INTRODUCTION

The political control of NATO's nuclear weapons was central to the strategy of Flexible Response. Initiating the use of nuclear weapons and directing those weapons to meaningful political purposes required express political authority for, and close political control of, nuclear operations. Consequently it is important to explore both the role political decision-makers had in the command and control of nuclear forces and the effects the command and control system exerted on the political decision-making process.

For the political leaders of NATO the two questions having most direct bearing on the command and control of nuclear forces were firstly whether to commit national military forces to operational NATO command under the Chop procedures and secondly whether to agree the use of nuclear weapons if circumstances were thought to require their use.

In terms of the command and control of nuclear forces in NATO the speed and unity with which these decisions could be made by alliance members would have been crucial questions.

This chapter attempts to address these questions by looking at the nature of operational decision-making in NATO during crisis and war. It has been organised into six sections. The first considers the nature of national and coalition decision-making at the political level and primarily asks whether operational decisions could have been taken collectively by the alliance. It, however, also seeks to understand how national and collective processes of political control of nuclear weapons may have inter-related and to assess the effect of this for timely, accurate and coherent decision-making.

The second focuses on the decision to commit national forces to operational NATO control. It attempts to explore the tensions and dilemmas inherent in this crucial early decision.

The third looks at how, and on what basis, the decision to use nuclear weapons could have been taken. It explores the different
aspects of the decision by discussing the political goals of alliance member nations and the nuclear options available to meet those goals.

The fourth considers the political aspects of the second use of nuclear weapons. It is premised on the failure (or partial success) of initial use to achieve NATO’s political aims and seeks to understand how political decision-makers would have addressed the question of the aims and options of authorising a second nuclear strike.

The fifth section considers the political-military interface and looks at the dilemmas and problems created by operational political-military tensions, the problems of matching military actions to political goals and the influence military operations may have exerted on the political decision-making process.

The sixth and final section deals with the military issues raised by analysis of command performance of NATO nuclear weapons infrastructure in crisis and war and shows how these complicate further the political and politico-military issues discussed in this chapter.

NATIONAL AND COALITION DECISION-MAKING

Theories of alliance formation, behaviour and dissolution provide a useful framework within which to consider the nature of national and coalition decision-making in NATO. According to Morgenthau:

A typical alliance attempts to transform a small fraction of the total interests of the contracting parties into common policies and measures. Some of these interests are irrelevant to the purposes of the alliance, others support them, others diverge from them, and still others are incompatible with them. Thus a typical alliance is imbedded in a dynamic field of diverse interests and purposes. Whether and how long it will be operative depends upon the strength of the interests underlying it as over against the strength of the other interests of the nation concerned.¹

The cohesiveness of an alliance, which is central to the present discussion, has been usefully summarised by Liska as resting on ‘the relationship between internal and external pressures, bearing on the ratio of gains to liabilities for individual allies’.²

The relevant questions raised by these theoretical summaries are as follows. Firstly, what were the differences and similarities between the