices, just as competing suppliers of goods and services do in their markets.

The calculus, although logical in its constructs, always contained fictions about the objectives (we changed the details to cap the demands for forces), about the threats (we swept some nasty problems up as "lesser included" threats), and about our abilities to derive the required forces objectively. But the pretenses in the calculus were

worth its product—a clear rationale for the bill presented to the public.

Now, however, the structure of the calculus is unraveling. We can no longer credibly peg the objectives and threats where they will support the bills we would like to present. The longer we hang on to calculus, as a comforting vestige of the Cold War, the more we risk the credibility of defense planning. In the buyer's market for national security now emerging, we must offer products (forces and capabilities) at competitive prices—competitive between the suppliers (the services) and competitive with the other societal demands on the public purse.

THE CALCULUS THAT CAME TO STAY

For the past forty years, American military planning has enjoyed a remarkable stability in the unquestionable urgencies of the Cold War. The nation's most vital interest—its very survival—was directly threatened by an aggressive adversary bent on world domination. It was a threat appreciated not just by the military, but by the entire nation.¹ For the past thirty years, that stability was overlaid with the rationality of a calculus² first implemented by Secretary of Defense Robert Strange McNamara and subsequently refined and institutionalized by growing cadres of defense planners and analysts.³

The calculus said that our needs for military capabilities could be logically deduced from our national objectives and the threats our potential enemies could pose to those objectives. The forces to provide the needed military capabilities (at some prescribed level of ef-

¹During the waning years of the Cold War, particularly during the divisive war in Vietnam, it was easy to forget just how aggressive the Soviet Union had been under Stalin in the first years after World War II and how that threat cast the shadow of impending war over the American public. In the early 1950s, military planning often reflected preparations for war with the Soviet Union only several years hence.

²The term, *calculus*, is used consistently throughout as a shorthand for the formal defense planning process we use to propose, design, develop, equip, deploy, and fund our military forces. It is a process that involves the Department of Defense (DoD), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the three military departments, and the four military services in a carefully scripted biannual bureaucratic dance, which produces an interwoven web of coordinated defense planning documents.

³One of the earliest refinements of the calculus was the Planning, Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS), which extended the analytical framework from objectives to resources. A recent refinement of the calculus is the one proposed by Glenn Kent in *A Framework for Defense Planning*, RAND, R-3721-AF/OSD, Santa Monica, August 1989.

fectiveness) could be selected from the least-cost options available or devisable. The price tag for those forces was the bill that the American public should be (and for the most part proved) willing to pay.

This calculus has been institutionalized for so long—throughout the professional lifetimes of its current practitioners—that it has become implicit in our thinking. Even though the Cold War is over, we continue to ply its rigid catechism in a new world where both national objectives and threats are increasingly ambiguous and argued. We suppose that if we could somehow state the objectives and threats as cogently as they were stated during the Cold War, we should be able to present an appropriate and acceptable bill to the American public. But the objectives and threats no longer present themselves as starkly⁴ as they did during the Cold War. Nevertheless, we persist, acting as if the real planning challenge is reformulating or repackaging the *components* of the calculus.⁵ We do not challenge the calculus itself; it has been so logical, so useful, in the past that it simply *must* be right for the future.

However, the calculus was always an intellectual device more than it was an immutable truth. Secretary McNamara originally sought the calculus as a cap to put on the American military's seemingly insatiable appetite for resources during the buildup of nuclear missile forces.⁶ If we needed any evidence of that delimiting purpose, we found it in the title of the definitive book by masters of the calculus,

⁴The objective of national survival against the threat of an aggressive communist bloc armed with thousands of nuclear weapons could hardly have been more stark.

⁵The struggle to reformulate the components of the calculus is captured by James A. Winnefeld in *The Post-Cold War Force-Sizing Debate: Paradigms, Metaphors, and Disconnects*, RAND R-4243-JS, Santa Monica, 1992. He compares then House Armed Services Committee Chairman Les Aspin and JCS schools of thinking, which have polarized around redefined objectives and threats, respectively.

