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The search for a new kind of warfare

PARIS — The greatest lesson of the Vietnam war is that America still has many commitments abroad and still retains foreign policy aims that can no longer be maintained by the kind of military establishment, strategy or network of alliances now employed.

This is quite clearly emphasized in the diminishing power of NATO vis-a-vis its potential adversaries and also in growing pressure by U.S. opinion to reduce forces abroad, not only in South Vietnam and South Korea but also in Europe.

It has been reported widely that the National Security Council will soon get new levels for U.S. forces in Europe. Obviously any revisions will be down, not up. Since the days of President Kennedy, America has expressed disappointment with allied efforts to assume a larger share of the burden.

But this cannot be done for the simple reason that European opinion is even more reluctant than its American equivalent to pull in its belt and protect the West against a war which, it firmly believes, will never come.

The flexible response strategy worked out by the Kennedy Administration has been less successful than the massive retaliation strategy worked out by the Eisenhower Administration because, while both achieved their ultimate goal of deterring major conflict, the former failed in its avowed purpose of being able to win a limited war.

As in Korea, when we became involved in 1950 but had the highly useful umbrella of U.N. participation, we again became directly involved in Vietnam—this time alone. Moreover, the avowed

objective of building a sufficient conventional force to do the job effectively was not achieved.

Prof. Robert Lawrence of Arizona University, former Defense Department consultant, points out in a study scheduled for publication by the French Revue Militaire Generale: "We (the U.S.A.) will either have to increase qualitatively our ability to respond to local threats, or in the future we will have to see a substantial reduction in our commitments and influence over the course of events.

"In the aftermath of Vietnam, we certainly do not propose to fight a large scale conventional war with China. Yet the ability to engage Chinese military forces successfully may be a sine qua non of deterrence and stability in Asia."

It is an old axiom that one can only hope to preserve peace by being ready to defend it. All-out nuclear holocaust cannot be warranted by any conceivable excuse, but this has not prevented the kind of limited war which Kennedy's strategy hoped to be able to oppose and win.

However, the United States has proven unable to meet this kind of challenge. Limited commitments to conventional defense are seen as increasingly outmoded and yet total warfare is a dreadful absurdity that cannot be contemplated save as the ultimate deterrent only a superpower can afford to have and no one can afford to use.

Consequently the search focuses on a third solution — between impossible nuclear disaster and unsuccessful conventional hardware. The answer may well lie in the field of truly tactical atomic weapons. By this it is not meant to include those devices now loosely called tactical whose destructive power, although immensely smaller than that of the so-called strategic weapons, is often measured in kilotons although not megatons.

Research now proceeds in purely fission warheads whose explosive potential

can be reckoned in tons, not kilotons, and is comparable to large conventional bombs. Their shortlived radiation effects could destroy an enemy's troops without causing unacceptable damage in cities or other areas.

A second research endeavor concerns what are variously called "fusion enhanced radiation" or "neutron" warheads with relatively lower blast and heat collateral effects than those of existing atomic weapons. Experts contend that such arms could be employed with sufficient precision to avoid even so large a collateral effect on areas attacked as on those damaged by conventional American bombing of North Vietnam.

The argument is that Democratic societies can no longer limit themselves to weapons known to be outmoded but must find new arms whose power is not wholly unrestricted, even to the extent of the so-called tactical A-bombs in today's arsenals. There appears to be no other middle road between supineness and suicide.

Lawrence writes: "Minor powers have shown an ability to frustrate U.S. conventional capabilities." Much earlier Bismarck wrote: "We live in a wondrous time in which the strong is weak because of his moral scruples and the weak grows strong because of his audacity."

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