

The Case for Discriminate Force

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Western democracies face increasing constraints on the use of their overwhelming military power. The classical logic, legitimacy and effectiveness of employing force to safeguard national interests apply less and less. State and non-state adversaries threaten important and even vital Western values and interests but are seemingly undeterred by – or even inspired by – Western military superiority. At the same time, phenomena such as globalisation, the growing transparency of the battlefield and changing Western value systems subject civilian and military leaders to mounting pressure to wield military power selectively and to use increasing discrimination in choosing means as well as ends.

Although the end of the Cold War ushered in a new era in which some speculated that force would play a less salient role in the international system, force remains essential to the West's maintenance and enhancement of security and stability. Yet military doctrine and force structures have been slow to adjust to new security challenges. Preventive diplomacy not backed by a credible threat of force is often impotent. Classical deterrence is less reliable against contemporary adversaries and asymmetric challenges such as terrorism. Non-military means of coercion by themselves often fail to change the behaviour of adversaries; and even when such coercion eventually succeeds, the time taken can result in greater bloodshed. The former Yugoslavia is an excruciating case in point. Yet the military options necessary to back up diplomacy, deterrence and coercion have not yet been fundamentally transformed to meet the new realities and constraints.

Even the most advanced Western militaries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel, have only slowly begun to adapt to the changing nature of warfare and the imperative of employing force discriminately. Along with new weapons, a new way of thinking about warfare is required. Without such adaptation, the military component of a national security strategy will be weakened in three critical dimensions: as an effective deterrent to attacks on territory as well as on allies and interests abroad; as an expedient coercive

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instrument that can reinforce diplomacy and compel foes to cease hostile actions; and as a viable warfighting tool should diplomacy, deterrence and compellence fail.¹ Using force discriminately should reinforce deterrence, bolster diplomatic efforts and increase the effectiveness of military actions when they become necessary.

The capacity to innovate doctrinally and technologically has long been a defining asset of those militaries that have stayed on the cutting edge of capability. Today, major innovation is required to retain the use of force as a legitimate tool of statecraft, an effective instrument of diplomacy and a viable warfighting tool. A paradigm shift is necessary in thinking about, preparing for, threatening, or ultimately employing military force. The innovation must occur synergistically across a range of areas. The Bush administration's assertion of a doctrine of pre-emption reflects recognition of the need for change. But pre-emption is inadequate and would be counter-productive, were it to become the sole or dominant feature of a new approach.

Western democracies and their militaries need to move deliberately towards a 'discriminate force' strategy. Such an evolution would permit the generation of a credible threat and if necessary, the resolute and targeted application of the appropriate amount of pain, precisely calibrated to elicit or impose the desired outcome and keep unintended death and destruction to an absolute minimum. This is crucial to ensure that future applications of force will be both legitimate enough to sustain public support, and decisive and precise enough to be effective.

Discriminate force does not automatically correspond to lessened lethality and hence a weaker communication of resolve. Indeed, discriminate force can equal high lethality or destruction if that is what is required, but it can also cause temporary incapacitation and denial. What the application of discriminate force demands is a combination of intensity, precision and effect that is versatile and dynamic. It is also unprecedented in its tight correlation with desired outcomes at all levels of the campaign: tactical; operational; and strategic.

Discriminate force requires fine-tuning military actions to political objectives and constraints, and it demands that policymakers deepen their understanding of military requirements for successful action. Hence, it entails an ever closer integration of military operations with political leadership throughout the campaign – not just at the onset and conclusion – and a greater synergy of military, diplomatic and economic policy tools than has traditionally been needed or desired. This integration may seem counter-intuitive because it is contrary to the instincts and inclinations of most military men and their political masters.² It also represents a sharp break with longstanding deterrence and warfighting traditions, in which military effectiveness has been predominantly equated with sheer destructive power. Facing adversaries undeterred by that destructive power, Western democracies need to look to new strategies of deterrence – and to new ways of applying that power effectively when it is needed.

The antecedents of discriminate force

Although effective development of discriminate force requires significant strategic and operational transformations, this evolution constitutes another step in the long march towards more discriminate application of military power that began at the end of the Second World War. Since the dawn of the nuclear age, strategists have struggled to reconcile the tension between the awesome power of nuclear weapons and the overwhelming costs of their use.