⁶For example, the Air Force originally talked of 10,000 and then 3,000 Minuteman missiles. This was cut back to 1,700 and, later, to the final number of 1,000, under relentless pressure from McNamara. For the evolution of these (and other) numbers, see Desmond Ball, *Politics and Force Levels*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980. The 3,000 number was, inter alia, the objective force established by General Thomas White in 1959, according to Jacob Neufeld in *The Development of Ballistic Missiles in the United States Air Force, 1945-1960*, Office of Air Force History, Washington, D.C., 1990, pp. 229, 230.

*How Much Is Enough?*⁷ The calculus was supposed to tell us how much was enough; but in reality it was McNamara who defined and redefined the objectives as necessary to keep the demands within affordable bounds.⁸ In effect, he preserved the calculus by moving the goal posts as necessary to fit them within the public purse.⁹

Later, the costs of the “conventional” (nonnuclear) forces exerted pressures upon the budgets; but changing the objectives for them was more obvious and seemed impolitic; so an acknowledged gap was allowed to grow between the objectives and the capabilities of the forces—under the euphemism of an “acceptance of risk.”¹⁰ That gap grew over the years until the forces required to achieve the objectives were little more than a dream—a wish list, a logical hook upon which to hang the significantly smaller, affordable forces. Two sets of books were then kept, one for the “objective” forces and another for the “planned” forces. The objective forces were those “owed” by the public to the military if it was expected to do its “proper” job, while the planned forces were what the military was willing to accept as a temporary expedient and risk until the “debt” could be paid. This was a classic bureaucratic ploy: The military settled for less but retained its marker for more.¹¹

⁷Alain K. Enthoven and Wayne K. Smith, *How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961–1969*, Harper & Row, New York, 1969.

⁸McNamara defined the objective criteria for the retaliatory nuclear strike forces in terms of the destruction of certain fractions of the Soviet urban population and industrial floor space. These fractions were steadily decreased in order to cap the rising costs of the nuclear strike forces.

⁹After World War II, we sought to plan our force structure for waging 2.5 wars—a major war in Europe, another in Asia, and a smaller (half) war somewhere else (typically in Latin America). This derived from the World War II image of our force capabilities. Later, McNamara explicitly reduced this objective to 1.5 wars when it became obvious that the forces in hand fell far short of a capacity for 2.5 wars and, I would argue, the budgets required to increase them could no longer be politically sustained. On the other hand, my colleague Kevin Lewis argues that disgust with the war in Vietnam and recognition of the Sino-Soviet split were probably more important reasons than budget considerations for scaling back from the 2.5 wars objective. Both arguments may apply—one for the reality and the other for the rationale.

¹⁰The gap between the JSOP (Joint Strategic Objectives Plan) and the JSCP (Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan) forces was presumed to be a measure of the risk between what we would buy and what we should have for confident achievement of the objectives.

¹¹Kevin Lewis points out that the ploy involved bargains struck between the military and its civilian leadership. For example, in the post-Vietnam planning environment,

Still, the calculus was preserved because it provided a rationale for the public's bill (really, for a much larger, deferred bill) and a predictable set of rules under which the military services could bid for (and share) scarce resources. What had begun as a civilian-made harness for control of the military had become the military's pacifier and security blanket. The calculus had become an addictive convenience—a comfortable set of rules and an explanation. The military had joined in the charade.

Now we pursue the calculus as the only stable framework in a turbulent world with few attractive references for military planning. Budgets, objectives, and threats all seem to be in sharp declines—in what some have described so vividly as “free fall.” Still under the spell of the calculus, we hope to articulate new national objectives and threats to replace that clear imperative of the Cold War—survival of the nation against the implacable threat of an aggressive nuclear-armed superpower.

So, we find ourselves talking about world flash points, tin-pot dictators, radical fundamentalism, oil as lifeblood, the responsibilities of the only remaining superpower, and simultaneous regional contingencies as the security challenges of a new world order. But neither the new objectives nor the new threats are compelling matches for the forces we seek or the bill we would present to the public. Being able to fight in several simultaneous regional contingencies against local bullies does not convey the same Cold War sense of urgency as avoiding Armageddon.¹²

The calculus is the deeper problem, not the times. The calculus has always been window dressing; the forces before and during the Cold War were really defined mostly by the limits of the budgets and the prerogatives of the services. The calculus was a pretense like the “emperor's new clothes”—a logical formalism that made us feel better about a process that, in truth, we always knew was far too arbitrary for the issues it was supposed to resolve. We held steadfastly to

the Army reduced its force structure with the full understanding by the civilian leadership that the Army would eventually go back to its original levels after the disruptive demobilization from Vietnam had been completed.

