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**“BOOTS ON THE GROUND” – WILL U.S. LANDPOWER
BE DECISIVE IN FUTURE CONFLICTS?**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Recent conflicts have demonstrated the enormous capabilities and advantages of aerospace and seapower in waging war. As a result, many strategic scholars and military decision makers believe that there is a new way of warfare, one in which land forces are no longer the decisive element in winning a conflict. The scholars believe future wars are won by precision, long-range strikes that coerce the enemy into surrender or acceptance of U.S. terms. This study will examine these views and the application of military power in recent conflicts. It will also analyze the employment of military power in current, and future conflicts. This study confirms that U.S. landpower will still be decisive in future conflicts and that it has not been displaced by a "new way of warfare."

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"BOOTS ON THE GROUND" – WILL U.S. LANDPOWER BE DECISIVE IN FUTURE CONFLICTS?

Recent United States conflicts, in particular OPERATION DESERT STORM in Kuwait and Iraq, OPERATION ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo, and the opening rounds in OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan, have demonstrated the enormous capability of U.S. military power. To layman and expert, friend and foe, and to soldier and civilian alike, these conflicts clearly show-case modern U.S. technological sophistication and expertise in waging war. This sophistication was most dramatically displayed by U.S. aerospace power in the form of devastating precision strikes. These strikes appeared to cripple our opponents at very little cost to ourselves, and in a way never seen before in the history of warfare. This has led many in the U.S. defense community to surmise that a "new way of warfare" has emerged.¹ Has this "new way of warfare" displaced traditional forms of military power, specifically landpower, as the dominant force in warfare? Will U.S. landpower still be decisive in future conflicts?

This paper will address these questions as its central theme. It will answer the thesis question: "Will U.S. landpower be decisive in future conflicts?" Stated another way, this study will analyze if landpower, traditionally held as the decisive form of military power, has been eclipsed by other types of military power in modern warfare. There are many other questions that first must be addressed in order to answer this central question. These include: "What has historically been the decisive form of military power?"; "What form of military power has proven decisive in recent conflicts?"; "Can aerospace power win conflicts alone?"; "Does the nature of the conflict determine what form of military power will ultimately be decisive?"; and, "Is there, or should there be, one decisive, dominant form of U.S. military power?" The answer to these, and other related questions, will ultimately answer the thesis to this study.

This study will focus on U.S. operations, conflicts, strategies, and capabilities. It will define U.S. military power and its various aspects, as well as define what is meant by a "decisive" form of military power. It will examine as a backdrop and historical foundation, past U.S. employment of military power in previous conflicts, and strategies for waging war. The study will carry this analysis into recent U.S. conflicts, including our on-going fight in Afghanistan, to determine which form of military power was decisive. Lastly it will look at what this examination and analysis of past and present warfare holds for the future employment of U.S. military power, and what conclusions may be drawn from this study.

When viewing the historical, recent, and present U.S. conflicts, the paper will use as a model: the identification of conflict objectives; the discussions of forms of military power that

were employed; and the determination of which forms of military power were decisive in the attainment of the conflict objectives and achieving the military endstate. This model, coupled with the historical analysis, will enable us to draw conclusions about the future employment of military power, and U.S. landpower in particular. The analysis and examination of these conflicts will ultimately lead us to the conclusion that U.S. landpower will still be decisive in future conflicts.

MILITARY POWER DEFINED

What is military power? What are its components? What is decisive military power? Various scholars and warriors have attempted to answer these questions in many ways. Power in general has been defined as “the ability to influence the behavior of other actors in accordance with one’s own objectives.”² In terms of warfare, Clausewitz spoke of power and force when he defined war as “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will” and that “force is thus the *means* of war.”³ More recently the U.S. military, in the form of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s Joint Vision 2020, has described military power as “full spectrum dominance,” or the ability to “defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations.”⁴ Military power for this study is simply defined as the military means and resources, (the aggregation of personnel, equipment, and weaponry, integrated with leadership, morale and discipline), that are employed to achieve national objectives in a conflict.⁵

Military power has traditionally been further delineated based upon the mediums of warfare: land, sea, and air, (and now space). Thus we can discuss military power in terms of landpower, seapower, and air, or aerospace power, with forces and strategies designed to operate and achieve effects in each respective medium.

Landpower is the capability and forces required to conduct sustained operations against an enemy force on the ground. This would include today’s short range helicopter/aviation capability organic to many ground armies. The U.S. Army is the embodiment of landpower, both for the U.S. military, as well as in general, global terms. The United States Marine Corps, while operating ashore with its ground formations against ground objectives, would also have to be considered an element of U.S. landpower. Landpower enables a nation to control events on the ground. It is also important to emphasize that it is on land where the vast majority of human events take place.

Alfred Thayer Mahan defined seapower as "command of the sea through naval superiority," or "that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy's flag from it."⁶ Following with Mahan, seapower can be considered to include a nation's bases ports, and maritime commerce. Simply put however, seapower is that aspect of overall military power, capabilities, and forces, that when brought together, enables a nation to project power, conduct operations, and achieve conflict objectives, on the seas and along coastal littorals. The U.S. Navy exemplifies the concept of a nation's military seapower. Seapower enables a nation to control the seas and influence events on land.

Air and space power, or "aerospace power," is the force required to command the mediums of air and space.⁷ The U.S. Air Force further defines it as "the synergistic application of air, space, and information systems to project global strategic military power."⁸ In the simplest terms, aerospace power is the combination of capability and forces that permit a nation to conduct operations in the air and in space against an opponent or in support of national objectives. Today's U.S. Air Force is the ideal example of national air and space power. Aerospace power enables a nation to control the skies and space, and influence events on the ground.

Strategic nuclear power, although operating through the mediums of air and space, should be considered separately because of its ability to be employed independently as a distinct form of military power. Very simply, strategic nuclear power is the capability and forces that can, in effect, realize national objectives through the total or mass destruction of an opponent's military forces, or national resources, institutions, and population. The current nuclear capability embedded in the U.S. Air Force's and U.S. Navy's missiles typify this type of military power. Nuclear power enables a nation to control the fate of other nations and populations.

