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INTRODUCTION

National decision-making in a crisis has become the object of study by planners concerned with military force composition, military budget allocation, force deployment, arms control, military air programs, nuclear weapon doctrine, and command-control-communication. Among those concerned with command-control-communication at the national level, there has been widespread attention to the requirements for survivability and for providing a timely, accurate picture of conflict situations. Less attention has been given to another dimension of the command-control problem--accomplishing the political direction of the military forces, especially in the event of a crisis that is rapidly escalating and nuclear. This paper will focus on the dilemmas the political decision-maker faces in conveying his intended conduct of such crises and on the problems the military agencies have in adapting to intended conduct.

We have studied hypothetical crises by means of hand-played games. The proceedings of these games raise important questions about the ways

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in which the political decision-maker's policy, perspective, and style are translated at subordinate military levels. During crises we may expect a President will want to guide military agencies without becoming bound or rigid in policy. His crisis management policies are almost sure to have subtle and flexible qualities. These qualities will not easily lend themselves to communication through a hierarchy of military command, particularly when the government is under the stress of major crises.

It is commonplace in recent years for a President to insist on direct and personal control over military actions during a direct confrontation with the nation's adversaries. We do not, for example, observe any public trends toward the predelegation of authority to employ nuclear weapons. But even when a President strives to keep direct rein on military actions, he cannot avoid great reliance on his military subordinates; for when a crisis creates many concurrent points of action and decision, there is a need for his delegating authority. This raises fundamental questions that bear on national command-control arrangements. What must be communicated from a President so that subordinate military levels can operate to satisfy his aims? How does a President who sometimes wants to remain uncommitted as to the next military moves give his military agencies sufficient anticipation of what they may be called upon to do next? How might the responsibilities of military agencies interfere with the political conduct of a crisis?

THE RESEARCH APPROACH

Is crisis management researchable? A priori, one cannot judge. We have elected to use hand-played games to acquaint ourselves with the

subject, but not because we regard the games as simulations of government operations during a crisis. Rather, we view hand-played games as a study technique enabling analysts to work together and to observe how various factors might enter and interact in problems seemingly too complicated for comprehensive formal models. If a politico-military crisis game seems sometimes worth the cost, it is for reason of having afforded new insights to the participants and having suggested new or better questions for discussion and study.

Our gaming was organized grossly as follows: A RED team represented the interests of one or more U.S. adversaries; a BLUE team represented the United States and, sometimes, one or more of its allies; and a CONTROL team both acted as a game manager and filled the role of the world environment exterior to the crisis principals. The BLUE team was structured, to serve the research purposes of this paper, into four sections: a supreme political authority (BLUE POLITICAL); a military command level equivalent to the National Military Command Center (NMCC); and two military headquarters equivalent to those of SAC and NORAD. Only formal communications were permitted among the four separated BLUE sections, by note or by conference, always monitored by CONTROL.

A play involved sixteen participants (mostly civilian professionals with various backgrounds and a few military officers) who were given a comprehensive and detailed scenario of world events leading to the crisis. The play proceeded in discrete jumps of action, decided by RED and BLUE, respectively, and communicated to CONTROL--on the basis of current crisis knowledge provided to the playing teams by CONTROL.

In the remainder of this paper we shall focus particularly upon one aspect of the play, the dialogue among the BLUE sections as they attempted to cope with rapidly escalating actions in limited warfare.

THE CRISIS SITUATIONS

The gaming dealt with crisis situations that were hypothetical confrontations between the United States and various elements of the Communist bloc in the time frame of the late sixties. The details of the situations will not be presented here, other than our mentioning that, on the U.S. side, USAF tactical aircraft were involved in both conventional and nuclear missions; USN ships and aircraft in both conventional and nuclear roles; USAF strategic aircraft in tactical nuclear missions; and U.S. ground forces in limited numbers.

Our emphasis (on the interactions among the several BLUE POLITICAL and military sections in a nuclearly escalating limited war) sometimes required regulation of the RED side, to constrain it to the role of a stubborn and ambitious foe, confident that mutual strategic deterrence was not only stable but would afford a license for local aggressiveness, particularly when RED was exploiting a conflict situation not originally of its own making.

In these exercises CONTROL's assessment of individual engagements did not necessarily reflect the expected military outcomes. It was more important for CONTROL to create opportunities for difficulties to develop between policy-makers and those responsible for the execution of policy, to reveal possible sources of failures in U.S. crisis management.

AN EXAMPLE OF POLICY AND STYLE IN AN INTENSE CRISIS

We can view BLUE POLITICAL's policy choices for managing a crisis from two directions, both important. The specific moves against BLUE adversaries suggest ways in which a nuclear crisis might be handled by actual decision-makers in an escalating crisis. But our primary interest is rather in the relation of BLUE policy and style to command and control.

