



## Dependence on Technology Yields an Unbalanced Force

Currently the Department of Defense is headlong in pursuit of a uniquely American way of war. U.S. capital is employed to create and exploit technological advantage and reduce the human costs of war. The pursuit is laudable when balanced across the services. When applied to pursue zero casualties from remote warfare the goal impairs foreign policy and expends enormous resources on an unattainable goal. Everyone — especially those in uniform — wants to reduce human costs of conflict as much as possible, but pursuit of that goal must be governed by hard-nosed analysis and not self-deception. The current pursuit of risk-free victory from the air and from offshore is a modern extension of an age-old theme. Unfortunately, the pursuit of that Holy Grail fits in the same category with so many others: lowering taxes to increase revenue; balancing the budget without reducing taxes or spending; achieving military victory without risk or human cost. It is the American way to believe that we can have our cake and eat it too, or to at least give the pundit a try. There are those who offer constructs of how we can have everything without sacrifice. But in the end it simply isn't true. As desirable as it may be, it is simply a mechanism to avoid or defer difficult choices.

A perceived strategy to pursue all American goals with technology and refuse to accept risk has significantly reduced U.S. influence in many areas. Political influence is achieved through moral suasion or demonstration of the credible commitment and capability to inflict unacceptable costs on those who threaten U.S. interests. The perceptions of acceptable costs by the United States and its opponents are an

important part of the calculus. How can the United States demonstrate credibility consistent with others' perception that we will act only where the cost is near zero? In the real world of infinite possible structures for challenging American authority, the cost of building the capability to achieve our ends without casualties is infinite as well.

Iraq is a case study in the folly of this approach. Iraq is engaged in classic power politics to exercise and consolidate its control of territory and people. The United States, for all its might, can achieve control of only marginally relevant air space, and then only above 10,000 feet. Saddam Hussein's guns control the air below that level, as he occasionally illustrated for CNN over the skies of Baghdad during the height of the Gulf War. Pilots can defend against missiles, but not against guns.

The United States' inability to influence Iraq is rooted in the unwillingness to accept the risks inherent in the use of force. This absence of will undermines the influence achieved by whatever capability the United States builds. Further, our pursuit of the mythical technological solution to war diverts a disproportionate share of defense resources toward air platforms to yield an unbalanced force and degraded capability.

Warfare remains an interactive human competition with deadly consequences. The pursuit of war without casualties is inherently a contradiction. Effective policy comes from clear communication of interests, the capability to inflict unacceptable costs on actors who threaten those interests, and the will to inflict those costs if necessary to protect our interests. How can one build good policy on a foundation that we will accept

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no cost? The approach is fundamentally incredible. In building the structure and instruments of war and in building the policies which guide their use, we define both our capabilities and credibility. If we deceive ourselves about those capabilities and limitations, we do the security of the nation a disservice.

Capital substitution is a good and appropriate strategy for the United States. Frankly, life is of greater value and capital more plentiful here than in other political systems or cultures. Capital substitution is a logical, responsible approach. But we are ten times richer than the others, not 100 times, or 1,000 times or infinitely richer. There is a limit to our resources and just as surely a limit to our power.

U.S. power is limited by others' perception of our willingness (or unwillingness) to commit power to coerce or force the behavior of others. It is in this dimension that the U.S. defense strategy of "capital for labor" has passed beyond the point of diminishing returns to the conduct of effective foreign policy. The futile pursuit of asymmetric, bloodless conflict reduces credibility and reduces the utility of even superior forces in diplomacy. Further, the pursuit of forces to execute this strategy creates the vulnerabilities of an unbalanced defense structure. It does not escape the notice of Saddam and others that the United States has three of the biggest air forces, the only navy of consequence and the 8th largest army in the world.

Simply stated, any imbalance in U.S. defense structures creates the opening for someone else to build whatever is best to exploit that imbalance.

In Iraq, Saddam demonstrates not his own unpredictability, but the cold hard facts of power politics. He can and will exercise despotic control in the areas where the United States does not have the capability and will to exert its own. He will continue to pursue effective means to inflict casualties on U.S. forces. He continues to probe for the limits of U.S. capability and will. In September 1991, when Saddam decided to subjugate the Kurds in northern Iraq, the United States responded by attacking air defense artillery sites in southern Iraq. This episode has confirmed that United States' "will" stops at an altitude of 10,000 feet, where the tracers of air defense guns fail. Demonstrating credibility for such a narrow slice of capabilities can increase the likelihood that Saddam and others will continue to challenge U.S. interests. We can expect him to continue his cat-and-mouse game with UN inspectors and continue to pursue chemical, biological and nuclear weapons capabilities. We can expect him to continue to challenge the United States where he thinks it cannot or will not put its foot down.

(This *Defense Report* was written by Lieutenant Colonel James V. Warner, USA, who is currently serving as a Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace.)

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