What makes a form of military power decisive? The ability of that power to achieve the operational/strategic level military objectives must be considered as decisive. The preponderance of forces or scope of operations alone does not determine the decisive form of military power in a conflict. Decisive force is distinct from the dominant force, although the two may often be the same form of power. The form of military power or force that is responsible for achieving the military endstate in a conflict must therefore be considered the decisive force. Viewed in another way, the decisive military force in a conflict is the form of military power, without which, the conflict objectives can not be fully met. Furthermore, in order to be decisive, the form of military power in question must actually achieve the desired effects. Merely having the ability to be decisive in a conflict is meaningless, unless actual objectives are realized. On

the other hand, this does not mean that an element of military force must actually be employed in order to be decisive. Depending on the nature of the conflict and the objectives involved, it is possible for the deterrent effect, or threat of use, of a military power to be decisive in itself.

The various forms of military power, land, sea, air and space, can be employed independently, or jointly, in any given conflict. Dependent upon the objectives and nature of the hostilities involved, it may, in theory, be possible for different forms of military power to be the decisive force in bringing a conflict to an end on favorable terms.

HISTORICAL AND DOCTRINAL PERSPECTIVES ON DECISIVE MILITARY POWER

Throughout history there have been theories espousing each of the forms of military power as the decisive force in warfare. Many of these theories, and our doctrine, have been driven by technological advances that have enabled a particular form of warfare to achieve spectacular combat effects. Some of the theories trace their origin back for centuries, while others are as recent as the space age.

Much of our current landpower theory and doctrine is heavily rooted in the Napoleonic era theories of Antoine-Henri Jomini, and to a degree, Carl von Clausewitz. From decisive points, to lines of operations, much of the U.S. Army's operational level doctrine has Jominian and Clausewitzian theory as its basis. During their time, landpower was viewed as the decisive form of military power. Seapower existed, and certainly had its place, but the prevailing understanding drawn from these great military theorists, as well as the practitioners of their art and science, was that decisive, war winning results could only be achieved through a land victory. Throughout the military experience of the U.S. this concept has generally proven true through the Second World War.

Current U.S. Army doctrine as expressed in the new U.S. Army Field Manual 3.0, Operations, clearly holds that landpower is a decisive force in military operations and conflicts.⁹ U.S. Army doctrine as outlined in previous operations manuals, (such as FM100-5), has consistently held this view. Although current U.S. Army doctrine stresses that it expects to fight as part of a joint team, and perhaps rarely, if ever alone, it none-the-less clearly emphasizes the Army's ability to be the decisive force in future conflicts, and the force that ultimately achieves the conflict objectives.

The views of landpower as the decisive force in conflicts have not gone unchallenged in the past. As a sea-faring nation, protected from potentially hostile neighbors by the broad stretches of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, seapower theory and doctrine has had a strong

place in U.S. national military strategies. Although seapower has always been a good way to project a political signal, or to show the flag around the world, it was not until the dawn of the 20th century that it was viewed as being a potentially decisive form of warfare. The expansion of overseas trade carried through sea lanes and the tremendous advancement of naval technology during that period led to the theories of seapower expressed by Alfred Thayer Mahan. "The stoppage of commerce," through seapower he wrote, "compels peace."¹⁰ Although some of his analysis neglected the war-winning results of great land conflicts, (i.e. maritime power England finally stopped Napoleon only after the ground victory at Waterloo), it clearly had sound foundations.

Current U.S. Naval and seapower doctrine recognize this, although with some significant changes in strategy from Mahan's time. Rather than a force operating in the self-contained medium of the sea, only opposing adversarial naval forces, U.S. seapower of today views itself as capable of projecting force from the sea onto land.¹¹ Additionally, U.S. naval doctrine expressed the belief that it can be the decisive force in a conflict. In current doctrine, U.S. seapower is capable of "winning regional battles"¹² and of "projecting U.S. power and influence from the sea to directly and decisively influence events ashore throughout the spectrum of operations."¹³ Technology has enabled expeditionary operations and strikes from U.S. Marine Corps forces and naval aircraft and missiles to form the heart of this doctrine.

Technology has likewise driven airpower theory and doctrine as well. Until the advent of mass produced combat aircraft in the First World War, realistic theories about the decisive use of airpower did not exist. Starting with Giulio Douhet, and carrying on through others such as General Billy Mitchell in the U.S., early airpower advocates clearly postulated that airpower would dominate surface warfare, and that it was the decisive form of warfare in future conflicts, capable of achieving strategic effects by itself. In their view, whether through breaking the will of a nation's people to fight through terror bombing, or destroying an opponent's means to fight by devastating his industrial centers and critical land and sea surface forces, airpower, particularly when delivering weapons of mass destruction, had trumped land and sea power as the decisive form of warfare.¹⁴ This concept has always been a part of airpower theory and strategy, and serves as the foundation of current airpower doctrine.

Current airpower advocates as well as U.S. Air Force doctrine express the view that aerospace power can clearly achieve the decisive effects needed in order to win a conflict. Air Force doctrine states: "the more recent history of air and space application, especially post-DESERT STORM, has proven that air and space power does now have the potential to be the dominant and, at times, the decisive element of combat in modern warfare."¹⁵ A former U.S.

Air Force Chief of Staff recently wrote: "Aerospace dominance allows the U.S. to exert strategic control, destroying the cohesion and structure of the opponent's plan, forces, and infrastructure, and denying the adversary his objectives while imposing our will on him."¹⁶

Nuclear power theory can be considered the ultimate extension of the early airpower advocate's theories. Many saw this phenomenal leap in military technology as making all other forms of warfare and military power obsolete. There can be little doubt about the potentially destructive and decisive effects of massed nuclear weapons. Whether the doctrine was mutually assured destruction, or flexible response, nuclear power is capable of being the decisive element in a conflict. It can also be decisive in deterring one. It is however, this very capability that limits the ultimate effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Other than when they were first employed at the close of W.W.II, they have not been used at all, nor have they deterred conventional conflict for the nations that possess them. Although decisive in nature, the sheer destructiveness of nuclear power has rendered it unusable except in the extreme case of national survival.

