**SIGNPOSTS FOR AMERICAN STRATEGY**
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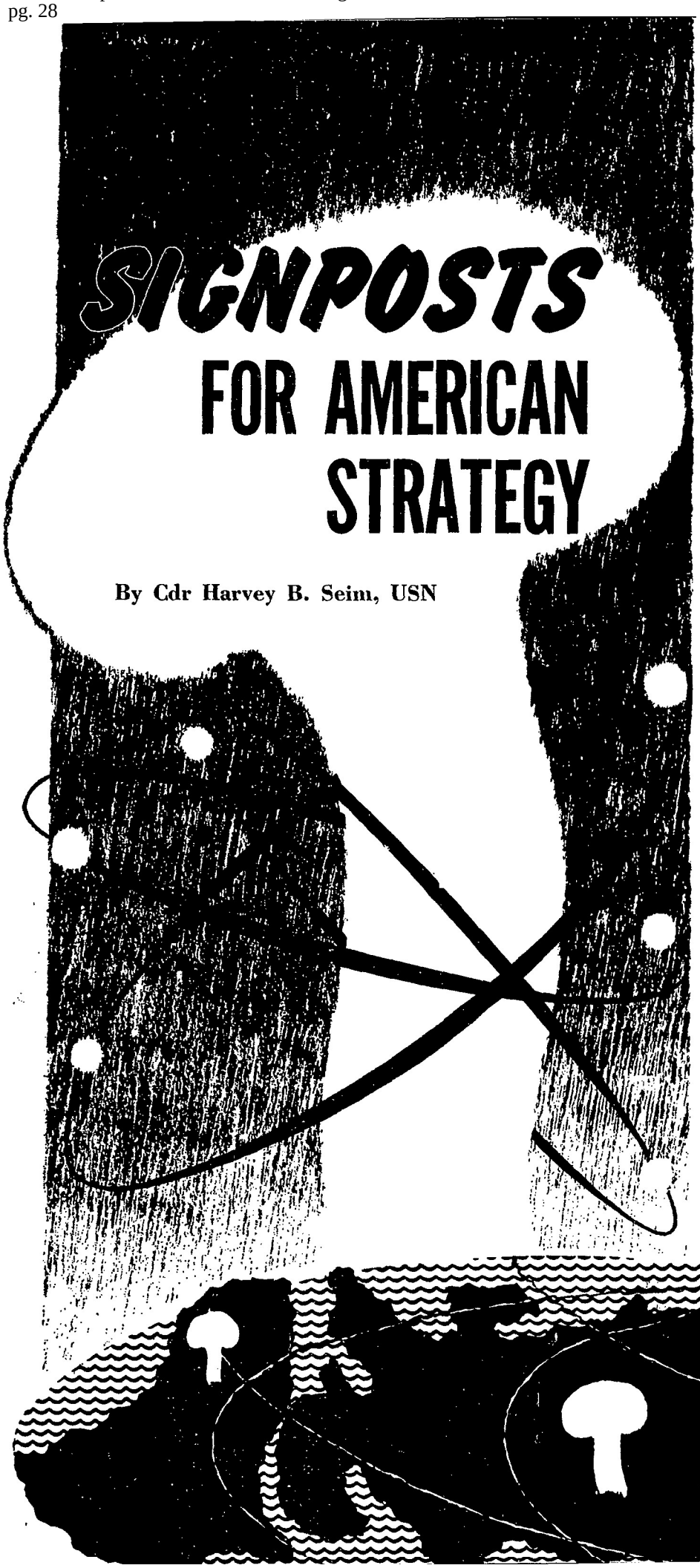


# SIGNPOSTS FOR AMERICAN STRATEGY

**By Cdr Harvey B. Seim, USN**

DURING THE PAST YEAR A NUMBER of trends in world affairs have become apparent which vitally affect the military aspects of US national strategy. Among these trends the following are significant: the growing awareness of the expanding Soviet atomic capability, the continuing search on the part of the United States for an acceptable disarmament formula, and our effort to reduce the heavy cost of maintaining a military establishment. Each of these trends has had and will continue to have a profound influence on the US military posture. For that reason, they merit further examination.