The example of a BLUE crisis management policy we have chosen contains the following elements. BLUE POLITICAL wished

- o to appear to be a reluctant decision-maker, to have its choices appear to be forced on it, to thrust the burden of escalation on the adversary

This tactic, BLUE POLITICAL hoped, would convince RED that the responsibility for escalation did not rest with BLUE. By emphasizing that it was prudent, cautious, and willing to negotiate, but at the same time was not entirely free in its choices, BLUE POLITICAL hoped that RED would come to believe that BLUE could conceivably lose control of the crisis. The conduct of a high level crisis in a stable deterrent world, BLUE POLITICAL believed, required strong emphasis on the inability of both sides to control events.

- o to estimate the intent behind the adversary's use of nuclears rather than replying automatically tit-for-tat

BLUE POLITICAL felt that having invulnerable, reliable, and controllable strategic weapons permitted pauses in the crisis action.

- o to emphasize the restoration of the status quo ante as a precondition for negotiation

BLUE POLITICAL believed that RED could not be permitted to use its own aggression as an issue in negotiations.

- o to rely on ambiguous and contingent threats of retaliation in response to RED actions rather than threatening automatic retaliation

BLUE POLITICAL preferred this position, because it gave both sides an opportunity to dampen the crisis if that seemed desirable.

- o to provide clear and explicit signals to the adversary by its own actions

BLUE POLITICAL aimed to create conditions where it would be difficult not to show resolve. For example, BLUE POLITICAL expected to make public announcements of various intended actions in the crisis area. Then, BLUE could not back down without penalty. BLUE expected that RED would know this, and therefore hoped that the credibility of its escalatory threat would be enhanced.

- o to employ both private and public channels of communication in ways that did not signal lack of BLUE resolve and presented opportunities to the adversary to retreat without humiliation.

Given this particular set of policy choices the relevant command-control issues (in the hypothetical crises we examined) are:

- (1) Was BLUE POLITICAL's style--the composite of the image it presented to lower echelons, its interactions with lower echelons, and its choices about internal information flows--adequate to insure that military sections took actions consistent with prescribed policy and avoided actions that were inconsistent?
- (2) How well were the BLUE military sections able to adapt to the military constraints imposed by the policies? and
- (3) How well was BLUE POLITICAL able to adapt to command and control constraints which might be expected to emerge during an intense crisis?

In the following sections we explore these issues in some detail with specific attention to choices about information flow and, crucially, differences in responsibilities, perceptions, and interpretation of signals--as revealed by our crisis exercises.

INTERNAL INFORMATION FLOW

BLUE POLITICAL aimed to provide the BLUE military sections with relatively complete information about RED actions and BLUE intent throughout a crisis. By passing on nearly all of its own information-- diplomatic, political, military--BLUE POLITICAL hoped to achieve two goals with respect to the military sections: to illustrate the problems it was facing and to instill in subordinate sections some sense of its own position and perspective; to give the military sections some sense of participation in the decision-making process.* Of course, the military sections would have to infer a good deal even with the same information as BLUE POLITICAL because of their physical separation.

There is little evidence in our gaming that BLUE POLITICAL's aims were successful. Military recommendations to BLUE POLITICAL did not reflect the latter's style, despite the large volume of information flowing between the political and military sections. Information flow presumably could have been enlarged. But we believe that differences between BLUE POLITICAL and the BLUE military sections would have persisted even with better information or more explicit guidance. These differences relate both to the definition of military responsibilities and to alternative interpretations of crisis events.

* Because of time constraints in our gaming which, however, have real world analogues, transmittal to the military sections of BLUE POLITICAL's draft messages and incoming external information reduced the number of decisions BLUE POLITICAL had to make. The small size of BLUE POLITICAL's staff made it essential that priorities be assigned to decisions. By not filtering information or discriminating among its subordinate sections, BLUE POLITICAL eliminated an entire class of decisions.

DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL AND MILITARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Throughout a crisis, the BLUE military sections demonstrated a concern for preserving civilian population and military forces. At times this concern and the recommendations generated by it brought the military sections into conflict with BLUE POLITICAL's policies of crisis management. There were differences over civil defense, the protection of the theater forces, and the role of the strategic forces.

Civil Defense

BLUE POLITICAL, simultaneously with limited nuclear actions in the theater, preferred to implement all civil defense readiness measures short of actually moving the population from urban areas and/or into fallout shelters. In addition to their insurance function, BLUE POLITICAL intended these actions to signal concern to RED about possible escalation to strategic exchanges. However, BLUE POLITICAL believed that civil defense measures should be carefully applied to avoid a false signal of BLUE strategic preemption.

The military sections, in contrast, recommended broader civil defense actions at this level of theater action: that the urban population be immediately ordered to take shelter or be evacuated; that civil aircraft be grounded; and commercial broadcasting be stopped. BLUE POLITICAL did not accept these recommendations. It had to weigh the value of the moves as insurance against their possible misinterpretation as signals.