As the Cold War era took shape in the 1950s, the United States and, over time, the Soviet Union, acquired huge arsenals of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and elaborated a complex set of rules governing their employment. Facing acute inferiority in conventional forces in Europe (in terms of both numbers and level of readiness), and seeking to avoid greater defence spending after the Korean War, the Eisenhower administration introduced the doctrine of 'massive retaliation' with nuclear weapons in response to a conventional attack from the East in Europe or another conventional regional provocation by the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, with the development and expansion of the Soviet nuclear and long-range delivery capability, strategists and laypeople alike became increasingly uneasy with the notion of basing the literal survival of the planet on such arrangements. Such indiscriminate power threatened destruction 'on a scale incompatible with any criterion either of political calculation or of military necessity', as Michael Howard has put it.³ Specialists debated whether the massive retaliation concept was credible or viable. European members of NATO questioned whether the United States would truly risk the destruction of the homeland should the Soviets attack another member of the Atlantic Alliance. American strategists also wrestled with the reality that effective defences against Soviet offensive nuclear forces were as yet technically impossible.

By the mid-1950s, the superpowers had begun to develop a new set of rules governing their bilateral behaviour. Massive retaliation gradually evolved into what would later be formally articulated as the doctrine of 'Mutual Assured Destruction', known by its apt acronym MAD, in which each superpower understood the other to have the capacity to retaliate massively against an offensive attack. Assuming that each would act rationally, MAD was premised on the notion that each would be constrained from using nuclear weapons against the other except under the direst of circumstances. Western strategists realised that a more circumscribed nuclear deterrence would not produce stability, and they proceeded to develop a limited conflict strategy that would allow for large-scale military operations without provoking nuclear escalation. This desire for escalation control introduced new and significant constraints on the application of conventional military power, among them limits on areas and targets to be engaged as well as on the means employed.

In the early 1960s, the Kennedy administration sought to eschew massive retaliation altogether and complement MAD with an explicit alternative strategy that avoided the painful choice between capitulation and annihilation. They developed a doctrine of 'flexible response', with deterrence based on the threat of tactical nuclear weapons and first nuclear use against battlefield military targets

(decoupled from strategic forces) in addition to a strengthened conventional capability. The latter was designed to raise the nuclear threshold as well as to effectively fight limited conventional wars in the periphery below the nuclear threshold, while carefully managing escalation even when Soviet proxies and forces were involved.⁴

The West has arrived at the threshold of a discriminate force strategy as a result of this progression. Through the evolution of an approach that acknowledged the paradox of having more power than could be effectively used in most circumstances, the United States and its allies strove to ensure continued viability of the military option both as the backbone of a deterrence posture (depending principally on nuclear might) as well as a means for waging conventional war if necessary. Hindsight reveals how this evolution took much longer to implement than to conceptualise and was fraught with problems from the outset. But the elaboration of flexible response fundamentally changed the way in which the US and other key Western military powers prepared to defend their interests.

Seizing the advantage with precision strike

Despite the evolution of a strategy that avoided immediate escalation to nuclear war, Western conventional military capabilities would remain inferior in sheer numbers to the Soviet Army and its Warsaw Pact allies. In the mid-1970s, NATO estimated that if it were to face a surprise armoured assault from the Warsaw Pact it would be outnumbered by a factor of three to one in personnel and equipment. As this gap was perceived to grow, those charged with ensuring the effectiveness of US military forces began to search for alternatives that would enhance American military capabilities, leading ultimately to the elaboration of 'precision strike'.

Relying on the inventiveness of American industry, US civilian leaders and military planners took another step towards the ability to engage in more discriminate application of force by pursuing in the late 1970s what has been described as the 'offset strategy'. They sought to gain decisive military advantage against a numerically superior enemy through the application of technology that would improve the intelligence of weapon systems and lead to more precise applications of power. William J. Perry characterised the offset strategy as a sustained effort to 'give these weapons a significant competitive advantage over their opposing counterparts by supporting them on the battlefield with newly developed equipment that multiplied their combat effectiveness'.⁵

The US military was not the only military that moved in this direction. Acting independently, but roughly in parallel with the US, Israel underwent a similar process of developing indigenous precision-strike capabilities. In the Israeli case, the prime motivation was the imperative after the 1973 war to dramatically improve its force attrition ratio and to offset through conventional means its growing quantitative military inferiority. This choice to retain a conventional response as the foundation of Israel's security doctrine while developing a

precision-strike capability came in spite of a strong public plea by Moshe Dayan for adoption of a nuclear-based strategy and was influenced by a sobering realisation that the classical conventional build-up in which Israel had engaged since the 1973 war would wreck its economy.

The rationale for going beyond precision strike

Precision strike proved overwhelmingly successful in offsetting and even reversing the conventional balance. However, some of the impact – directly attributable to its very effectiveness – was unanticipated and unwelcome, because it motivated adversaries to seek to acquire WMD and to adopt asymmetric strategies and tactics for challenging Western interests. Precision strike's cutting-edge capabilities will remain the backbone of Western military responses to conventional threats – just as strategic nuclear systems remain fundamental to Western deterrence of nuclear war and are indeed requisites of discriminate force. But precision strike and its ancillary technologies can no longer serve by themselves as the defining paradigm for Western use of force; they must be integrated into a broader strategy to address some of the new employment scenarios for which militaries must be prepared.

