Bernard Brodie and the bomb: at the birth of the bipolar world

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Tilvistemä
Bernard Brodie (1910-1978) was a leading 20th century theorist and philosopher of war. A key architect of American nuclear strategy, Brodie was one of the first civilian defense intellectuals to cross over into the military world. This thesis explores Brodie’s evolution as a theorist and his response to the technological innovations that transformed warfare from World War II to the Vietnam War. It situates his theoretical development within the classical theories of Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), as Brodie came to be known as “America’s Clausewitz.” While his first influential works focused on naval strategy, his most lasting impact came within the field of nuclear strategic thinking. Brodie helped conceptualize America’s strategy of deterrence, later taking into account America’s loss of nuclear monopoly, the advent of thermonuclear weapons, and proliferation of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Brodie’s strategic and philosophical response to the nuclear age led to his life-long effort to reconcile Clausewitz’s theories of war, which were a direct response to the strategic innovations of the Napoleonic
era, to the new challenges of the nuclear age. While today’s world is much changed from the bipolar international order of the Cold War period, contemporary efforts to apply Clausewitzian concepts to today’s conflicts suggests that much can be learned from a similar endeavor by the previous generation as its strategic thinkers struggled to imagine new ways to maintain order in their era of unprecedented nuclear danger.

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