

A TRIBUTE TO BERNARD BRODIE AND (INCIDENTALLY) TO RAND

Thomas C. Schelling

July 1979

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The 1950s were the first time in at least a century that Americans became professionally concerned, in peacetime, with military strategy. (That had not been the business of the Army or the Navy.) At Yale and at Princeton, at SRI and ORO and the Lincoln Laboratory, and at MIT, even at Harvard, but most of all at the Rand Corporation, this new academic profession grew in size and influence. The leading intellects of that movement--it had some of the characteristics of a movement, and was often seen as one--were known to each other and many became known to the public. The germination date was August, 1945; and the movement reached a kind of maturity from which it never recovered, when it moved in 1961 into the Establishment, the Departments of State and Defense. The idea stage was about over then, although books reflecting earlier thought and work continued to appear in the early 1960s.

Among the originators of that academic profession, Bernard Brodie was first--both in time and in distinction. He was one of the very few whose training was professionally oriented towards the study of war and peace, and he had published two excellent books by 1942, years before any of the familiar names of later years were associated with strategy. His *Layman's Guide to Naval Strategy* (from which the first word in the title was deleted so that the Navy could assign it to officers without embarrassment) contains some of the best early "systems analysis" I ever saw, all presented in straightforward English. As editor and one of the chief contributors to *The Absolute Weapon* (1946), he set standards for thinking about nuclear strategy and made predictions that could actually be falsified or verified by later events, an unfashionable kind of prediction then as now. And his articles on limited war, deterrence, and strategy as a science, in *World Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The Reporter*, culminating in *Strategy in the Missile Age* (1959), were of an analytical and literary distinction that set him apart. He was a central figure in the Rand "oral tradition" that gave shape to strategic thinking as it emerged in the 1960s and--it is still about all we have--the 1970s.

By the middle 1960s he had to change sides on a number of policies to oppose "carrying an intrinsically good idea so much too far," publishing the brief and slightly polemical *Escalation and the Nuclear Option*, seeming to relish his first publication in more than a decade that did not have to meet the requirements of security clearance. And in 1973 he published *War and Politics*, turning his historical perspective for the first time since *Naval Strategy* to the bitter non-nuclear wars that were real in his lifetime, rather than the hypothetical nuclear wars that his own work, I truly believe, has helped us to avoid. Anyone who, nostalgically or in search of wisdom, takes one of Bernard's books from the shelf will be quickly reminded of the breadth and the depth of Bernard's thinking, his use and enjoyment of history, and the taste with which he wrote English. He, more than anyone else, helped us to learn to think about how to survive in a world with nuclear weapons.

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