Many twenty-first century adversaries are unlike those that Western democracies prepared to confront when precision strike was developed. They are no longer primarily the large land armies of the Soviet Union or Arab nations. They are more often tyrants, terrorists, or drug lords; they may operate from or exploit failed states; and they may have a global reach, being at least partially networked (rather than hierarchical) and diffuse. In response to precision strike, adversaries have evolved new methods of challenging Western militaries' capabilities. In the face of overwhelming and ever-growing conventional superiority, they make use of old and new asymmetric means, resorting to terrorism and guerrilla warfare to attack primarily civilian targets as well as Western interests, friends and allies abroad. Their typical capabilities consist of a hybrid of low-tech weapons and diverted or modified commercial assets. They also increasingly seek WMD and longer-range delivery vehicles. They strive to blur the lines between combatants and bystanders by hiding themselves and their military assets and weapons facilities in residential neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals and religious sites. They seek human shields or maintain a low 'signature' to prevent detection, identification and targeting, and to generate a public uproar about the indiscriminate use of power against them when they are attacked.

Finally, they complement physical attacks with an intense propaganda and incitement campaign. This 'image war' (frequently referred to as 'the battle of narratives') is designed to discredit, to drive a wedge between allies and friends, and to mobilise their own people and sympathisers to join the underdogs in taking on high-technology Western powers. Seeking political gains in the court of international public opinion, they spread disinformation, much of which is difficult and time-consuming to refute; exploit the vulnerabilities that much-cherished civil liberties create in Western democracies; and inflict and even

invite considerable pain and suffering on their peoples (for example, Saddam Hussein's deprivation of Iraqi citizens as part of his fight against international sanctions). They are inspired by traumatic Western debacles (such as the US and subsequent Israeli pullout from Lebanon, or the US withdrawal from Somalia) to believe that they will ultimately prevail by driving up political, economic, and military costs and breaking the will of the West.

These adversaries are not necessarily deterred by the traditional logic of deterrence, believing that their audacity, brutality, tenacity and tolerance for pain, in addition to their innovative tactics and global reach, provide them with relative impunity. They believe that they may be able to deter action by the US, other Western democracies or Israel; catch them off guard; attack the countries themselves or their interests with plausible deniability or immunity from retaliation; or provoke a response that is either relatively painless or counter-productive. Some of these new adversaries are not only undeterred by Western power but are actually inspired by it to try to pick a fight and, having lured their opponent into attacking them, expect to enhance their own domestic and international standing. Capitalising on their underdog advantage in the image war, they hope to convert tactical losses into strategic gains, fundamentally altering the classical military link between the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war. According to this logic, they might lose all the battles but still win the war for hearts and minds.

In addition to the advent of new adversaries, another reason that Western militaries need to move beyond precision strike is that publics in Western democracies have grown less willing to tolerate casualties and destruction, even on their adversary's side. This is partially a result of a change in Western social values that has dramatically diminished public tolerance for casualties and destruction, especially among non-combatants. But this is also the result of a combination of higher expectations and better access to information. Thanks to the revolution in imagery and telecommunications, the battlefield is now increasingly transparent to the media and to the general public, either in real time or shortly thereafter. In the recent war in Afghanistan, despite the remote terrain and the limitations imposed on the media by allied forces (as well as by self-censorship), vivid footage made its way on to television with record speed. Furthermore, given Western militaries' technological prowess, the public expects precision and reduced collateral damage. With every successful performance, the bar is raised even higher.

While it might appear that superior precision and overwhelming conventional superiority have made it easier to employ military force, this is not the case. Western public expectations that combat should be brief, incur few casualties and cause minimal collateral damage have outstripped capabilities. Warfare remains a blunt instrument. It still involves friction and grinding, is mired in confusion and uncertainty, and results in casualties and destruction, including among non-combatants. While Western democracies possess seductive options for applying force that appear to be clean, surgical, stand-off and 'cost free,' these options in reality have become more challenging to employ

legitimately, because of ever higher demands for discrimination and growing Western political inhibitions about using force. Also, it has become exceedingly difficult to translate the enormous improvement in raw military capabilities into a corresponding enhancement of military effectiveness.

With new capabilities and constraints, overwhelming preponderance of force has become even more difficult to translate into desired effects. Paradoxically, it is precisely those countries that have the greatest power who may least be able to achieve desired results. This makes it imperative that Western democracies find novel approaches to harness their qualitative military superiority to retain the threat or use of force as a viable instrument in national security strategy, particularly against opponents guided by asymmetric logic and employing corresponding tactics.