¹²Even our conventional forces were ultimately tied to the threat of Armageddon: They had to be sufficiently robust to credibly link their defeat to our threat of nuclear escalation and, hence, to Armageddon.

the pretense even though we knew that defense budgets were often used as an elastic buffer between national resources and demands.¹³

So now we find ourselves trying to make the planning calculus work for us because it was predictable and comforting—not because we are any longer sure that it describes how things will work in the post-Cold War era or that it ever described how things really worked during the Cold War. Surely, the time has come to consider alternative planning schemes and the price we pay for adhering to a calculus that may turn out to be yet another anachronism of the Cold War.¹⁴

¹³During the Cold War, defense budgets were expanded and contracted according to the nation's needs to increase or decrease government spending during recessionary and inflationary periods. The defense sector was consistently the best (most prepared) to absorb additional funds when the government needed to spend more and also the best (most quietly obedient) in taking budget cuts when the government needed to reduce spending in favor of other sectors.

¹⁴Other anachronisms that we took to be the norm rather than the exception during the Cold War were large, standing military forces in peacetime, constantly ready strategic nuclear strike forces, and a large military-industrial complex. Although the communist threat gave these things a specific focus, we thought they were more general imperatives of a superpower in the modern world; if communism went away, we assumed that other ideologies and superpowers would present new, somewhat similar threats.

If the calculus never really described how we *made* military planning decisions but how we tried to *explain* them, then there is the risk that military budgets will not follow the logic but still seduce the decisions. By maintaining the fictions of the calculus in the face of declining budgets, we invite self-deception more than we clarify the issues and our choices: Under the calculus, a budget reduction can be too easily interpreted as a *temporary* increase in risk, when, instead, it should be a signal for the outright elimination of certain capabilities and forces. Successive budget decrements can lead to “salami-slicing” of the force structure when bold amputation of some force elements would be prudent.¹ It isn’t that we do not foresee the possibility of successive budget reductions; they are all too apparent; but the *fiction* of the calculus permits us to avoid confronting the ugliest implications of retrenchment—deciding which of our children must be abandoned.

¹At some reduced level of military funding, it is apparent that some capabilities cannot be *maintained* in a reduced size or readiness but will have to be *rebuilt* largely from scratch if ever needed or affordable again. Production facilities for large numbers of ships, tanks, and planes are one example. The navies of smaller nations provide additional clues: At some level, navies abandon their efforts to maintain aircraft carriers—even one carrier demands too much infrastructure for them to maintain at the expense of other things. At still lower levels, they may abandon submarines, which also demand substantial infrastructure. Frigates and then patrol boats are usually the last to go as navies are forced to shrink. Of course, each nation faces somewhat different security threats and resource constraints; but those differences do not entirely mask the “food chains” of capabilities that are evident in the capital-intensive navies and air forces of the world.

The mischief is extensive: The calculus—by holding out implicit expectations of budgets to meet our self-positing objectives and threats²—off loads our shortfall into ambiguous “risk” accounts, invites salami-slicing rather than strategic amputations of the forces, and suppresses the tough choices about dividing the scarce resources among the military services. What could be more important, strategically, than the wrenching decisions to eliminate certain forces and to shift the allocations of budgets among the services? Yet, these are the very decisions that the present calculus comfortably masks rather than reveals.

What should we do instead? We might start with the obvious: We could plan against the most influential uncertainty affecting our military forces—which is neither objectives nor threats, but military budgets. This is precisely the uncertainty that the calculus was designed to suppress as a pretended *output* of the planning process, when it should have been (and indeed always was) an *input*.

What would happen if we *started* with alternative budget projections? We always did, of course, but in a very discreet, off-line process where we could privately contemplate the consequences of possible, unwanted budget cuts. Such furtive looks (really preliminary plans) were not made public³ lest they become self-fulfilling prophecies. The calculus provided a safer way to make a public bid for more resources than were likely to be available; any cuts would then have to be imposed, not offered;⁴ and they would be brokered in a political process *outside* the logic of the planning calculus. Of course, the brokered political process always resulted in a new and

²Some among us would argue that we do not posit the objectives and threats—that they are defined for us by the nation’s leadership and intelligence agencies—but such argument is dissembling: It does not square with our vigorous bureaucratic participation in the formulation and critical review of all statements of national security objectives and threats. We may not bear the signatory responsibility for these statements, but our hand prints are all over them.