At various times, each element of military power has been proclaimed as the decisive force in warfare. Historically, each has had an opportunity to be proven as a decisive force in past U.S. conflicts. A review of the major conflicts the U.S. has participated in since the advent of modern airpower and seapower will provide us with an understanding of the application, and decisiveness, of the different elements of military power.

The Second World War was the first modern war where all the elements of U.S. military power were employed. In both the European and Pacific theaters of war, land, air, and sea power were all applied in force against our opponents. In the case of the Pacific, nuclear power was also applied as well. In both theaters, the ultimate conflict objective was unconditional surrender, and all that it applies, (withdrawal from occupied lands, regime change, and disarmament).

The war in the European theater gives us numerous examples of the elements of military power at play. Both the 1940 "blitz" bombing of Britain and the V-series weapons attacks, as well as the Allied strategic bombing offensive directed against Germany, failed in forcing their target to capitulate. No doubt, serious damage was done, and in the case of the U.S./Allied bombing, significant damage was done to the German war machine. However, the application of airpower did not prove decisive on its own.

Likewise, U.S. seapower was instrumental and absolutely necessary in safely delivering men and equipment to both European staging areas and battlefronts. However, in and of itself, it did not bring about the defeat of Germany. Although German seapower in the form of

submarines came close to strangling Britain early in the war, it too failed to achieve a decisive effect. It was left to U.S. and Allied landpower to ultimately defeat Germany. Despite the tremendous efforts in the air and at sea, Germany was not defeated until there were U.S. and Allied ground armies standing on German soil and in Berlin. It may be arguable that if one took away U.S. airpower and seapower that the land forces would not have been able to be successful. But there is no doubt that it was the action of large U.S. and Allied land forces that dealt the decisive blow to Germany and forced her unconditional surrender. One can only imagine the outcome if we removed the U.S., or Soviet, landpower from that fight. Landpower was the decisive element in the war in Europe and the force that was responsible for ultimate obtainment of the war objective of unconditional surrender.

In the Pacific theater it is much less clear. By its nature, the war in the Pacific was one where all elements of military came into play alongside one another. Was any one element decisive? Landpower was essential in seizing terrain and rolling back the Japanese forces to the home islands. The argument can be made that without land forces seizing island after island, it would not have been possible to collapse the Japanese defensive ring and seize forward bases. Without landpower it is doubtful the U.S. could have maintained the momentum of the Pacific offensives.

Clearly, seapower enabled the U.S. to project its power across the vast expanses of the Pacific. It can also be plainly stated U.S. seapower was the dominant force in the Pacific in terms of size and scope of action. From projecting power, to neutralizing the Japanese fleet, to strangling Japan's supply lines, U.S. seapower dominated the fight. If the U.S. had lacked significant seapower, it is very likely that the war in the Pacific might have been very different.

U.S. airpower in the Pacific wreaked havoc on Japan and her war fighting capability. Operating from bases seized by sea and landpower, massed bomber formations devastated Japanese industries and cities alike with fire-bombings. However, after months of intensive bombing, (and with casualties greater than the atomic bomb attacks), the Japanese still did not capitulate.

Many would argue that it was the employment of air-delivered nuclear power against Hiroshima and Nagasaki that brought Japan to her knees and forced a surrender, and that this is what was decisive in the Pacific. Other arguments exist that it was the Soviet entry into the fight with their ground invasion of Manchuria that pushed the Japanese over the edge. A logical conclusion is that each in some way was decisive to victory in the Pacific and the absence of one would have made the cost of the conflict much greater.¹⁷ It is interesting to note however, that the plan for the ultimate defeat of Japan was a large scale ground invasion of the home

islands designed to gain the war objectives of total defeat and complete surrender of the Japanese.

Following the successful conclusion of the Second World War, U.S. strategy focused on the use of nuclear power, delivered by air power, as the decisive element in future conflict. Based upon that reliance, and the desire to draw down the size of the military following the war, conventional forces, in particular landpower, were relegated to near obsolescence. The general thinking was that in an age of "push-button" nuclear warfare, conventional forces, especially large land armies, were not needed. However, the very destructiveness of nuclear power, and its spread to the Soviets and Chinese, ultimately led not to strategies on how to best employ it, but rather on preventing its use.¹⁸ Their decisive, nation destroying capability, and the fear of nuclear retaliation in kind, made nuclear power more of a strategic defensive, rather than offensive capability. This situation exists today, and in the 1950s, enabled a war to be fought without the use of nuclear weapons.¹⁹ The communist invasion of South Korea in 1950 brought a conventional, non-nuclear response from the U.S. Checked by concerns of expanding the war into a global nuclear holocaust, the conflict objectives were limited in scope to preserving a non-communist Korea and keeping the fight on the Korean peninsula. As a result, the U.S. employed only conventional sea, air, and landpower in the fighting to save Korea from communist domination.

Limited by the same concerns as nuclear weapons employment, U.S. airpower was restricted to operate only over the Korean Peninsula. Although some will claim that if "the gloves had been taken off" the U.S. Air Force, that airpower could have ended the fighting alone. However, there is no reason to believe that strategic bomber attacks against China would have had any better results than similar methods used in W.W.II. Additionally, whether practical or not, the political considerations that limited the war were indeed real and defined the nature of the hostilities. This fact prevented airpower from ever being decisive in this conflict.

U.S. seapower was instrumental in delivering men and supplies to the fight, and essential in delivering the blow at Inchon. It had no opposing seapower with which to contend. Like airpower, it was clearly in a supporting role, and by itself, had no chance of strongly influencing the outcome of the conflict on the ground or reaching the military endstate for the conflict.

The decisive fight and the decisive force was on the ground. U.S. landpower was the force that obtained the conflict objectives for the U.S. Through a combination of political realities and constraints, the nature of the terrain and geography, and the make-up and will of our opponents, landpower was the only military force that was decisive in Korea.

A very similar situation faced the U.S. ten years later in the Vietnam War. Again, U.S. conflict objectives were limited by concerns of escalation into superpower conflict with the communist bloc. Like Korea, U.S. objectives were to preserve a "democratic" South Vietnam, and defeat communist aggression by North Vietnam and Viet Cong proxies in South East Asia.

