

# Casualty Aversion: Dispelling the Myth

A Monograph  
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## ABSTRACT

CASUALTY AVERSION: DISPELLING THE MYTH by Maj. T. S. Mundy, USMC, 55 pages.

The perception among many officers of all ranks in the U.S. armed services is that casualty aversion limits the military's ability to perform its mission. A frequent remark from military members during discussions of world crisis spots and what the U.S. response should be is that if the military suffers a single casualty, the mission will be ended because the American people will not support such intervention with casualties. Yet this is a myth that has so permeated the U.S. military today as to have the effect of limiting risk taking in military operations. Limiting risk in the name of casualty aversion carries the future implication of driving boldness out of the military organizations. The unforeseen consequence may be more casualties in the next conflict.

The origins of casualty aversion are explored using three criteria applied to the three case studies of the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and the intervention in Somalia. First, public opinion polls are used to identify the changing nature of public opinion in support of each of the case studies. The research also includes data on the effect of media coverage of military operations as it relates to public opinion and support. Second, the nature of U.S. warfighting capability is chronicled through the case studies using historical documents and books to determine if the ability of the U.S. military today, through technology, has become so thorough and efficient as to induce a feeling in decision-makers that war can be waged without friendly casualties. Finally, an examination is made of decision-makers, both in the highest echelons of the military and their civilian counterparts, and whether an aversion to casualties has evolved over the years among this group. The research determines whether or not there is a myth that has led senior civilian and military leaders to believe the U.S. should only commit forces when friendly casualties can be minimized.

Research reveals that the American public is remarkably willing to accept U.S. military casualties even in limited conflicts. Casualty aversion as it is normally attributed to the American public is a myth. Contrary to the common perception among military members, once committed to a war or intervention, the public prefers to escalate force to attain victory if needed. Public demands, even to a highly dramatic event such as the deaths of eighteen members of Task Force Ranger in Somalia, tend to be for retribution vice withdrawal. The technological edge the U.S. enjoys over all adversaries is used as a means of limiting military casualties, but can also serve to create a feeling of invincibility among military and political leaders. Those senior military and political leaders are the ones who make casualty aversion a reality through their actions because of their incorrect conclusions about the nature of public support in limited conflicts. Unfortunately, this top-down perception causes subordinates to attempt to avoid suffering any casualties during operations and is driving boldness out of the U.S. military.

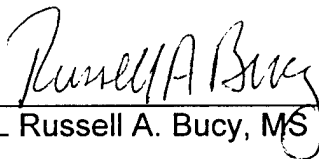
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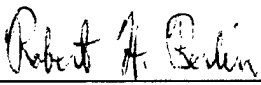
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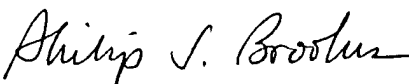
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Public Opinion and the Military.....	7
Vietnam.....	8
Desert Storm.....	13
Somalia.....	16
Media.....	18
III. Effect of Technology on Casualty Aversion.....	22
Vietnam.....	24
Desert Storm.....	25
Somalia.....	28
Adversaries.....	28
IV. Leadership.....	30
Vietnam.....	31
Desert Storm.....	32
Somalia.....	36
V. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	42
Recommendations.....	44
Endnotes.....	47
Bibliography.....	56

## INTRODUCTION

The American Army really is a people's Army in the sense that it belongs to the American people who take a jealous and proprietary interest in its involvement. When the Army is committed the American people are committed, when the American people lose their commitment it is futile to try to keep the Army committed. In the final analysis, the American Army is not so much an arm of the Executive Branch as it is an arm of the American people. The Army, therefore, cannot be committed lightly.<sup>1</sup>

Gen. Fred C. Weyand

Friendly casualties have become a paramount concern in the commitment of U.S. military forces. Few commanders in history have waged operations with a desire to suffer friendly casualties, but all understood casualties were part of the act of fighting, even in limited wars. Since the Vietnam War, U.S. military operations have been plagued by casualty aversion. The U.S. leadership's views about casualty aversion were solidified in the Weinberger Doctrine. This distillation of the lessons learned about casualties and limited war was first espoused by the Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger in 1984. His strict rules for the commitment of U.S. forces abroad were generally accepted in the U.S. government and used through Desert Storm. Secretary Weinberger codified the feelings of many political and military leaders who had learned from the lessons of Vietnam that public support for a limited war was fleeting and casualties would not be tolerated. This is a myth perpetuated to the present day which must be fully understood by future senior military leaders.