³Public in the sense of their exposure to those who might seize upon them to our disadvantage—such as service competitors, lawmakers, or their analysts and advocates.

⁴Or, if offered, carefully designed to put the favored children of lawmakers on the chopping block rather than our own—in the hope that the knife might therefore be spared. But this stratagem has backfired by stimulating the lawmakers to intervene increasingly with their own selective butchering and larding within the defense program—making the program, if anything, even less rational or coherent.

different budget mark—which was then ruthlessly applied to the force structure we had exquisitely constructed (programmed) upon the fiction that objectives and threats, not budgets, set the resource requirements.

So, one reason for not openly starting with alternative budget allocations was to avoid planning solutions that might be used against us. Such solutions were, instead, held closely. We never *openly* asked or answered the question of what force structure would make the most sense if the available resources were markedly less than those required by the calculus. It was safer to salami the force structure designed *from* the calculus than it was to design a force structure *to* the budget. It was safer because it gave nothing away and pushed the brokering into a political process where compromised outcomes were predictably equitable⁵ among the services.

⁵“Equitable” is not quite correct. It is doubtful that any of the services see their share of the budget pie as being equitable. What they seek most of all is to avoid any *reduction* in their share. Although an increase in their share is desirable, a reduction is a catastrophe. For the services, budget *shares* are more important than budget *size*. If all service budgets are increasing, but faster for one service than another, that is a cause for satisfaction to the one benefiting most, but it is cause for great alarm from the others. Budget shares are the measure of self-esteem; budget size is a measure of fortunes.

What, then, are the risks we run in designing force structures to alternative budgets rather than objectives and threats? Some of the obvious ones are that we shall:

- Admit that we could do with less
- See our admissions taken up as an offer to do with less
- Abandon any objective, logical, or rational basis for estimating the nation's defense needs
- Unleash open competition among the services for budget shares
- Lose our presumed *entitlement* to resources independent of the nation's political and economic vicissitudes.

All of these seem scary enough to make us risk-averse; but they do not stand up well under close examination: They are ultimately either self-serving or shallow assessments.

To be sure, there are risks in admitting that we could make do with fewer resources; but there are also risks in denying that widely appreciated fact. We know that we can do with less—indeed, we expect that future budgets will require that we make do with substantially less. We cling to the normative as a refuge from the objective reality.

Much, perhaps most, of the public believes that we can do with less. We appear to them to be bidding for more with full knowledge that we will have to settle for less. We seem absolutely determined not to ask for any less than we might be able to get. In labor negotiations and automobile retailing, that tactic is widely recognized by the

American public; but is that either the image or reality we wish to convey? Do we lose more credibility than we gain with the American public by ignoring or denying that we can do with less? Who do we most deceive in our pretension—the public, their lawmakers, or ourselves?

There are risks that our designs of forces to alternative budgets will be taken as offers to make do with less. Of course, suggestions of how we might do with less can and are offered by defense critics all the time.¹ Such suggestions are not always completely devoid of merit; but they are unlikely to be better or more broadly informed than those formulated by our military leaderships. So, by withholding our own designs for forces to alternative budgets, we do not prevent others from doing so; we just refuse to participate, wrap ourselves in the obscurities of the calculus, and thereby withhold some of the most informed (albeit biased) judgments from the debate.

We may hope that the critics' suggestions will fail from their flaws (which we can always be the first to point out); but have we really joined the debate? Are the offers to make do with less better if they come only from our critics? There would seem to be some risk if the public's knowledge of how the nation might do with less is devoid of inputs from those who are the most informed. Clearly, advocacy in the design of our military has taken on a bad demeanor; yet advocacy in almost all other sectors is seen as the source of inspired innovation.²

There certainly are risks in abandoning a rationale for the nation's defense needs that is based upon abstract ideas (like national security objectives and potential threats) in exchange for one that is based upon hard realities (like the available resources). The calculus

¹Defense critics, of course, are not confined to the lay public or academics; they are also found among lawmakers and their staffs and even among discontents in the ranks of other military services or disenfranchised factions within the criticized service.