Implementing discriminate force

To retain the use of force as a viable instrument both of diplomacy and warfighting, Western democracies must develop an enhanced capacity for the application of discriminate force *across the full spectrum* of possible military engagements. When circumstances require military action, Western forces should be competent in scenarios that range from the higher end – such as deterring and if need be defeating regional bullies such as Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Il and routing al-Qaeda cave dwellers in Afghanistan – to the lower end – such as dealing with ethnic cleansing in Rwanda, quelling a riot in Mitrovica, responding to Palestinian suicide bombers or combatting drug cartels in Colombia.

As has been the case for the past 50 years, experts disagree about the role nuclear weapons will play in this new security environment, with some arguing for an expansion of their role within as well as beyond the context of deterrence. The version of the US Nuclear Posture Review leaked in early 2002 suggests that some within the Bush administration may be inclined to proceed along this path. However, greater reliance on nuclear weapons for anything other than strategic deterrence is unlikely to produce positive results. It will not be credible or effective against most of the new threats faced today, and it will most likely abet the proliferation of nuclear weapons and lower inhibitions on their use. Nuclear weapons do have an important role to play in dissuading contemporary adversaries who either already possess or aspire to acquire and use WMD capabilities. But this role is best accomplished by a posture converged upon over the last decade by the US, the UK and France: one that *a priori* neither rules in nor rules out a nuclear response.

While there is an important synergy between nuclear and conventional arms in addressing contemporary Western security requirements, enhanced conventional capabilities hold the key to strengthening diplomacy, enforcing compellence and improving warfighting outcomes. Efforts to implement discriminate force must therefore focus on increasing the strategic and operational effectiveness of conventional arms. To date, this work has largely concentrated on the refinement of high-intensity warfare precision capabilities.

While investment in these capabilities should proceed apace, it must occur in an overall context that provides strategic and doctrinal direction. Otherwise such investment will increase strength in only one dimension, to the detriment of overall effectiveness.

For Western defence establishments to move decisively toward discriminate force, they need to integrate innovations in at least five arenas: deterrence and coercive diplomacy; doctrine; capabilities; force structure; and international collaboration.

Reinvigorating deterrence and coercive diplomacy

The realisation that some contemporary adversaries are inherently more difficult to deter or coerce should make clear the need to adjust expectations about the reliability of these strategies in the face of new challenges. Indeed, it should motivate Western democracies to seek to reinvigorate deterrence and coercion as policy instruments. Both remain essential arrows in the quiver of policy tools if only because the alternatives are even less palatable.

To bolster the utility of deterrence and coercive diplomacy, Western democracies need first and foremost to develop capabilities and options for the highly discriminate, calibrated and nuanced application of conventional military power. For diplomacy to be effective against contemporary adversaries it must be backed by credible coercive threats. Discriminate force aims to provide capabilities that impress upon adversaries the fact that discrimination does not diminish the capacity to inflict pain. Otherwise countries such as the US, UK and Israel will be forced to make hollow threats or respond disproportionately in a context in which excessive use of force is immoral, illegitimate and may also prove counterproductive.

Secondly, unlike classical deterrence and compellence, Western democracies may no longer be able to influence directly the motivations and intentions of contemporary adversaries. But they might still be able to prevail upon such adversaries by applying coercion or deterrence indirectly against their patrons, allies, and subordinates in order to affect their cost/benefit calculations of compliance. For example, to reduce Hizbollah provocations against Israel from Southern Lebanon, the US and Israel have successfully applied pressure on the Syrian and Lebanese governments to rein in Hizbollah. Related examples include US efforts to persuade Pakistan to stop supporting the Taliban regime so that allied forces could destroy the al-Qaeda base, and the US and European success in mobilising the Serbs to oust Milosevic.

Thirdly, Western democracies need to complement threats of punishment or denial with reassurances and rewards for compliant behaviour on the part of the adversary's allies, constituents or hosts. Deterrence and coercion efforts can also be reinforced by strengthening capabilities that bring to justice leaders and their followers whose behaviour is ruthless or repugnant. This can involve prosecuting Serb leaders for war crimes, or threatening prompt and effective retaliation against any of Saddam Hussein's lieutenants and troops who might carry out his orders to launch chemical or biological weapons attacks against the US or its allies.

Finally, they will need to reinforce the threat of nuanced and effective punishment with the message that no gains will be achieved through aggression: that most provocations are likely to be detected and foiled and their perpetrators identified due to enhanced intelligence, early warning, readiness, law enforcement and protection measures. The capacity and will to take pre-emptive action, if necessary, must also be made clear.

Adapting doctrine

Making a successful transition to a discriminate force strategy will require profound doctrinal adaptation that yields military concepts and guidelines for action that are calibrated to new challenges.⁶ Western democracies will need to produce a doctrine that addresses the dual requirements of efficacy and sustainability, demonstrating adequate resolve and sufficient restraint. Some of the doctrinal imperatives that flow from this delicate balancing act pertain to the timing of military operations as well as to their aims and means.