Understanding casualty aversion is essential to modern military planners. Concern over military casualties will impact operations in the foreseeable future,

so commanders must recognize the effect this will have on their plans. If the United States is the only remaining superpower in the world, wars of the near future will largely be limited in their scope from the U.S. perspective. With limited war, casualty aversion continues to receive strong emphasis from senior military and civilian leaders, but should it? It is predictable that future opponents to the U.S. may seek to exploit the American approach that favors technological but bloodless combat. The understanding of this phenomenon starts with the examination of where and when casualty aversion began in recent history. The U.S. leadership was willing to commit a vast amount of American servicemen to defeat a common enemy in the world wars. Exploring what has or has not changed since the end of the second world war could lead toward today's operational leaders understanding of the restrictions they face concerning friendly casualties in the future. As operational leaders translate strategic aims into tactical actions they must understand the origins of casualty aversion and how it affects campaign planning and execution.

What are the origins of casualty aversion and why does it seem to be an issue? From the birth of the United States, the American people were steeped in the heritage of the citizen soldier. In the late twentieth century, the military has become the realm of professionals and not the citizen soldier. Yet the public remains focused on the lives of members of the U.S. military when necessity dictates its employment in crises.

The Vietnam War and its use of the draft beginning in 1964 meant that many American families were directly tied to the concerns of the military because their sons and daughters were being drafted to go fight.<sup>2</sup> This may have given rise to a public expectation that their children should be committed to combat wisely and excessive casualties should be avoided. However, the legacy of the Vietnam years does not totally explain the reason for the public's continued interest in avoiding cost in lives during military operations, regardless of the value of those operations.

The U.S. military today is seen as a place offering a chance for social mobility. Americans identify with this and are sensitive to the fortunes of military personnel.<sup>3</sup> They want to see members of the military perform well and not be needlessly wasted. Many American families also have a family connection with the military reflected by past service accomplishments and still feel a kinship with members serving today.

Since WWII, Americans have developed technology to protect military personnel varying from longer range firepower and target acquisition to improvements in body and vehicle armor. The U.S. has spent untold billions finding ways to keep our sons and daughters from unnecessarily becoming casualties in combat. "People of all countries love their children and their soldiers, but only we in the United States have the opportunity, the wealth, and the technology to protect them, even in battle."<sup>4</sup> Yet this concern for limiting

casualties might affect mission performance or possibly degrade our military's effectiveness as a deterrent to would be enemies.

The perception among many officers of all ranks in the U.S. armed services is that casualty aversion limits the military's ability to perform its mission. A frequent remark from military members during discussions of world crisis spots and what the U.S. response should be is that if the military suffers a single casualty, the mission will be ended because the American people will not support such intervention with casualties. Even our allies have identified this phenomenon. In a well circulated email, a British Lieutenant Colonel who served with the IFOR (Implementation Force) in Bosnia gave his impression that the U.S. emphasis on force protection did little to assure the civilians in the area that life had returned to normal and they were no longer in danger. He ascribed a negative affect on the mission as a result of U.S. force protection policy. He further argued that the feeling among U.S. soldiers that suffering one casualty would adversely affect one's career led to a group of American officers and NCOs unwilling to take risks.<sup>5</sup> Also in Bosnia, a U.S. Army major was approached by an allied officer from the Norwegian/Polish contingent and told, "I know you Americans wear all that gear because you are afraid, but don't worry, we'll protect you."<sup>6</sup> This should not be the legacy the U.S. military carries into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To determine the origins of casualty aversion, whether it actually exists, and where it has its greatest influence, three criteria are compared in each of

three case studies. First, public opinion polls are used to identify the changing nature of public opinion in support of each of the case studies. The research also includes data on the effect of media coverage of military operations as it relates to public opinion and support. Additionally, the effect media access to the battlefield has had on public support is examined as it relates to the case studies.

