

Towards a Grand Strategy - General

persuading one-time opponents to cooperate and even become partners after the conflict is over.

Closely linked to proportionality is the principle of damage limitation. This requires looking at actions taken during a crisis or a conflict through the lens of the post-conflict period. The principle gains in importance as military operations are conducted as wars 'among the people'. To achieve this end, damage done in the area of operations must be as small as possible, yet it must not reduce the chances of quick success, scored as decisively as possible. We are therefore no longer preoccupied with the traditional principle of destruction, which dominated strategic thinking from the early 19th century. The new principle – in line with the progress of technology – is the principle of minimum damage and victory through paralysis, involving the surgical use of all available instruments of power.

Simultaneously observing proportionality and damage limitation will become extremely difficult in cases where the use of nuclear weapons must be considered. The first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the quiver of escalation as the ultimate instrument to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction, in order to avoid truly existential dangers. At first glance, it may appear disproportionate; but taking account of the damage that it might prevent, it could well be proportionate. Despite the immense power of destruction possessed by nuclear weapons, the principle of damage limitation remains valid and must be kept in mind. Indeed, it was one of the principles that governed NATO's nuclear planning during the Cold War.

Another principle is legality. All action must be legitimate, properly authorised and in general accordance with customary international law. This is a grave impediment in combating

Towards a Grand Strategy

British General

Jan 2008

Deterrence in our time thus still avails itself of creating uncertainty in the opponent's mind – no longer reactively but proactively. What is needed is a policy of deterrence by proactive denial, in which pre-emption is a form of reaction when a threat is imminent, and prevention is the attempt to regain the initiative in order to end the conflict.

As deterrence might occasionally either be lost or fail, the ability to restore deterrence through escalation at any time is another element of a proactive strategy.

Escalation is intimately linked to the option of using an instrument first. A strategy that views escalation as an element can, therefore, neither rule out first use nor regard escalation as pre-programmed and inevitable. Escalation and de-escalation must be applied flexibly. Escalation is thus no longer a ladder on which one steps from rung to rung; it is much more a continuum of actions, as though there is a 'trampoline' that permits the action to be propelled up into the sky at one moment and just to stand still the next.

Such a concept of interactive escalation requires escalation dominance, the use of a full bag of both carrots and sticks – and indeed all instruments of soft and hard power, ranging from the diplomatic protest to nuclear weapons. As flexible escalation and de-escalation are the crucial instruments in gaining and maintaining the initiative, fast decision making is of the essence. The traditional forms and methods of governments and international organisations will today (in a world of instantaneous global communications) no longer be capable of meeting this requirement. Thus a thorough review and adaptation is required.

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate instrument of an asymmetric response – and at the same time the ultimate tool of esca-

lation. Yet they are also more than an instrument, since they transform the nature of any conflict and widen its scope from the regional to the global. Regrettably, nuclear weapons – and with them the option of first use – are indispensable, since there is simply no realistic prospect of a nuclear-free world. On the contrary, the risk of further proliferation is imminent and, with it, the danger that nuclear war fighting, albeit limited in scope, might become possible. This development must be prevented. It should therefore be kept in mind that technology could produce options that go beyond the traditional role of nuclear weapons in preventing a nuclear armed opponent from using nuclear weapons. In sum, nuclear weapons remain indispensable, and nuclear escalation continues to remain an element of any modern strategy.

Asymmetry will be used by all conflict parties, which means both that our side must be more prepared for the unexpected than ever before, and that the opponent must never know how, where or when we will act. To act asymmetrically could well be an instrument in regaining the initiative and could require deployment of the full range of options, from diplomacy to military intervention. Nuclear escalation is the ultimate step in responding asymmetrically, and at the same time the most powerful way of inducing uncertainty in an opponent's mind.

It is important, furthermore, to have dominance over the opponent's ability to calculate his risks. It is a very important element of strategy to keep things unpredictable for the opponent, who must never be able to know, or calculate, what action we will take. It is essential to maintain this dimension of psychological warfare by instilling fear in an opponent, to retain an element of surprise and thus deny him the opportunity of calculating the risk.