Pre-emption The West's ability to deter or defend against the threats posed by new (in particular non-state) adversaries remains limited. This inadequacy is compounded by the dearth or often highly perishable nature of timely and reliable intelligence about many of these enemies and their hostile intentions. These factors have generated a growing incentive to resort to force early in order to prevent or at least diminish such challenges to Western security. Pre-emption appears particularly compelling in cases in which an acute perception of vulnerability to imminent danger is matched by the brief availability of high-quality real-time targeting intelligence about the adversary. The logic of pre-emption before such a 'window of opportunity' closes has guided Israel in its response to Palestinian suicide bombers, and it has also attracted more adherents in the United States, beginning late in the Clinton administration. In the aftermath of 11 September 2001, the Bush administration has made the case for pre-emption in the face of WMD and terrorism threats and endeavoured to codify this approach as a new strategic doctrine of pre-emption.

From the military point of view, there are clear operational benefits from threatening or actually using force early and decisively, when the need for action first materialises and the intelligence to support effective intervention is available. In certain circumstances, it permits action to be taken before developments have deteriorated to the point that the discriminate use of force is no longer possible or much more difficult to achieve. The benefits that derive from seizing the initiative early also extend to overcoming the real danger that restraint in using force might be misconstrued by one's adversaries as weakness or lack of resolve, thereby increasing the probability of conflict, prolonging its duration and driving up its costs. Recent history provides ample evidence of the price of waiting and of conducting a truncated military campaign.

Furthermore, the magnitude and intractability of some threats – such as high consequence terrorism, the use of WMD or brutal ethnic cleansing –

presents a powerful argument for revisiting deeply held Western inhibitions against relatively early military engagement of a preventive or pre-emptive nature. Both commonly fall under the legal category of anticipatory action. Although a policy of pre-emption seems contrary to many Western norms, a growing number of prominent scholars and practitioners concerned with the legal and ethical aspects of the use of force have revisited these strictures in light of new dangers. A debate is now underway about the ethical imperative and political legitimacy associated with *selective* pre-emptive or anticipatory military action. Under current international law such a course is at best dubious, but in light of contemporary security challenges, long-held assumptions require rigorous scrutiny.⁷ In the past year, a distinguished international commission has articulated the ethical imperative of timely intervention in humanitarian crises.⁸ 'Just wars' philosopher Michael Walzer has argued that some previously taboo activities, such as assassinations of individual leaders, are not inherently immoral; the morality of military action, he argues, derives from finding legitimate targets and *preventing* the killing of large numbers of innocent people.⁹

However, those contemplating pre-emptive or preventive action must weigh the possible benefits against the potentially profound adverse implications of such an aggressive military posture. Most problematic, especially for the United States, is the danger that such behaviour, especially when carried out on its own and in the absence of an internationally accepted basis of legitimacy (such as a United Nations Security Council resolution), will set a precedent and lower the threshold for military action by others. In addition, the impulse to act early can and often has led to the false estimation of the risks and costs of military action, as well as to the mistaken expectation that military responses provide all the answers to complex national-security challenges.

A discriminate force strategy does not envisage anticipatory military action becoming the norm, let alone the default option. Indeed, it may be ill-advised to elevate pre-emption to the level of a new doctrine. The circumstances and stakes involved vary greatly and therefore judgment is required on a case-by-case basis. Yet Western leaders can no longer run the risk of categorically foregoing the option of pre-emptive or preventive action. Waiting until all other means have been exhausted, or until an international consensus has emerged, is not, in all cases, the right course of action. It is in this gulf between looking at force as the means of first resort and treating it necessarily as the means of last resort that discriminate force assumes even greater prominence. In the future, the legitimacy of military action, especially when action is undertaken pre-emptively, would depend largely on the combination of a just and well-articulated cause, the highly nuanced means available for conducting the operation (sparing as much as possible non-combatants casualties and suffering, avoiding collateral damage and seeking to limit permanent damage to military or other essential targets) and the evident commitment to the establishment of a stable post-conflict order. Developing and fielding novel options for applying force discriminately thus becomes a prerequisite of any pre-emptive or preventive

action. This lesson has been illustrated both positively and negatively by the US war against al-Qaeda as well as by the Israeli campaign to foil suicide bombers. *Preparing for the image war* The growing influence of images and public perceptions in determining the outcome of contemporary military engagements necessitates preparing to fight and win the image war. With the advent of handycams, mobile satellite communications, the Internet and 24-hour global television channels, the image war has come to play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of a campaign. In some cases, it is more important than the military operation itself, in that military effectiveness may be judged more by public perceptions of what transpired than by what really happened on the ground. Success in deriving political benefits from military action requires an unprecedented level of integration between military and non-military means to monitor events in real time, share information with the public, counter and refute false allegations, discredit and disable the adversary's communications with his troops and followers, and promote a positive narrative – all without resorting to Soviet-style propaganda.