A significant component of the U.S. strategy was to coerce the North Vietnamese to cease their aggression through a bombing campaign. However, despite the most advanced technology of the time, and greater bomb tonnages dropped than in W.W.II, U.S. airpower was unable to decisively end the conflict. Much like enemy populations in W.W.II, the North Vietnamese did not cave in to the bombing campaign. Although a major and effective component of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam, airpower alone was not decisive. Likewise, in a similar fashion as in Korea, U.S. seapower, although a contributor, could not decisively affect the fight or achieve the conflict objectives on its own.

Once again, given the nature of the conflict, the terrain, and the enemy, it was landpower that was the decisive force in Vietnam. Although it would be possible to argue for decades, (and we have), over whether the U.S. won or lost, or could have won or lost that war, the fact remains that it was only the application and employment of land forces and landpower that offered the greatest opportunity to ultimately achieve the conflict objectives.

This brief historical analysis of past U.S. wars shows us that although all elements of military power can be applied to modern conflicts, only landpower has proven to be the force of decision in achieving the war aims of the conflict. Although these conflicts showed the promise of airpower and the capability of seapower, they all served to re-confirm the decisive nature of landpower in obtaining objectives. They also served to illustrate how the nature of the conflict, its political concerns, geography, and the aspects of the enemy affected how military power could be employed. Modern destructive technology, rather than making landpower obsolete, has made it even more essential for the future.

ANALYSIS OF MILITARY POWER IN RECENT U.S. CONFLICTS

Recent U.S. conflicts of the last decade, including Operations JUST CAUSE, DESERT STORM, and ALLIED FORCE provide excellent examples of the application of U.S. military power. All were conducted in a period of advanced technological weaponry and provide strong indicators on how wars may be fought in the future.

The major objectives of the first of these recent conflicts, OPERATION JUST CAUSE, were the removal of a hostile regime, protection of U.S. citizens, and protection of the Panama

Canal, all done with minimal collateral damage to the citizens and infrastructure of Panama.²⁰ The nature of this conflict, or small scale contingency operation in current parlance, precluded the employment of massive firepower to achieve the desired endstate. Bombing targets to force Manuel Noriega to step down from power would have caused significant collateral damage and would have been counterproductive. This relegated both air and seapower to a supporting role in getting ground troops to the fight. It was clearly the actions of land forces, U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps ashore, and special operations forces, (SOF), that proved decisive in this operation and brought it to a successful conclusion. Neither air nor sea, (and of course nuclear power), could have a decisive effect in achieving the desired military endstate for this conflict. Despite their tremendous modern capabilities, the nature of the conflict limited the employment of air and seapower, leaving ground forces as the only real tool for successfully accomplishing the conflict objectives. In a nation where the population is not hostile to the U.S., and there is no significant, remote infrastructure to target, there are severe limits to what airpower or seapower can achieve.

The peace keeping operations, (PKO), in Somalia and Bosnia reinforce the concept that not all conflicts can be solved through the application of firepower. Although not hostile conflicts in the classic sense of the other wars analyzed above, they serve to emphasize the need and utility of landpower across the complete spectrum of conflict. Where establishing "a safe and secure environment"²¹ among a diverse population is the military objective, clearly, land forces are the only form of military power that can achieve the delicate military endstates required in these types of operations.

The Gulf War on the other hand was as a traditional a war as has been fought since W.W. II. Unlike OPERATION JUST CAUSE, it is held up by some as an example of the pre-eminence of airpower. In OPERATION DESERT STORM, air, sea, and landpower all were employed by the U.S. during the conflict. The endstate was clear for the operation: the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait; restoration of Kuwait's government; a secure and stable Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf; and the safety and protection of American lives abroad.²² The mandate provided by the UN and the international coalition of forces supported the application of the full range of military power, (short of nuclear), to achieve the objectives. Additionally, the end of the cold war and non-interference by the Soviet Union removed any concerns and fetters of escalation into superpower conflict. All elements of U.S. military power could and did come into play during DESERT STORM.

Seapower was essential in enforcing economic sanctions and a blockade of Iraqi sea trade. Likewise it was essential for the movement of the vast amount of material and equipment

needed to prosecute the war. Cruise missile strikes launched from sea and the feint of an amphibious operation all contributed to the war effort, although carrier aviation strikes and U.S. Marine Corps ground operations must be considered under the context of air and landpower respectively. Although an important part of the fight, seapower did not have a decisive effect upon achieving the military endstate for the conflict. Once again, the nature of the conflict, geography, and the opponent limited the role of seapower.

It has been suggested that airpower was the decisive element in achieving victory in DESERT STORM. The full might of U.S., (and coalition), airpower was brought to bear upon Iraq. Unlike previous conflicts there was no magic line that could not be crossed nor any target that could not be struck. The one overriding limitation was minimization of civilian casualties among the Iraqi people. There were no direct attacks designed to kill large numbers of civilians and break their will to fight through "terror bombing." However, attacks on infrastructure targets were obviously designed to do double duty by reducing war fighting capability and putting stress on the Iraqi people as a coercive means to help end the conflict. Airpower was employed in attacks at all levels of warfare. Strategic attacks against infrastructure, operational attacks against military targets, and tactical strikes against combat forces were all combined into a "strategic air campaign."²³

Drawing on expertise from the Air Staff, a plan was devised that would employ airpower as an independent actor in the conflict. Termed "Instant Thunder," the plan envisioned swift and massive strategic attacks that would achieve "strategic paralysis" on Iraq.²⁴ The intent of the plan was to "either convince Saddam Hussein to capitulate or bring about his removal by the people of Iraq" through attacks using the Warden theory of "five rings" of critical elements that make up a nation state.²⁵ By strategically striking at "the nerve center of Iraqi national power," the aim was to "convince the Iraqi leadership and/or citizenry that holding Kuwait was more expensive than releasing it."²⁶

After 38 days of incessant strikes, tremendous destruction was wrought upon the Iraqi war fighting machine and infrastructure. However, the conflict objectives had not been met. Iraqi forces still stood in Kuwait despite the most technological and intense air onslaught in history. Airpower had not proven the decisive element in reaching the military endstate of the conflict. It was necessary to employ other forms of military power.