## The Expanding Soviet Atomic Capability

In 1949 most people in the United States were surprised, if not shocked, when President Truman announced that the Russians had exploded a nuclear device. Although we have had frequent reports from Allied sources of continued Soviet atomic experimentation, we have tended to be overly complacent about the implications of this activity. It is apparent that the USSR is making considerable progress toward parity with the West in atomic weapon delivery capability. This is underlined by the boastful claim of Nikita Khrushchev, that the Soviets have already achieved atomic parity. We can no longer afford to ignore consideration of the consequences of Russian attainment of a capability to strike heavy nuclear blows at the American continent. If they don't have this capability now, they soon will.

When the United States enjoyed a monopoly on atomic weapons and the means for their delivery during the first few years after WWII, we adopted as a cornerstone of our military strategy the maintenance of a capability for massive atomic retaliation. We created the world's finest strategic air force which had, and

still has, the ability to strike crippling blows at the very heart of Communist power if the Reds should be so rash as to start a general war. There is good reason to believe that exclusive Western possession of this atomic striking capability was the major deterrent to large-scale Soviet aggression. This nuclear capability may also have exercised a restraining influence on Communist aggressive designs of a more limited nature, but this is less certain. The efficacy of the massive atomic retaliation threat in controlling or countering Communist penetration in the peripheral areas can be questioned in the light of events in eastern Europe, Greece, Korea and Indochina since WW II.

Reduced to its basic terms, the situation was simply this: The United States possessed the means to strike a devastating blow at the center of Communist power; the USSR did not have the capability to do the same to the United States. Note also that it really doesn't make much difference whether this devastating blow is struck by a strategic air force with atomic weapons, or by missiles, or by a blanketing gas attack, or by armed invasion, or any other type of military force. The key element is the fact that one side could cripple the other while its own source of power remained untouched. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the Soviets would refrain from challenging the United States in a general war. It is also understandable that the Communists might hesitate to use their military power to overrun free territory around the periphery of the Iron Curtain, realizing that such action on their part could raise the spectre of immediate and overwhelming nuclear retaliation if the West could muster the will to retaliate. What happens when both sides have the capacity to strike crippling blows at each other's power centers?

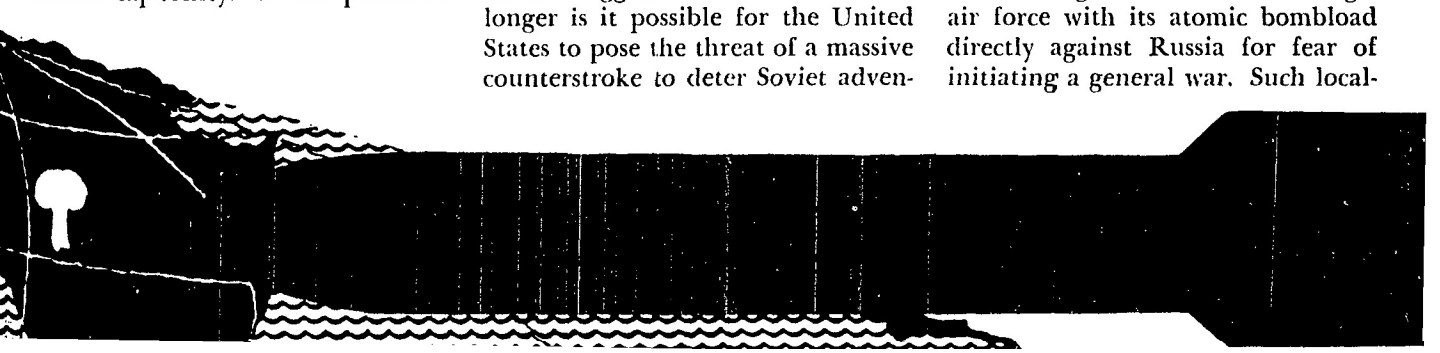
Today, we know that the West is no longer the sole possessor of an atomic capability. In all prudence we must now credit the Communists with having a capacity to strike directly and massively at the industrial complexes of all Western countries, including the United States. While we may strive to retain the technological superiority which will enable us to overcome Soviet defenses and deliver our weapons on target and at the same time defend ourselves against the Red onslaught, we cannot base our strategy on the assumption that we will always have this superiority. Therefore, we must assume that within a short period of time the Soviets will have sufficient atomic weapons with the associated delivery systems to enable them to strike effectively against the continental United States. As mentioned earlier, this is not restricted to a consideration of strategic air forces and nuclear weapons, although that weapons system is the most probable one through which the Communists will achieve parity.