Modifying the concept of victory Traditionally, victory was accomplished through death, destruction and eventual territorial conquest. If the cause was just, these means were considered legitimate. Furthermore, until relatively recently, military technology provided few alternatives. Today, massive death and destruction (especially but not exclusively among non-combatants) are no longer deemed acceptable as objectives, and even as unintended consequences must be kept to a minimum. Territorial conquest is similarly problematic with respect to legitimacy and may not be relevant against some adversaries (as in the fight against stateless terrorists). It is also unattractive because the victor frequently bears the burden of post-conflict reconstruction. Thus the goal of military operations must now be redefined to achieving *success* rather than *victory*, where success is measured just as much in avoiding excessive civilian suffering, casualties and destruction as it is in furthering the political goals underlying the military operation. Attaining these results requires a transformation in thinking about military operations as well as a different mix of aims, doctrine and means. It requires astute management of the image war as well as significant improvement in warfighting capabilities to provide a greater range of options to political and military leaders.

Upgrading capabilities

Western militaries are already heavily although not uniformly investing in an array of advanced precision-guided munitions and targeting tools, as well as buying new platforms or modifying older ones from which to launch them. Technologically, these acquisitions provide a growing capacity to calculate the likely impact of ordnance and to aim it with ever-declining (though never zero) prospects of missing the selected target or hitting others instead. The principal shortcoming of capabilities lies not in the technology but in knowledge shortfalls pertaining to target selection. To apply force discriminately, the single

most important task is to develop a knowledge base that will enable aiming attacks at high-leverage targets, while avoiding irrelevant, politically sensitive, incorrectly identified or illegitimate sites. The second requirement is to be able to readjust those attacks in light of a tactical, operational and strategic assessment of their impact, as well as other developments outside the context of the campaign. In practical terms, this will require a new set of 'force enablers': deep area expertise; multi-dimensional intelligence; broad-based situational awareness; and accurate battle-damage assessment, all fused in real time. These innovations will contribute to effective targeting and warfighting, and they are absolutely essential to dominating the image war.

A second domain that requires a significant boost is the capacity to produce transient, reversible and less-than-lethal effects on human beings as well as on materials and facilities. These capabilities need to address both lower-end and higher-end scenarios. The challenge is to qualitatively expand and upgrade the options available to commanders for applying their force and doing so decisively without necessarily having to kill or destroy (at least on a large scale) to attain results. The development of capabilities to temporarily or partially incapacitate or render harmless is not only important for force protection and quelling civil unrest; it is also necessary for effectively fighting adversaries who seek refuge in or who deploy WMD facilities or other military assets in the midst of non-combatants, religious sites, hospitals or schools. It is also driven by the need to use force legitimately (by avoiding unnecessary killing and destruction), to lower the cost of post-conflict reconstruction, and to offset targeting limitations imposed by partial or imperfect intelligence.

The development of these capabilities has, so far, been peripheral in advanced militaries (with the exception of providing for force protection). Most of the available options for employing less-than-lethal weapons are only marginally superior to those originally developed by law enforcement agencies for their modest requirements and within their relatively meagre resources. Furthermore, the restrictions that have guided their development – including the precept that they should do little or no physical harm – have yielded effects that are most likely to be too short-lived, feeble, or inconsequential to be effective across a full range of scenarios. Information warfare constitutes an additional and promising category of less-than-lethal capabilities, but as yet also remains outside the core of military strategy. Fully exploited and surgically applied (in terms of choice of targets and means), it can provide opportunities for the discriminate application of force by inflicting targeted but temporary or reversible 'pain' on the enemy, such as selectively incapacitating but not destroying cyber-communications or power-generation infrastructure.

Adapting force structure

Moving towards discriminate force also requires rethinking traditional military structures, although not along the most obvious lines. For example, some have argued for development of two separate forces: one prepared for high-intensity conflict; the other for peacekeeping and lower-intensity missions. Such a

bifurcation of capability would be counterproductive from a discriminate-force perspective. Escalation dominance remains as important as it has ever been for military success and is even more critical in the current security environment. For example, every commitment of what might be perceived as the 'B team' would be quickly recognised as such by adversaries (as well as allies), inevitably projecting weak resolve and thereby diminishing the deterrent effect and degrading the value of the military commitment. In addition, having an 'A team' and a 'B team' will most likely generate significant problems with recruitment to the 'B team' due to the combined effect of lowered prestige and fear of extended deployments. Another concern is that having a readily available low-intensity force may also make it too easy to use, thereby running the risk of imprudent or excessive commitment.