²For example, most human enterprises of stunning effect—in transportation, medicine, governance, and science—have their origins in advocacy, in people who were strident advocates pursuing ideas that were contrary to the conventional wisdom of their day.

has seemingly provided an altruistic and arcane basis³ for toting up the defense bill—the price to be paid by the public, *for* goods and *against* evils, which only those who prepared the bill could fully understand and explain. But if the calculus is more a pretended than factual basis for defense planning, then its purported altruism is at best a charade and at worst a fraud, and its opaqueness to outsiders becomes a protective shadow rather than merely the inevitable and unfortunate consequence of complexity. Unless the calculus is the true and transparent basis for the design of military forces, its claims to altruism and objectivity are not just empty, they are perverse.

³Altruistic in the sense of serving causes larger than one's own institution; arcane in the sense of being so complex as to deny most people the ability to understand and debate the issues.

THE ALTAR OF JOINTNESS

Jointness is in vogue. The Goldwater-Nichols Act,¹ by making military promotions dependent upon joint service assignments, has made jointness a holy grail—something to be revered and sought in words and deeds (if not always in the deepest recesses of the heart). Anything that might reignite open competition between the services for scarce resources has become blasphemous or “politically incorrect” for an increasing fraction of the military.² The calculus provides a clear set of rules by which all the services must play in their requests for funds. Those rules suppress open conflict and invite cooperative behavior (“log rolling”) in budget allocations.³

Under the protective shadow of the calculus, the division of funds (budget slices) among the three military departments has remained

¹The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, enacted by the Ninety-ninth Congress, provided for a number of changes intended to enhance “jointness” in the American military, such as increasing the authority of joint commanders.

²Particularly those whose careers fall under the shadow of Goldwater-Nichols—the younger officers looking ahead to promotions under its strictures—and the Army, which has always been more dependent than the other services on joint concepts of operations.

³The cooperation typically takes the form of implicit agreements between the services to support each other’s requests or interests by pairs: “You support our request for system X and we shall support you on your request for system Y.” These brokered trades usually occur in the joint arena under the auspices of the service chiefs. They are one aspect of the political brokering of defense decisions that the calculus fosters but does not account for.

remarkably stable.⁴ That stability correlates with the calculus more than with the Cold War. During the Cold War, but prior to the imposition of the calculus by McNamara during the Kennedy administration, the budget shares fluctuated considerably.⁵ These fluctuations reflected the outcomes of competition between the military services, not just for the hotly contested “roles and missions,” but also for the most *efficient* means of fulfilling those roles and missions that were shared among the services.⁶

To abandon the calculus and substitute force designs based on alternative budgets would open the door to trading off one service’s design options for those of another—inviting the services to compete with one another in proposing the most attractive options for the use of scarce funds. For the disciples of jointness in all things,⁷ this competition would be a disaster. It would put defense planning back in the jungle of rampant interservice rivalry, the very jungle that Secretary of Defense McNamara set out to tame in the early 1960s through the calculus.⁸

⁴Just how stable the budget slices (fractions of the total) have been since the mid-1960s, when the calculus was first implemented, is evident from an analysis by Kevin Lewis in *National Security Spending and Budget Trends Since World War II*, RAND, N-2872-AF, Santa Monica, June 1990. Lewis points out that more than the budget shares have been stable: The force structures, as variously measured in macro terms, have also been highly stable since the mid-1960s.

⁵The variance in the service’s budget shares was more than *three* times higher in the 15 years before the calculus than it was in the 25 years that followed the introduction of the calculus in the mid-1960s. That change in variance is exclusive of changes in the *size* of the budgets, for it reflects how the budget pie was cut (in percentages) between the services, not the size of the pie. The variances were calculated by the author from the budget breakdowns in Kevin Lewis’ *National Security Spending and Budget Trends Since World War II*, for the periods 1949–1964 and 1965–1988.

⁶For example, in the 1948 Key West agreements dividing up the roles and missions among the services, the Air Force and Navy shared the strategic nuclear strike mission; but the Air Force initially provided what was generally perceived to be the more efficient means for fulfilling that mission. Thirty years later, the Navy began to dominate that mission when the survivability of its submarines was perceived to be superior to that for any land-based nuclear strike forces.