The nature of U.S. warfighting capability is chronicled through the case studies using historical documents and books to determine if the ability of the U.S. military today, through technology, has become so thorough and efficient as to induce a feeling in decision-makers that war can be waged without friendly casualties. This research determines whether this feeling of superiority puts the U.S. military in a position easily exploitable by our enemies. An enemy that can cause casualties to U.S. forces when decision-makers expect none may be able to induce a type of shock that limits U.S. resolve and commitment.

In relation to the case studies, an examination is made of decision-makers, both in the highest echelons of the military and their civilian counterparts, and whether an aversion to casualties has evolved over the years among this group. Using books, articles written by senior personnel, and an interview, the researcher reveals whether or not a change occurred in the decisions these leaders make about war and its cost in terms of casualties. The research determines whether or not there is a myth that has led senior civilian and military leaders to believe the U.S. should only commit forces when friendly casualties can be minimized.

The three case studies used to examine the criteria are the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and the operations in Somalia. The Vietnam War is examined because it is recognized as the war that instilled the belief in U.S. leaders' that the public will not tolerate casualties in a limited war. The emergence of this belief in casualty avoidance, unwritten until the Weinberger Doctrine, resulted from the Vietnam War and was contrasted by the way subsequent leaders executed Desert Storm. Somalia stands out as a clear departure from the Weinberger Doctrine, yet the public perception of casualties in all the case studies remained constant. An understanding of the evolution of U.S. leadership beliefs concerning casualties is critical to an understanding of the modern phenomenon of "casualty aversion."

By studying this phenomenon, recommendations are made on how to limit the negative effect casualty aversion has on U.S. military operations. Recommendations focus on assisting operational level planners and leaders to understand casualty aversion and take actions to mitigate its effects on campaign design and operations.

## PUBLIC OPINION AND THE MILITARY

In a democracy, the public determines much of what the military will be used for. Civilian leaders, in an attempt to best serve the public they were elected to represent, desire to remain popular. Their attention to polls tracking the population's support is a factor that cannot be ignored. Particularly when the military element of national power is exercised, public support is critical to politicians. No other aspect of national is tied so closely to the public's support.

Public support, expressed in opinion polls, can drive American policy on the use of armed forces. Often, elected leaders who want to use a military option in a crisis have to wage a campaign to win public support. Eric V. Larson, a Postdoctoral Fellow and specialist in national security policy from RAND, conducted research on public opinion polls and suggests that the American people arrive at a level of support by looking at several ends-means criteria. First, the perceived benefit from the use of U.S. forces is examined. Second, the prospects for success in the intervention or war. Third, the expected or actual costs, if known. Fourth, changing expectations can greatly impact levels of public support, as in the example of the TET offensive in Vietnam or Chinese entry into the Korean War. Finally, the nature and depth of support among other public icons (influential politicians; recognized public figures) will also sway the American public. These criteria for public support have remained true through Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Somalia.<sup>7</sup>

## VIETNAM

Vietnam is viewed today as the least popular conflict in American history. It was not that way when it began. The Congress gave virtually unanimous support for the President when the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was signed enabling him to prosecute the war in Vietnam. The American public followed its elected officials and supported the war, especially at the start. By comparison, Congress was much more committed to the entrance into Vietnam than it was to Desert Storm, a war that will be discussed later. Yet by the end of the war, the lesson that U.S. leaders had drawn from Vietnam was that any future interventions in the Third World must be decisive and brief.<sup>8</sup> These ideas would later form the heart of Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's policy on the use of military force, known as the Weinberger Doctrine. Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk summarized the views of U.S. leaders of the time when he said, "A rather heavy number of casualties can be taken in the short term to get the struggle over with, but if there is a steady stream of casualties over a considerable period of time, then the erosion on the home front is very significant, or can be very significant."<sup>9</sup>