It was left to the U.S. and coalition ground forces to ultimately meet the Gulf War's objectives. The now famous "left hook" flanking maneuver into Iraq, and the direct frontal attack into Kuwait by three plus corps of armor and mechanized forces forced the very rapid withdrawal of the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. This successful ground attack permitted the restoration

of Kuwait's borders and her legitimate government. It was massed landpower that finally brought the conflict to its successful conclusion.

Airpower was far from impotent or ineffectual in the conflict, and did help in achieving the operation's objectives. There is little doubt that it was the air campaign that destroyed the Iraqi air force and significantly damaged his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capability. When finally shifted to tactical combat forces, airpower destroyed large numbers, although not all that was tasked or promised, of Iraqi ground combat vehicles and soldiers. In this regard, airpower helped achieve the goal of a secure and stable Gulf region as Iraq, at least for the near term, would lack the ability to seriously threaten her neighbors or dominate the region. Also, the physical and psychological effects of massed airpower had a telling effect on reducing the combat effectiveness of Iraqi ground combat forces. This no doubt helped preserve the lives of numerous U.S. soldiers and marines on the ground who fought them.

In the end, despite the tremendous capability brought to the fight, airpower did not succeed in achieving the most important objectives of the conflict. Landpower did. Could landpower have done it without the contribution of the air effort? Given the superior capabilities and tactics of U.S. and coalition ground forces versus their Iraqi opponents the outcome would ultimately have been the same, but the cost in terms of casualties and resources would have been higher. Could 38 more days of bombing alone have brought about the desired outcome? When viewed through the veil of previous air actions, the conclusion to be drawn is no. If this conflict had ended with only the use of airpower, the desired military endstate would not have been achieved.

OPERATION ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo on the other hand, appears to be the prime example of the new decisive capability of airpower, or now more accurately, aerospace power. In the Kosovo conflict U.S. and Allied objectives were seemingly met without the introduction of landpower or significant use of seapower. Airpower appears to have delivered the promised blow that had decisive results on the opponent in an effects based strategy. In this operation it was definitely not just pure airpower alone, but space-aided airpower – aerospace power, when one factors in the importance of satellite intelligence imagery, communications and global positioning system support. Furthermore, the operation was concluded with essentially no loss of U.S. combatants, and minimal loss of air platforms.

The objectives for OPERATION ALLIED FORCE were essentially to: demonstrate NATO resolve; force the Serbians to halt their military operations in Kosovo; deter an even greater offensive against civilians in Kosovo; and seriously damage the Serbian military's ability to harm the people of Kosovo.²⁷ From the start, the operation was destined to be an air

campaign only, as the use of ground forces was “ruled out” by NATO and the U.S.²⁸ It was a campaign focused on achieving an “acceptable political outcome” through the coercive use of aerospace power, rather than “seizing and holding ground.”²⁹ In this regard, it shared the same theory that was initially factored into the DESERT STORM air campaign plan. The U.S. and NATO would pressure Serbian president Milosevic to withdraw from Kosovo by striking military and infrastructure targets in Serbia, imposing a political and economic cost that he would not be willing to bear. In far simpler terms, the idea was that NATO would “twist” Milosevic’s arm with bombing until he “cried uncle” and withdrew his military forces from Kosovo.

Despite the current, indefinite NATO military presence in Kosovo numbering in the tens of thousands, in the end, the conflict objectives were mostly met. There is some doubt however over the role aerospace power played in reaching them. It is generally understood that taking a ground option off the table at the start of the conflict gave Milosevic critical breathing space, and time to think and act. Facing an air only option may have made him question NATO and U.S. resolve to carry the fight through to completion. It may have also prompted him to feel secure in taking more aggressive action, and to stick it out much longer than thought possible. This might not have been important had it not been for the very object that brought in U.S. and NATO action – the plight of the Kosovar people.

Immediately following the commencement of NATO air strikes, the Serbian military moved into Kosovo in force and began a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing, forcibly displacing hundreds of thousands of Albanian Kosovars into neighboring countries.³⁰ For almost a three month period during the NATO air campaign, 24 March to 10 June, aerospace power could not halt the repressive Serbian military operations, nor did it prevent “an even bloodier offensive against innocent civilians in Kosovo.”³¹ Quite the opposite occurred. It is possible that Milosevic finally agreed to stop operations in Kosovo not because he was finally coerced after three months of non-stop bombing, but rather because he met his military objectives before NATO did. Aerospace power failed to prevent the increase in violence directed against the Kosovar civilians and could not alleviate their suffering. In the long term it can be argued that the pressure brought to bear by bombing did eventually stop the oppression and facilitated the eventual demise of Milosevic. However, that can be likened to the police apprehending the suspect after the murder has already occurred. It is therefore very likely that aerospace power was not decisive in effectively achieving the first three of the stated objectives of the conflict.

There is also a question as to how effective aerospace power was in accomplishing the last conflict objective, “to seriously damage the Serbian military’s capacity to harm the people of Kosovo.”³² After a shift from strategic targets to tactical military targets in Kosovo as a means to

halt the increase in Serb ethnic cleansing, a significant number of air sorties were directed towards destroying the Serb military capacity to harm the Kosovars. Despite a tremendous effort on the part of the airmen involved, there is little evidence that after months of air strikes, very much damage was done to the Serb forces which actively and effectively employed decoys, deception, dispersion, and concealment. Physical post war bomb damage assessments turned up 12 tanks and 14 self-propelled guns confirmed destroyed.³³ Although some estimates put the actual numbers at several times this figure, even the estimates do not reflect serious damage to the Serbian military forces. At the time of their eventual withdrawal, the Serbian military forces in Kosovo were seen leaving as an essentially intact combat force that still retained its fighting spirit. Additionally, most of the targets had been engaged only after being forced to expose themselves while fighting Kosovo Liberation Army ground forces. It appears that aerospace power failed to achieve the last conflict objective, and it is this point that serves to emphasize the transient nature and effects of airpower.