⁷Bear in mind that jointness need *not* be applied to all things. Jointness in *operations* is a different thing from jointness in force capabilities, logistics, development, acquisition, design, or planning. Here, the question raised is about the utility (or disutility) of jointness in *force design*.

⁸This recalls the bitter public debates between the Air Force and the Navy over bombers and aircraft carriers at the beginnings of the Cold War—which coincided with major shifts in budget slices among the three military departments during those

But, have we lost more than we gained through the suppression of service competition in force design?⁹ It is difficult to believe that the nation's security is best served by cutting the budget pie, as we have, into relatively constant shares—even as that pie grows or shrinks substantially—any more than we should believe that the force structure within each service should grow or shrink proportionately with the service's budget. An architect, faced with the prospect of a smaller or larger budget for a new home project, would almost certainly not increase or decrease the dimensions of all its rooms proportionately. Rather we would expect that some rooms would be added or deleted in their entirety, with some rooms changing little or not at all in their size.

So too, we should expect that prudent design of our military forces would reflect highly disproportionate changes in force structures and in service budget shares as the available resources for national security rose and fell. To be sure, certain designs can be adjusted at the margin; but sensible force structures must have break points where substantially different budgets result in substantially different designs and logic. We should be able to say,

Given a budget within a few percent of this figure, here is the most sensible force structure we can devise. It is based upon the following logic and involves the following concerns and risks. If the budget is much more or less than this figure, we would adopt a different logic and propose a different force structure. We are prepared to provide what we think is a reasonable range of such alternatives.

Would this result in anything markedly different from what we get from the calculus? Almost certainly so, for the following reasons: The calculus starts with objectives and threats that we *know* will not be fully supported with the available resources. The shortfalls are typically substantial, so the funded forces will end up far off their design point. The necessary adjustments will be accomplished by

years. The Air Force garnered the lion's share of the budget pie by proposing what appeared to be better (more cost-effective) options for the use of scarce funds. The uneven slices disappeared not because of the calculus, per se, but because of the political brokering that the calculus fostered.

⁹Kevin Lewis argues that we have not suppressed the competition so much as we have prevented the continuing competition from resolving anything by the rules imposed. Everyone competes, but no one is allowed to win or lose.

salami-slicing and political brokering—most often arbitrarily imposed from the outside by those less qualified than the designers to make informed trade-offs. On the other hand, forces specifically designed to alternative budget marks should be close to their design points—provided we offer alternatives that bracket the available funding.

JUDGMENTS OUT OF THE CLOSET

Would these alternative force designs be arbitrary without the logic of objectives and threats provided by the calculus? In principle only, for the salami-slicing and political brokering induced by the calculus vitiate much of its logic. If we design to alternative budget marks, we can take into *explicit* consideration many very real, judgmental factors that should (and do) affect the design of our military forces:

- The available resources
- The realistic prospects for future resources (growing or declining defense budgets)
- A wide range of explicit and *implicit* national objectives,¹ now and into the future
- A wide range of military threats and contingencies, including their relative likelihood²
- The health of our military institutions and their commercial suppliers

¹Some national objectives are simply impolitic if made explicit. Indeed, our dancing about on explicit national objectives is a symptom of the pretensions built into the calculus.

²One of the more invidious effects of the calculus is the incentive to design forces for a single, dominant threat that treats other threats as "lesser, included cases." History has proved, to our grief, that the lesser cases were often not easily included.

- The opportunities of (and incentives for) our military services to compete with one another for the provision of military capabilities that are most attractive to the American public.

All of these judgments—all of them very real and important—are generally subverted in the calculus: The budgets are inflated; the objectives and threats are stylized (often becoming cartoons, with a consequent loss of richness); and institutional considerations are suppressed as having no place or utility. We do lose more than we gain from the calculus; we pay too high a price for what we are compelled to abandon on its altar of altruism.

The calculus was, in part, intended to get us away from arbitrary judgments by the military leaderships, which were thought to be often stupid and self-serving. But time has taught us that civilians have no monopoly on wisdom or altruism. We certainly gained from the logic that the calculus proposed—thinking quantitatively about the relationships of means and ends—but we lost when the bureaucratic imposition of that logic led to the pretended exclusion of almost all that was judgmental. The loss of judgments and their integration in the human mind is the tragedy of the calculus.