Western democracies do need an integrated, adaptable, multi-purpose force based on core fighting competencies that can be modified on a case-by-case basis with certain skills or manpower resources (civilian as well as military) depending on the mission requirement. Soldiers should be the best warriors possible in any circumstance they may face, even if this implies the need to invest more in training and refresh their training every time they are assigned to unorthodox military missions.¹⁰

However, within the single force, the function of ground forces needs to be carefully scrutinised. The scale and role envisaged for them during the Cold War may no longer be relevant, and their relationship to other elements of military forces may need to be redefined. Furthermore, while it would be inadvisable to downsize forces drastically in the near term, it is equally clear that a fundamental shift is necessary in the way ground forces are organised to deploy and fight. Western democracies face adversaries who harbour no illusions about their ability to catch up conventionally. And the democracies are increasingly subjected to political and ethical apprehensions about conquest and destruction. Their military engagements are likely to increasingly emphasise standoff firepower over physical movement and territorial conquest, air over ground forces, software over hardware, and extensive employment of light, high-tech infantry as well as special forces over armoured or mechanised formations.

These requirements imply a growing emphasis on air power as well as on lighter and special ground forces. Yet in some circles, such changes in force structure and employment raise concerns that the transformation is driven by Western casualty aversion, which in turn produces a higher likelihood that adversary civilian casualties and collateral damage will be incurred or at least tolerated. Such critiques were voiced during the Balkan wars and more recently in Afghanistan and the Palestinian *intifada*. Casualty aversion has indeed been a Western preoccupation in these and other cases, but the tactics chosen for force employment have deliberately been relatively discriminate. Indeed, cutting-edge airpower employed by the US and Israel has proven more adept at avoiding indiscriminate killing and destruction than the employment of large ground formations (such as were used in Vietnam, and on a smaller scale, more recently in the Palestinian village, Jenin). Special forces and elite infantry units

also assume greater importance in asymmetric scenarios because they can often provide a functional substitute to large ground commitments without increasing the suffering of bystanders. Such forces complement modern airpower, improving its accuracy and offsetting some of its inherent limitations, such as in dealing with targets in urban terrain.

The most likely scenarios for future military engagements also require revisiting the cherished military principle of organic armed formations, in which military units, especially army field units, possess their own core components that provide them with all essential capabilities. This organising principle may also need to be fundamentally modified to meet the requirements of discriminate force. Future conflicts will require innovation and elasticity in the capacity to assemble joint capabilities quickly and efficiently around a core command-and-control framework. These must be tailored to the particular circumstances of the situation at hand, and should be capable of swift and smooth adjustment along many dimensions (including integration of coalition forces) as warranted by the scope and fortunes of the mission. Such concepts would need to be explored through an extensive experimentation process including simulations and war gaming.

Enhancing international cooperation

To implement discriminate force, the United States and other countries that seek to make a similar adaptation will need to make significant new investments in international cooperation. Cooperation is required not for legitimacy or charity but because it is essential in meeting new security challenges. Partners are needed to do just about everything that needs to be done in the international security arena – whether it involves prevention, detection, deterrence or pre-emption of hostile intent, or an actual response to an attack should those fail.

To support the precision capabilities under development, intelligence and other situational awareness tools must be improved. As a consequence, close cooperation with other countries, NGOs and individuals – in both the military and the intelligence domains – is required. In addition, international cooperation will be necessary for successful coercion, because others may have more leverage over adversaries or their supporters, or because there is strength in numbers. Further, international cooperation is necessary for warfighting. All of this cooperation will depend on having a ‘bank account’ of political capital from which to draw, requiring a sustained investment in relationship-building. For example, the US and other leading Western militaries should expand their defence cooperation initiatives with potential coalition partners. Through such programmes future allies learn about one another’s strengths and weaknesses, and prepare for future combined operations.

To ensure that force can be applied discriminately by the coalitions within which Western nations are likely to fight in the future, the US will also need to undertake a concerted effort to close the military technology gap between itself and its allies and partners. As the pressure to reduce death and collateral

damage increases, so too does the pressure to acknowledge that most Western nations have not made anywhere near the same investment as the United States and Israel in precision weapons such as smart munitions, or in secure battlefield communications. In Kosovo, for example, this presented a real problem for US commanders; they had to weigh the benefits of operating alongside allies against the potential liability that European forces would not necessarily be as precise, which could have resulted in a counterproductive outcome.

A focus on command, control and communications interoperability is the most important first step. The US military information grid that is now being assembled needs to be built to accommodate what is most vividly described as 'plug ins' for allies and coalition partners.¹¹ The Europeans need to rationalise defence spending and invest what limited defence resources are available in critical capability upgrades. The US should also set in advance information security standards that would enhance coalition warfighting capabilities, and it should address significant obstacles that its export control policies present to transnational defence-industrial cooperation.