How decisive was aerospace power in the Kosovo conflict? As it was the only form of military power brought to bear, it is difficult to dispute that it alone achieved results. Giving it the benefit of the doubt, it can be surmised that aerospace power eventually stopped the Serb aggression and brutality in Kosovo through the pressure brought to bear on the Serb leadership by air and missile strikes. But how many innocent civilians died while waiting for this to happen? What if landpower had been employed to protect the Kosovar Albanians? The SACEUR wanted this as part of the campaign.³⁴ Certainly there would have been more friendly military casualties, but this could have brought about an earlier cessation of hostilities leading to the desired military endstate. There is no doubt, if it were not for NATO's Kosovo Forces, (KFOR), on the ground that the Serbian military could move back into Kosovo and resume ethnic cleansing or genocide again. Even if we assume that aerospace power in this conflict had proven to be decisive as an independent form of military power, the Kosovo War illustrates the inherent shortcomings in its employment.

In the conflicts of the last decade, even those touted as clear vindication of the independent, decisive capability of aerospace power, we still see the decisive role of landpower in achieving the objectives of the conflict across the full spectrum of combat operations. Although aerospace power has shown tremendous capability, there is doubt as to whether it can truly be decisive on its own. What the last decade has shown is that landpower is still the decisive element of warfare.

ANALYSIS OF MILITARY POWER IN CURRENT U.S. CONFLICTS

The current U.S. operation in Afghanistan has been a showcase for the employment of U.S. military power. Just a month after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, U.S. military forces were engaged in OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, carrying the fight to the enemy in Afghanistan to destroy the terrorist infrastructure and its "host nation" support. The Afghanistan conflict's objectives include: elimination of terrorist networks with global reach in Afghanistan, (e.g. Al Qaeda); and destruction of the Taliban as a harbor for the terrorists.³⁵ This conflict is unusual in the sense that the U.S. is fighting both a nation-state, in the form of the Afghani Taliban, as well as non-state actors, in the form of a well-organized, international terrorist group. The conflict is also unusual compared to those of the last 50 years as this enemy poses a direct and significant threat to America and its citizens. The fight against the Taliban military would appear to be similar in principle to the conflicts of years past. As is the norm for U.S. military operations, avoidance of civilian casualties and collateral damage is still a constraining factor. The fight against the Al Qaeda terrorists would obviously employ some new approaches, but in the end, would not be significantly different from combat as we have known it in the past.

Aerospace power was the first component of U.S. military power to be employed in OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, although not without the presence and support of seapower. U.S. air and missile strikes, (many of them carrier and ship based – a strong display of the U.S. naval doctrine to project combat power from the sea to the land), struck at Taliban and Al Qaeda forces and bases. Initial strikes, conducted unilaterally by the U.S., appeared to be an effort to coerce the Taliban leadership to give in to U.S. demands as well as disrupt the terrorist network of training camps. In this regard, the initial plan appeared to follow the Warden theory of aerospace power where parallel strikes against key enemy centers would in effect break his will to resist to U.S. demands. In a country where there is little infrastructure of value, and where the enemy leadership has known war for over twenty years and is ideologically and religiously motivated, the Warden theory of air-applied strategic coercion was doomed to fail. The U.S. air onslaught did not convince the Taliban leadership to "throw in the towel." Although it will remain for post-conflict analysis and memoirs to confirm, it appears that the U.S. strategy going into the conflict, at least in regard to the Taliban, was to attempt another "Kosovo" – an attempt to achieve the conflict objectives at little cost through the use of aerospace power and a strategic air campaign. As the events of October 2001 have shown us, that initial strategy did not work. The Taliban remained defiantly in power with its fielded forces still capable and fighting. The U.S. would have to adjust its strategy and employ more than just aerospace power.

The U.S. began to achieve definitive results only after the introduction of landpower into the fight. This landpower took the form of U.S. Special Operations forces (SOF) on the ground, (and supported by SOF air assets), and the indigenous Afghan opposition forces, (primarily the "Northern Alliance"). Both elements took the fight to the Taliban and the Al Qaeda in a ground offensive lasting several weeks. The SOF operations consisted of liaison teams with Afghan opposition forces, as well as teams conducting reconnaissance, strikes, and raids independently and unilaterally. The SOF teams with the Afghan opposition forces advised and assisted those forces similar to the pattern established in previous conflicts like Vietnam. Additionally, they were also the conduits for applying U.S. airpower.

Aerospace power efforts were increased in support of the opposition ground offensive and U.S. unilateral SOF operations. Although not decisive, aerospace power was a critical and significant contributor to the success of the fight. Employing pin-point, SOF directed, precision munitions en masse greatly aided the success of the ground offensive. What appeared key in the use of the airpower was that it was applied at the points requested by the ground forces, that offered the greatest possibility of success against the enemy, rather than targets picked by a distant air planner. This was close air support, or CAS, at its best. Air strikes destroyed and suppressed key enemy weapons and positions, and undoubtedly lowered enemy morale while correspondingly improving that of opposition forces.

The opposition force's ground maneuver, aided by these air strikes, overran enemy positions, captured sizable numbers of prisoners, and broke the Taliban and Al Qaeda as an organized fighting force. Ultimately, the successful ground offensive and SOF operations would result in the disposing of the Taliban regime, the installation of a new friendly government, and the Al Qaeda forces on the run. Follow-on operations directed towards the destruction of the Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, (OPERATION ANACONDA), have required the use of conventional infantry forces to find, fix, and finish the enemy.³⁶ It is clear future operations of that type will be required to completely destroy the remaining enemy forces.

The conflict in Afghanistan has highlighted some of the limitations of aerospace power in this type of conflict. Much like in DESERT STORM and ALLIED FORCE, the actual results of the bombing in terms of enemy destroyed has been much lower than the high profile media coverage of bursting bombs and videos of precision guided munitions would imply. Aerospace assets alone could not find all the targets that needed to be struck. It required ground forces to locate and pin-point the targets. More importantly, the ground forces, not the air force operating independently, successfully determined which targets would have the greatest effect and payoff. Aerospace forces could not prevent the enemy from withdrawing and escaping, nor prevent

them from regrouping and reinforcing. Key enemy positions in cave complexes and urban areas could only be completely cleared of the enemy through ground action, and only forces on the ground could exploit the invaluable intelligence "treasure chests" that were found.