After further escalation, BLUE POLITICAL did execute full civil defense measures. Still, BLUE POLITICAL attempted to use these measures as signalling devices. There was to be a gradual pace of implementing

them so that RED could see that BLUE was not preempting. A difference, therefore, persisted in style between BLUE POLITICAL and BLUE military sections, even when the former ordered the execution of options desired by the latter.

The BLUE military sections did not have the ultimate responsibility for managing the crisis. It was, therefore, natural that the insurance value of military measures should weigh most heavily with them. They were necessary, if the military were to discharge their war-fighting responsibilities. Thus, they made their recommendations on strict military grounds. Apparently, differences over civil defense derived from the different responsibilities inherent in the respective offices.

Protecting the Theater Forces

Differences in responsibility appeared once more in the policy conflict over the protection of theater forces. To deter an attack on the BLUE theater forces, the NMCC section recommended that BLUE inform RED that any major attack on the U.S. theater forces would be equivalent to a direct attack on the United States. It was the NMCC's duty to protect the forces under its command. The recommendation that BLUE POLITICAL commit itself to that protection in the same way and the same degree was natural. But BLUE POLITICAL felt it could not accept this definition, since it was attempting to keep the crisis localized. Accepting such a recommendation would have conflicted with the BLUE POLITICAL's policy and style we described above. Consequently BLUE POLITICAL sought ways to satisfy its subordinate military levels and still conform to its intended image of a reluctant decision-maker.

The responsibilities of the NMCC section often led it to insist that only the maximum threat of homeland retaliation could deter RED's local aggressiveness. But propounding such a view took the NMCC section beyond a narrow interpretation of its military responsibilities.

The Role of the Strategic Forces

The differences between BLUE POLITICAL and the NMCC section deepened in their dialogue about the role of the strategic forces. The NMCC section believed that the functions of the strategic forces, and especially any counterforce operations, should be to reduce as much as possible the RED damage-inflicting capability. But in a stable deterrent world, where both sides presumably had an unacceptable damage-inflicting capability even after absorbing a first strike by the other, BLUE POLITICAL believed that the function of the strategic forces was to aid in coercion of and bargaining with the adversary. As the crisis escalated, differences between these views became more pronounced. And they were exacerbated by the characteristics of the strategic forces themselves. Prudent measures to reduce the vulnerability of some of the strategic forces sometimes obscured BLUE signals to RED and made RED responses ambiguous and difficult to read.

DIFFERENCES IN READING SIGNALS

In addition to differences deriving from the responsibilities inherent in political and military offices, there was disagreement about the meaning of events themselves and about RED intent. From a purely military perspective, the intent of RED escalatory actions was not important. What mattered was the objective outcome. Whenever RED

destroyed something of great value to BLUE, the BLUE military sections believed that lack of a strong, immediate retaliatory response demonstrated lack of resolve. BLUE POLITICAL, however, judged events on the basis of their possible intent and, indeed, believed that the ambiguity of the enemy's intent could sometimes be the basis for an attempt to resolve the crisis, while BLUE prepared appropriate retaliatory action in the event the attempt failed. (BLUE POLITICAL believed that its strategic strength enabled it to pause.) An inadequate BLUE response, the NMCC section argued, would simply induce a tit-for-tat enemy response in return. The point here is that BLUE POLITICAL and the BLUE military sections had exactly the same information, but very different interpretations.

CONCLUSION

In our crisis gaming the political decisions did not produce consistent military actions nor were the military sections able to adapt promptly to political constraints. Moreover, the political leaders were often deficient in adapting policies to the command-control constraints that emerged during interactions with the subordinate military sections. It has been the theme of this paper that these failures did not arise simply from a lack of transmission media, or of timely information, but rather from differences in responsibilities, in perceptions, and in operational styles among the different agencies.

Failures in crisis exercises do not imply failures in the real world. The structure of responsibilities, perceptions, and styles are enormously more complex in the United States government. And the resources and choices available to decision-makers and other actors in

real crises are far greater. Subordinate military levels, particularly in stressful situations, are understandably motivated to participate in the political decision-making process. The legal and traditional subordination of the military to the political authorities in the United States limits the former's ability to participate and presents them with a serious procedural--and even ethical--dilemma. The problems of the President in controlling the military in times of crisis are matched by the problems presented to the military in trying to understand the executive objectives, an understanding that seems achieved mostly by participation in the setting of objectives. In sum, simplicity and consistency are desirable attributes of military control but these attributes can conflict with the political objectives of flexibility and subtlety in crisis management. The problem of minimizing this recurrent conflict is a central problem of command-control in crisis management.*

* We are indebted to William Jones of the Economics Department, The RAND Corporation, for many revealing expressions reflected in this paragraph.