In this connection, it is important to remember that the number of weapons in the respective atomic stockpiles begins to lose significance as the number increases. The significance in absolute numbers practically disappears once both sides have sufficient weapons, and the capability to deliver them on target, to achieve destruction of opposing power centers. When this situation materializes, we have a condition of parity and it makes no difference at that time whether the Allied stockpile far exceeds the number of weapons in the Soviet stockpile. This is just another way of saying that there is no particular advantage to having a capability of destroying Russia 2 or 3 times over, once the Communists have the ability to destroy us once.

One of the most obvious consequences of the achievement of retaliatory parity by the Soviets is the release or negation of a large measure of restraint which our atomic superiority formerly exercised over Communist aggressive intentions. No longer is it possible for the United States to pose the threat of a massive counterstroke to deter Soviet adventures in aggression. Under conditions of parity or near parity, both sides will have to anticipate that an exchange of atomic blows in an all-out war situation will bring about a large degree of mutual destruction. For the United States, this simply means that the conditions which would justify the execution of our massive atomic retaliation concept have become drastically narrowed. Henry A. Kissinger expressed it this way: "If we refused to fight in Indochina when the Soviet nuclear capability was relatively small because of the danger that a limited war might become general, we shall hardly be readier to risk nuclear bombing for the sake of Burma or Iran or even Jugoslavia. On the contrary, as Soviet nuclear strength increases the number of areas that will seem worth the destruction of New York, Detroit or Chicago will steadily diminish."

In essence, achievement of parity will force us to reserve our massive atomic retaliation for use only in the event of a direct Soviet attack against the power centers of the continental United States. Consequently, this brings about the interesting paradox that the achievement of parity reduces the likelihood of general war. Before the days of parity, we alone possessed the capability of striking directly at the heart of Communist power. This was an effective deterrent against the possibility that the Soviets would initiate general war because we could have acted to expand a limited war into general war with little risk to ourselves. With parity, this is no longer a rational choice on our part. On the other hand, general war is no more attractive to the Communists under parity than it was when the West was the sole possessor of an atomic capability.

We must anticipate that the Soviets, in whatever military aggression they may undertake, will resort more and more to localized pressure in a fashion which will undermine American willingness to use our strategic air force with its atomic bombload directly against Russia for fear of initiating a general war. Such local-



ized pressure could be in the nature of probing actions, seeking limited objectives and using puppet forces. With the conditions under which we might employ our massive nuclear counterstroke being ever more harshly circumscribed, we must resort to other measures to restrain Communist attempts at peripheral aggression. The answer is found in a strong system of collective defense.

This concept calls for the strengthening of those nations of the Free World which border Communist-dominated territory and which are, therefore, among the most likely victims of limited aggression. They must not only be made stronger militarily, but also fortified economically, politically and ideologically. Enlightened self-interest demands that the United States be prepared to help these countries to strengthen themselves. This is the rationale for our extensive military aid program. We should note, however, that the provision of equipment and training assistance is not enough. The concept of collective defense requires as well that the free nations on the periphery of the Soviet Bloc area be ready to assist one another against Communist encroachment, and that the United States be prepared to lend its weight to the collective defensive effort. The Reds cannot be permitted to pick off their victims one by one.