Military planning is mostly art and some science; but the science has been given over to accountants and has been used to drive the art underground. The art will not go away because it is essential to military planning, regardless of attempts to cloak it in the language of science. The art will eventually prevail; but the pretensions to science remain strong, pervasive, and perverse. The calculus has pushed military planning into a corner where it is now almost completely lacking in common sense. In the extremes of the Cold War, that was tolerable, for the world we confronted was often not one of common sense.³ Now the absurdities of the Cold War and the calculus are much more apparent; and it is time to stop pretending.

³Many have observed that the tenets of nuclear deterrence did violence to common sense; but the imperatives of the Cold War drove bizarre bargains: mutual assured destruction was one of them.

Is national security just another public service commodity that must compete with others for funds at the public till? Yes, and no. No, in the sense that those who serve the nation's security in times of war may include those conscripted from the public itself. But more generally, in peacetime, national security always has been and will remain one of a number of public service commodities competing for public attention and funding. That is a difficult conclusion for those whose military careers have been dominated by the Cold War; but it was quite familiar to those who served before the Cold War; and it is likely to be more and more familiar to those who serve in the post-Cold War era.

The Cold War was an anomaly because it created the first seller's market for national security in peacetime. Never before had the nation's very survival been so immediately at stake; never in peacetime had the nation stood for so long, so close to a wartime footing. All military professionals serving today have never known anything but a seller's market for their services. The end of the Cold War was the end of that rare seller's market; we have entered a buyer's market for national security services; and we do not particularly like it.

The implication of a buyer's market for national security services is that we can no longer simply present a bill to the public for our services based upon our definitions of the national security objectives and threats—any more than an automobile dealer in a buyer's market can define our motoring needs and present us with a bill for a car. On the other hand, to use the same analogue, if we need a car des-

perately and there is only one available for sale (i.e., a seller's market), the seller can simply present us with a bill.¹

If we are in a buyer's market, we must *serve* it, not dictate our terms to it. That means we must provide a range of capabilities (products) corresponding to alternative budgets (prices). Can the public be trusted to choose wisely? Its record, over the past 200 years, is not a clear failure.² But, if we truly serve the nation's and its public's security, we *must* trust their judgments; otherwise our service becomes contempt. The public must be trusted with our proposals for alternative capabilities (and risks) corresponding to alternative budgets. It is their responsibility to dispose of those proposals. It is our responsibility to make those proposals (force designs) the best we can devise at a price and to present them clearly to the public.

Thus, to be prescriptive, we should:

- Design force structures to alternative budgets
- Define the capabilities and risks inherent in those force designs
- Define the budget scaling limits for those designs (i.e., the range of funding over which they may be reasonably expanded or reduced without major redesign)
- Provide an array of such alternatives that covers the range of desired and likely budgets
- Allow the services to compete in their proposals for funding separately and together.

Dare we undertake such bold changes in military planning? They are no more daring than the changes now sweeping the world. Military

¹In 1950, the seller's market for used automobiles, which had prevailed for the decade during and after World War II, suddenly changed to a buyer's market with the first flood of post-war automobile production. The automobile dealers were at first unhappy with the collapse of prices. But as the public demand for new automobiles rapidly expanded in the 1950s, their demeanor changed. Perhaps there will be bright spots as well for the military professional in a buyer's market for national security services.

²Some have complained that the military must pay in wartime blood for the public's peacetime parsimony. But the blood paid is public blood; and the funds paid or saved are public funds. To separate *our* blood from *their* funds is not just divisive and elitist, it is factually incorrect.

planning, above almost all other things, must be prescient and adaptive in times of great change. Our forces are no longer the ones we sought at the height of the Cold War, but our planning calculus remains the same.

The planning challenges, however, lie not with the changing world—with the changes in our nation's objectives or enemies—but within ourselves. Planning *should* be our servant, but the incentives of bureaucracies lie in precisely the opposite direction—they would have us be servants to their rituals. We can refuse to be seduced by the calculus and its pretensions—even as we continue to fulfill its essential formalities.³ We can undertake commonsense planning any time we choose; and if we persist, we may eventually see the calculus transformed from our planning tyrant to our analytic assistant.

³If the calculus involves keeping two sets of books—one for the objective forces and another for the planned—we, too, ought to be able to keep two sets of plans: one for the calculus and another for ourselves.


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