This successful endstate could not have been reached by aerospace power alone. Continued strategic strikes would have left the Taliban in power and the Al Qaeda still functional. Landpower ultimately proved itself the decisive element in the conflict. It was left to U.S. and allied landpower, supported by aerospace and seapower, to achieve the conflict's military objectives.

MILITARY POWER IN FUTURE CONFLICTS

It is clear that the U.S. will face conflict in the future. These conflicts are likely to run the spectrum from "military operations other than war" like peacekeeping, to mid-intensity conflict against determined foes, and everything in between.³⁷ Some conflicts may appear similar to previous wars, while others may seem radically different. It is likely that the Clausewitzian concepts of war will still be valid, yet it is possible that the rise of non-state, ideologically driven actors will add a new dimension to the sources and meanings of conflict. Conflicts in the future will be shaped as much by the reasons why we go to war as by the environment and conditions of the conflict.

The conditions of future conflicts will be driven by the U.S. itself, by natural forces, and by the enemy. The character of a democratic U.S. will exert three strong constraints on the application of military power. Strongly rooted concerns for human life and suffering will place great concerns and corresponding limitations for the minimization of non-combatant casualties and collateral damage. Although U.S. public opinion appears willing to accept some level of unavoidable collateral damage, it is likely that there would be little tolerance for large numbers of indiscriminate casualties, particularly in a war not involving survival interests. World opinion will probably be even less tolerant. Secondly, the American public is adverse to large numbers of U.S. casualties, particularly again where survival interests are not at stake, (although the myth of zero tolerance for any casualties has been hopefully destroyed by the recent war against terrorism). Finally, although always prepared to go it alone, in a globally interdependent world environment, the U.S. will have to take into account the considerations of allies and world opinion in general. As a result, future hostilities are likely to be fought as part of a coalition of allies, both to cement, and as a symbol of, international resolve and support. All of these factors will affect U.S. force employment.

In order to minimize unintended casualties, limits will have to be placed on the application of firepower. Some critical targets may be "off limits" due to the proximity of non-combatants or important cultural features. Even greater reliance will have to be placed upon precision and discriminatory weapons. In addition, in order to keep U.S. casualties low, human beings need to be replaced by technology and firepower wherever possible. Coalition operations will be the norm, and political constraints to maintain legitimacy and sway world and domestic public opinion will be commonplace.

The natural state of the world will greatly influence and shape the conditions of future conflicts. Ever increasing urbanization ensures that future conflicts will unavoidably be waged in and around population centers. This will place severe limits on the application of air delivered firepower in a conflict in order to minimize civilian casualties and destruction. Obviously, the nature of the physical geography will impact the conflict much as it has over the decades. A war fought in restricted, covered, and broken terrain will always be more difficult than in the rolling expanses of a desert or steppe. The information age will affect warfare to a far greater degree than ever before. Global, interconnected information technology systems, for those that possess them, will become a battleground in and of itself. Instant, world-wide media access will inform and shape public opinion. Technology will affect the battlefield for both friendly and enemy forces alike. As U.S. forces develop new technologies, both high and low tech countermeasures will also be developed and employed by opponents to counter American technological superiority.

Future opponents will look for unexpected "asymmetric" means and methods to strike at U.S. forces. Likewise, the enemy will look for ways to defeat U.S. advantages in firepower, technology, and numbers, including conducting operations in urban areas and with dispersed forces. Most importantly, the enemy will largely drive the nature of the conflict. Their actions and objectives will determine whether we are fighting a war to restore a border, destroy a capability, or protect a people. The U.S. must be prepared to combat a nation-state waging war upon a neighbor in a conventional manner, as well as non-state actors fighting unconventionally.³⁸ Many conflicts of the past have been fought to gain or control territory and resources, and no doubt, there will be more in this mold in the future. Just as likely wars will be fought to control people and establish or abolish conditions that they will live under. Some of these may be physical or ideological enslavement, or the destruction, expulsion, or "cleansing" of a population.

Where the global war against terrorism will next carry the fight at the time of this writing is unclear. The regime in Iraq certainly looms large as a future target. There, like in

Afghanistan, it is probably safe to surmise that the Saddam Hussein regime, and those instruments that keep it in power, and not the Iraqi people, will be the object of U.S. hostilities. As such, there will almost certainly be the same constraints placed on the application of U.S. firepower as witnessed in ENDURING FREEDOM and ALLIED FORCE. Ground forces, in some shape, will be necessary to achieve lasting and complete effects.

Although it is impossible to predict with 100 percent certainty what the next war will be like, what we do know from the conditions above, and our previous and current conflicts, is that U.S. military forces will have to be flexible enough to respond to a wide range of threats and conditions in the future. These threats and conditions will strongly influence the future roles and employment of U.S. military forces. Will the various forms of U.S. military power still be relevant in these future conditions?

Nuclear power will likely remain the genie in the bottle and serve as a deterrent similar to the previous fifty years. The mass casualty producing and destructive effect of nuclear weapons would not make their employment feasible in light of the desire to minimize non-combatant casualties and collateral damage. World opinion would undoubtedly disapprove of their use in anything other than the most extreme circumstances of national survival. It is very possible however, that the U.S. might employ limited nuclear forces in response to a significant WMD attack against America or its forces, if there was a suitable target. As a response to WMD attack, and for deterrence, nuclear power will remain relevant. However, although possessing the capability to still be a decisive force in theory, it is likely that conventional means will decide future warfare.

The role of seapower is unlikely to change from the vision expressed in current naval doctrine and vision. With no naval competitor in sight, the U.S. Navy's focus on projection of U.S. power ashore, and protection of global trade, fits the conditions expected in the future. The opening round of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM has demonstrated the capability and contribution of seapower to America's future conflicts. The nature of the conflict will determine whether seapower can be decisive. Quite obviously, in a limited seaborne conflict, such as protecting shipping in the Straits of Hormuz, seapower was and can be the decisive element. In more general conflicts of the type we have recently seen and are likely to deal with again, although a key contributor, seapower is not likely to be the sole decisive force in achieving the conflict's objectives.