As indicated earlier, we can no longer rely on the threat of a massive nuclear counterattack against Soviet Russia itself as a deterrent to localized aggression. The main deterrent to war by proxy lies in the ability of indigenous military forces to fight an initial delaying action successfully until the capability of American back-up forces can be exploited to redress the balance.

These back-up forces should be in the nature of a strategic reserve, so organized and equipped that they may be instantly deployed to the support of the indigenous forces engaged in resisting local aggression. The American back-up forces should probably contain land, sea and air elements, although not all of these elements would necessarily be used in each instance. They should be equipped with a wide variety of weapons in order to give them a capability of exerting a military pressure tailored to fit the situation. They should be able to employ both nuclear and non-nuclear munitions, but the nuclear weapons would be of low yield—the tactical type of weapon. Aside from this diversity of weapons with its resultant range of pressure alternatives, our back-up forces should be capable of operating effectively in any of the areas of the globe under a wide span of climatic conditions. Furthermore, this versatility in operational capability should be matched by a capacity for rapid movement. Our back-up forces must be fully mobile. To insure such mobility, they must be streamlined and as self-sufficient as we can possibly make them.

Thus, one of the most important consequences of the expanding Soviet atomic capability is the need for the United States to forego sole, or even primary, reliance on a concept of massive nuclear retaliation to deter Communist aggression. While we must retain our capacity for striking back with an overwhelming atomic counterattack in the event of a direct Soviet attack against the United States, we must recognize that an effective system of collective security cannot be nurtured on that basis. We cannot limit ourselves to the sole alternatives of all-out nuclear war or surrender. In such a situation, other nations of the Free World, who must be brutally realistic when their own existence is at stake, would have to anticipate that the United States would elect general war if its own survival were in jeopardy, but that we would probably surrender to Communist pressure if it were localized and limited to the fringe areas. For the most likely victims, this is not a very comforting basis on which to construct a system of collective security. A sound system of collective security today, from our viewpoint as well as from the viewpoint of other free countries, requires that we not only maintain a capability to deter the Reds from initiating a general war, but that we also assist our friends to build up their own strength against local aggression and that we create the capability to come quickly and effectively to their aid with compact, versatile support forces.

In connection with approaching Soviet atomic parity and the growing Red capability to strike directly in force at the Western Hemisphere, we must appreciate more fully the need to disperse our own forces. Heretofore, we have been blessed with a safe haven in the United States where our own forces have been secure from a surprise assault. This is no longer true. Now we must so organize and deploy our forces that they are least vulnerable to unexpected attack. Here again, the value of streamlined, mobile and self-sufficient forces is apparent. Their worth is also evident when we consider the implications of the current trend toward disarmament.

### The Continuing Search for an Acceptable Disarmament Formula

Soon after the United States exploded its first atomic weapons, we proposed in the United Nations that an international system of nuclear control be established. While our first efforts along this line were frustrated by the Soviet veto, present United States policy still advocates the adoption of an effective means for the control of atomic weapons and devices. This was later expanded into a search for ways by which armament in general can be limited. In line with a suggestion of President Truman in October 1950, the present United Nations Disarmament Commission was established by merging the separate commissions on conventional and atomic weapons. Commencing early in 1956, the United Nations General Assembly under Western leadership overwhelmingly endorsed the practicality of a partial approach short of immediate adoption of a comprehensive disarmament plan as the most promising basis for negotiations. Although

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progress toward effective limitation and regulation of armaments may have been slow to date, we must anticipate that our continued efforts to find an acceptable disarmament formula will eventually bear fruit, particularly if the concept of a piecemeal approach is followed. This will have a decided impact on the type of military establishment that the United States should have.