This view seems to be widely accepted as the legacy of the Vietnam War. Mark Lorell and Charles Kelley, Jr. in a study on casualties and its effects on presidential policy during the Vietnam War arrive at the same conclusion. They argue that public opinion polls demonstrate support for the war fell consistently as U.S. casualties rose. They readily acknowledge that the measure used in the

polls was what is known as the “mistake” question. Basically, the question posed by pollsters at the time was phrased as, “Do you think it was a mistake for the United States to get involved in Vietnam?”<sup>10</sup> Versions of the questions differ slightly, but all approach the issue from the standpoint of the decision to *get involved*. Throughout the Vietnam War, the American Institute of Public Opinion, as it had in WWII and Korea, tried to gauge public disaffection with the government through polling. One author concludes that Americans’ dissent with the government increases in limited wars, but shows the question asked by the AIPO consistently was: “In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?”<sup>11</sup> Given that question and the mounting casualties, most Americans chose to answer affirmatively. Yet results of polls can be terribly misleading. Politicians like Rusk based their views on polls and the same type of results that politicians and military leaders today assume when considering public support in light of friendly casualties.

Other studies have been done patterned after the Lorell and Kelley study that arrive at different conclusions about Vietnam and public support. Larson’s study, based on its criterion, suggests that Vietnam held a limited expectation of benefits to the American people. Larson goes on to say that very early in the conflict “...fewer than 4 in 10 expressed a belief that a war in Vietnam was worth Korea-like or higher costs.”<sup>12</sup> Yet neither shows that the American people favored ending the conflict after being committed to it. This points out that

Americans are not willing to sustain large numbers of casualties in a conflict where they see little perceived benefits and where the costs are estimated to be high. This fits with Larson's criteria, however points to a different reality of public support during the Vietnam War.

The change in public opinion might be linked to the other criteria besides cost in terms of casualties. As Vietnam dragged on, President Lyndon Johnson began to talk of a negotiated settlement to the war. Americans up to this point had expected a victory, so when the perceived benefit of victory clashed with the negotiated settlement their leaders now offered, the public could see only limited gains. In the public view, the cost was not worth the casualties because of the limited gains to be expected.<sup>13</sup> The Johnson administration also did a poor job of articulating why Vietnam was so valuable that it was important for the United States to be involved. Since the stakes were not clear to the public, they found it hard to support involvement. Many Americans did not see the harm in a North Vietnamese victory over the south. The administration did not justify why the conflict was increasing in scope towards a more total war. Since Americans saw only limited benefits to be gained from U.S. involvement in the war, that justified only a limited expenditure of means.<sup>14</sup> Limited means for the public translated to only a limited number of casualties. Larson, even while showing the areas where support crumbled, is careful to point out that the American public supported the war in Vietnam *once committed* even if it meant incurring casualties. But, as the war drew on and victory seemed less certain, thereby

equating to fewer expected benefits, the “increasing costs came to be judged by majorities as incommensurate with the expected benefits of the war and its prospects for success.”<sup>15</sup> Yet this does not imply that the American people wanted a withdrawal from Vietnam short of victory.

Benjamin C. Schwarz, a researcher from RAND, conducted a third study into casualties and Vietnam. His findings came close to Larson’s, but he also delved further into the polls that reflected the public lost support for the war to determine if this was indeed true. Schwarz argues that in any conflict, polls will show a dramatic decline in support when the public is asked “mistake” type questions once the intervention has gone longer than expected or casualties mount. His study focused on follow up questions such as, “What should we do to bring the war to an end?” A trend he discovered is that people polled who say it was a mistake to get involved usually do not support withdrawal of American forces. Rather, once committed, the public seems to favor getting the job done; escalating if necessary to achieve victory.<sup>16</sup>

Data from the period makes it evident that Vietnam was no different than conflicts before or after it. From July 1965 to August 1968, “...public ‘approval’ of the Vietnam war had declined by 30 percentage points, casualties had accumulated horrifically, but the number of Americans favoring withdrawal from Vietnam was nearly unchanged.”<sup>17</sup> How can one argue that on one hand the American people didn’t approve of the war, yet on the other hand did not favor withdrawal? Based on Schwarz’s analysis, the answer is evident.