Aerospace power will clearly remain relevant in the future. Given the unique nature of some conflicts, it is possible that aerospace power may be capable of independent action and decisive effects. As America's asymmetric advantage, it is very possible that it could dominate

some conflicts, even if not proving ultimately decisive. Some propose that the future of conflict is long-range, stand-off attack, an advanced version of current aerospace power.³⁹ It is clear however, that such reliance on a technological form of combat power would be limited in application given the nature of future conflicts. Standoff weapons would have added little to the fight in Afghanistan for example. What is indisputable is the value that aerospace power brings to the fight. Coupled with another form of military power, its contributions to achieving the conflict objectives can be significant.

However, aerospace has its limitations. Aerospace power is firepower based. It requires a target that can be located and struck in order to be effective. As such, it is possible for our opponents to negate its capability through dispersion, decoys and deception. Also, more importantly, the enemy will operate in urban population centers as the preferred environment for conflict. This will make aerospace intelligence gathering difficult, as well as limit the amount of firepower that the U.S. can employ, in order to minimize collateral damage. Even in "open" warfare it can not achieve miracles: "firepower alone, even when delivered on a massive scale, rarely has proved capable of ejecting determined troops from the ground they occupy."⁴⁰ Aerospace power, except for the most unique circumstances, will not be able to win the conflict alone.

The necessity and role of landpower is not going to diminish in future conflicts. If anything, the nature of the hostilities and our enemies will increase the importance of landpower in achieving the desired military endstate. Landpower has provided the flexibility, staying power, presence, and lasting effects that other forms of military power are unable to deliver in a ground conflict. There have been times when landpower has been seemingly declared obsolete. Yet, the record of our conflicts tells us otherwise. One combat veteran from the age of "push-button warfare" put it very eloquently: "You may fly over a land forever; you may bomb it, atomize it, pulverize it and wipe it clean of life – but if you desire to defend it, protect it, and keep it for civilization, you must do this on the ground, the way the Roman legions did, by putting your young men into the mud."⁴¹ Landpower has proven itself a decisive form of military power in past and recent conflicts. Although there may be unique hostilities where another element of military power may be decisive, landpower will clearly be a decisive force in future conflicts.

For the foreseeable future, it appears that each form of U.S. military power will remain relevant. What has been illustrated very clearly in recent U.S. conflicts has been the joint effort of all forms of military power in achieving the military endstate for the hostilities. It is clear that in each of the wars examined here, a joint effort led to the greatest success. It may be very

possible that one form of military power could be independently employed and prove decisive. But, it is obvious that the costs incurred, whether in the form of friendly casualties, non-combatant deaths, or political capital lost, will generally be much higher when only one form of military power is used alone. Joint warfare is more than just a buzzword, it is indeed the way of fighting a future U.S. conflict. The synergistic, mutually supporting, and enabling effects of each form of military power have in the past, and will serve in the future, to maximize the effects of U.S. forces while overcoming the constraints dictated by the nature of the conflict. "Joint power should be the dominant, and clearly can be the one decisive form of U.S. military power in future conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Are "boots on the ground" still needed to win America's wars? Will U.S. landpower still be decisive in future conflicts? The answer to both questions is a very clear and strong yes. Has aerospace power eclipsed landpower? The answer to that question is no. U.S. landpower will be needed in the future, and it will remain decisive in conflicts yet to come.

The U.S. military is comprised of several forms of military power. Nuclear, sea, aerospace, and landpower are each extremely capable, and each possesses a potentially decisive effect, an effect that can determine the achievement of the military endstate and objectives. There have been numerous theories advocating and espousing the decisive nature of each form of military power. Yet, past U.S. conflicts of the modern era such as W.W. II, Korea, and Vietnam have shown the decisive nature of ground forces. In each, it would have been impossible to ultimately reach the conclusion desired without landpower.

More recent U.S. conflicts have illustrated the decisive role of landpower in winning the nation's wars even in times of revolutionary technological advances. OPERATION DESERT STORM, despite advanced technology and massive air operations, still required the employment of ground forces to reach the desired endstate and win the conflict. Operations in Kosovo, likewise highlight the limitations of aerospace power, as well as the difficulties of achieving conflict objectives when landpower is not directly employed. In the information age, the current fight in Afghanistan has witnessed landpower in the decisive role of achieving the military endstate in that conflict. The likely nature of future conflicts will ensure that landpower has both a dominant role to play, and that it will more often than not be the decisive force.

It is also clear that landpower, although it can be ultimately decisive in deciding the outcome of future conflicts, should not be employed alone. The joint application of all elements

of U.S. military power will yield the most effective and decisive results in any future war. No one form of U.S. military power has eclipsed the others and rendered them obsolete or irrelevant. Each element of military power will have an indispensable and critical part to play. Future hostilities will require the capability of each form of military power to successfully end the hostilities on terms favorable to the U.S., and at the least cost in lives and resources. The U.S. will require landpower in order to fully achieve its military objectives and reach the military endstate of any future hostilities. In that regard, U.S. landpower will still be needed, and will still be decisive in future conflicts. There will still be a need to put U.S. "boots on the ground" in order to win our nation's wars.

WORD COUNT = 9,904

ENDNOTES

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²⁰ Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Operation Just Cause: Lessons and Warnings in the Future Use of Military Force, 101st Cong., 1990, 2.

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²² U.S. Army War College, Operation Desert Storm Case Study (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2001), 23.

²³ COL Edward C. Mann, Thunder and Lightning: Desert Storm and the Airpower Debates (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1995), 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

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²⁷ William J. Clinton, Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 26, 1999), 1.

²⁸ Benjamin S. Lambeth, NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 12.

²⁹ Alan Stephens, Kosovo, or the Future of War (Fairbairn Base, Australia: Australian Air Force Air Power Center, 1999), 21.

³⁰ Lambeth, 227.

³¹ Clinton, 1.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Lambeth, 132.

³⁴ Wesley K. Clark, Waging Modern War (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 236.

³⁵ The ideas in this paragraph are based on remarks made by a speaker participating in the Commandant's Lecture Series.

³⁶ Evan Thomas, "Leave No Man Behind," Newsweek, 18 March, 2002, 24.

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³⁸ Martin van Crevald, The Transformation of War (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 1-20.

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