As the size of our Armed Forces is reduced, the capabilities and versatility of the remaining elements must be expanded. No longer will it be possible to maintain units with narrowly restricted capabilities, or units which can only be used in certain limited circumstances. Every attempt must be made to increase the fire power of the remaining elements and to provide them with the organizational structure and the weapons which will permit them to be used in a wide range of situations, ranging from police actions through incidents of local aggression to the holocaust of a general war. We will have to learn to do more with less. Our forces, though reduced in size, must still be capable of maintaining internal security, of fulfilling international commitments which the United States has, and of carrying out our general responsibilities in connection with the maintenance of international peace and security under the UN Charter. Assistant Secretary of State Francis O. Wilcox has given Americans this wise counsel: "In our quest for effective disarmament we must make sure that there is enough power on the side of law and order and justice in the world to keep the Free World free." Thus we find that mobile, multipurpose armed forces have particular significance in effectively meeting the impact of the disarmament trend. They are significant also in the light of the continuing endeavor in the United States to seek ways to lessen shock of military costs on our national economy.

### The Effort to Reduce the Cost of Maintaining a Military Establishment

It is painfully apparent to the American taxpayer that armed forces are very costly. Although our military budget was reduced considerably after the signing of the Korean armistice, the price for security is rising once again. We can expect Congress and the Administration to continue their efforts to diminish these costs wherever possible. Since we in the military services are also taxpayers, and since the economic well-being of our country is as important to its survival as the maintenance of a strong military establishment, we too must seek to obtain more security with less national treasure. This is no mean challenge because the cost of modern weapons is constantly mounting. A new aircraft today costs 2 or 3 times the amount paid for the plane it replaces. The price tags on new ships and guns and tanks are larger as well. The expenses both in terms of research and development and in terms of installation and operation of adequate defenses against modern weaponry in either its general war application or its limited aggression utilization promises to be staggering. Thus, we face the dilemma of a cutback in total funds available for our armed forces, while at the same time the tasks to be accomplished and the costs of the tools required for these tasks are constantly increasing.

Reduced to its simplest terms, our problem is this: to obtain the maximum in national security for the money which is provided. To insure their effectiveness, we must continue to equip our armed forces with the most modern and powerful weapons, regardless of the mounting costs of such equipment. We must exploit our technological superiority to the fullest to retain a decisive weapon advantage over any potential enemy. On the other hand, we must avoid extravagant or wasteful use of our talents and treasures. As the expense of weapons increases, we must find ways to absorb the additional cost if possible. One way of doing this is to reduce the size and number of units which we maintain in our Armed Forces. In order that our security will not suffer thereby, we should seek to increase the capability of these reduced forces. Whatever forces we retain must be able to strike hard — new weapons will help to achieve this. These forces must be flexible and versatile. They must be usable in a wide range of situations. Furthermore, they must be highly mobile and self-sufficient so that their power may be applied quickly and effectively where needed.

Another way in which the cost of maintaining a modern military establishment can be reduced is to place greater reliance on the collective security system. However, as we noted earlier, the prerequisites for an effective system for collective security include military aid for indigenous forces and the guarantee of an American back-up force in the event of limited aggression. This in turn has its own impact on the cost of national security. Nevertheless, the significance of streamlined, versatile forces is once more evident.

In summary, we find that the implications of the expanding Soviet atomic capability, the impact of the continuing search for an acceptable disarmament formula, and the effect of the effort to reduce the cost of maintaining a military establishment, all point to this need — to develop and perfect small, hard-hitting, mobile forces which can be effectively employed in any of the wide range of situations short of general war, as well as in general war itself. To the fulfillment of this need, the Navy and the Marine Corps can make a notable contribution. Naval forces, including the Fleet Marine Forces, can be readily deployed to troubled areas. They are capable of exerting a wide variety of military pressures. They are among the most self-sufficient of military forces. They are versatile and flexible and compact. Because they so effectively translate American technological superiority and skilled manpower into readily available forces, they are ideally suited for employment as back-up forces to support indigenous forces engaged in resisting localized aggression. Traditionally, naval forces have been organized on an austere basis since there is not much room for excess fat in a shipboard organization. Because of this, the American taxpayer gets a good return in security for every dollar spent on naval forces.

By the very fact that the Navy and Marine Corps can make such an important contribution toward meeting future national security demands as presaged by the trends in current world affairs, we carry a heavy responsibility. We dare not treat this challenge lightly. USMC