Conclusion

Many developments in the technological, operational and political domains have converged to create conditions that favour the transition towards discriminate force by Western militaries. Yet these have largely come about as a loose collection of separate and disparate actions without any common organising concept or vision to guide them. Consequently, they have failed to dramatically upgrade the capacity to apply force discriminately. This capability will continue to prove elusive without a paradigm shift in thinking about, preparing for and using force. Innovation will be required across the board: at the strategic level; in doctrine; in force structure; in capabilities; and in international cooperation. Accomplishing these objectives will enhance the ability to:

- wield force in a fashion most conducive to attainment of political goals;
- integrate force fully with other instruments of national power;
- conform with civilised norms of conduct and retain the moral high ground;
- enhance appeal to (or at least legitimacy in the eyes of) allies, partners, and international public opinion;
- avoid excessive alienation of an adversary's population or its sympathisers;
- reinforce the norm of discriminate use of force;
- improve warfighting economics and reduce the price of post-conflict reconstruction; and
- increase the deterrent effect of military power.

If Western democracies achieve many of the goals set forth here, they will significantly enhance their warfighting potential. Even more significantly, they will enhance the preventive diplomatic potential of their military capabilities. A genuinely discriminate force strategy will make warfighting less likely by strengthening diplomacy and deterrence.

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Notes

- ¹ The origins of use of the term 'compellence' as a strategy can be traced back to Thomas Schelling in *The Strategy of Conflict* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960). On p. 195, Schelling introduced the concept of 'compellent threats', defining these as 'a threat intended to make an adversary do something (or cease doing something)'. Further, he introduced the distinction between such a threat and another type of 'risky behavior', which entailed 'a threat intended to keep him from doing something', the latter commonly referred to as deterrence and a 'deterrent' threat. For further refinement of the concept of compellence, see Alexander L. George, 'Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics' in Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (2nd ed.) (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 7–12.
- ² Civilian 'meddling' in the management of military campaigns is

the subject of a new book by Eliot Cohen. He presents a compelling case that intrusive involvement of political leaders in military campaigns is neither unprecedented nor, under certain circumstances, detrimental, and in fact can enhance warfighting outcomes. See Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

- ³ Michael Howard (ed.), *Restraints on War: Studies in the Limitation of Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 8.
- ⁴ The US war in Vietnam demonstrated the challenges associated with preventing escalation into a direct superpower confrontation. It also provided sobering insights into the inherent limitations of and evolving requirement for applying military power, massive and superior as it might be, in fighting wars in general and counter-insurgencies in particular. While the incrementalism associated with American military action in Vietnam might be misconstrued as representing an effort to be more 'discriminate', this was not the case. Indeed, the conduct of the war was not dominated by the kind of concerns for expediency or legitimacy that define discriminate force. Furthermore, the capabilities to support discriminate application of power did not exist. One of Vietnam's legacies would be a greater interest in the development of more nuanced and calibrated capabilities.
- ⁵ See William J. Perry's explanation of the origins and logic of the offset strategy in 'Desert Storm and Deterrence', *Foreign Affairs*, (Fall, 1991), pp. 68–69.
- ⁶ US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers have already publicly acknowledged

the centrality of the conceptual innovation that is required. In their 5 February 2002 testimonies before the US Senate, they stated:

'Transformation is not about weapon systems particularly; it's more about thinking – changing how we think about war. All the high-tech weapons in the world won't transform our armed forces unless we transform the way we think, the way we train, the way we exercise and the way we fight' (Secretary Rumsfeld); and 'Such dramatic improvement requires not only technological change but also changes, and probably most importantly, in how we think and how we employ our capabilities to achieve more effective results in less time with fewer lives lost and with less cost. The transformation must include training and education ... changes in our doctrine and in our organizations' (Chairman Myers).

- ⁷ For example, see discussion by Anthony Clark Arend and Robert Beck on 'Anticipatory self-defense' in *International Law and the Use of Force: Beyond the UN Charter Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 71–79, and Christopher C. Joyner and Anthony Clark Arend, 'Anticipatory Humanitarian Intervention: An Emerging Legal Norm?' in *US Air Force Academy Journal of Legal Studies*, 1999–2000.
- ⁸ See *The Responsibility to Protect*, report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (Ottawa: International Research Centre, 2001).
- ⁹ Michael Walzer, 'First, Define the Battlefield', *The New York Times*, 21 September 2001.
- ¹⁰ As former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Sir Rupert Smith has argued, 'A soldier is a warrior. He is no good as a soldier unless he is a warrior'. Interview with

General Sir Rupert Smith, *NATO Review*, vol. 49, Summer 2001, p. 24.

- ¹¹ For more on the issue of 'closing the gap', see Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, 'Managing the Pentagon's International Relations', in *Keeping the Edge: Managing Defense for the Future*, Ashton B. Carter and John P. White (eds) (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 240–249, and David Gompert, Richard Kugler, and Martic Libicki, *Mind the Gap: Promoting a Transatlantic Revolution in Military Affairs* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1999).