Americans, primarily because of the increase in U.S. casualties, lost support for having *entered the war*, yet they still favored completing it. Many anti-war protesters, by a margin of three to two, protested because of disillusionment with the President's policies and handling of the war, but when polled actually favored escalation vice a "cut and run" negotiated peace. Polls at the time reveal a majority of those people supporting Senator Joseph McCarthy or Governor George Wallace over President Johnson in the presidential candidacy race did so out of a desire to elect someone who would escalate the war and win<sup>18</sup> Yet the legacy the Vietnam War passed on to future political and military leaders was that if you suffer casualties, the American public will demand withdrawal.

This belief is evidenced by the existence of the Weinberger Doctrine, espoused in 1984 by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. In it, Secretary Weinberger developed six tests to be applied when U.S. leaders were weighing the use of military forces abroad. First, forces should not be committed unless the situation was vital to U.S. or allied national interests. Second, if forces are committed, there should be a clear intention of winning and appropriate resources dedicated to do so. Third, political and military objectives must be clearly defined. Fourth, the relationship between the objectives and the forces must be reassessed and adjusted to ensure they are adequate to win. Fifth, the U.S. must have the support of the people and Congress before making the commitment. Finally, commitment of U.S. forces should be a last resort.<sup>19</sup> His six tests that restricted the use of U.S. forces abroad and served to codify the

feelings of many elected officials and high ranking military leaders who had served through the Vietnam War. However, the supposed lesson that the public will not support a limited intervention that incurs casualties failed to hold true in U.S. conflicts of the more recent past.

## **DESERT STORM**

In preparation for Operation Desert Storm, casualties certainly weighed heavy in the minds of U.S. political and military leaders. Initially, the American public was divided on the decision of whether or not to go to war with Iraq. In the Senate, reflecting public opinion and in contrast to Vietnam, the measure to support the President in a war with Iraq barely passed.<sup>20</sup> Yet there were several factors which aided U.S. leaders in gaining public support for the coming war. First, the conflict began with Iraq's dramatic invasion of Kuwait, an act the public could clearly see as an act of aggression that painted the Iraqi's as brutal invaders. The public seemed to identify with the U.S. interests in the Gulf and could easily understand the import of the invasion for the nation. Saddam Hussein played into the U.S. leadership's hands by acting the part of a Hitler-type enemy leader: seizing western hostages, allegedly allowing Iraqi atrocities in Kuwait, developing weapons of mass destruction, and making provocative statements.<sup>21</sup> The majority of Americans expected a costly war with Iraq in terms of friendly casualties, but because of the nation's interests and the Iraqi leader's mistakes, they were willing to bear those costs.

In fact, once committed to war, approval for it jumped dramatically given that a great majority believed the conflict would last months or a year and would be costly in casualties on both sides. Many polled believed the use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons was likely to occur, yet still supported the decision to go to war.<sup>22</sup> American citizens identified with clear U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf region. Preventing Iraqi development of weapons of mass destruction, restoring the government of Kuwait, eliminating the potential for Iraqi control of oil that could affect the U.S. economy, preventing further Iraqi aggression towards Israel, and removing Saddam Hussein from power were seen as acceptable strategic ends and worthy of the cost of American military lives. Contrary to a popular stereotyped response, when Americans were asked if it was worth going to war simply to lower oil prices, the response was overwhelmingly negative. This reason seemed too much in "crass economic terms."<sup>23</sup> The question of going to war essentially came down to two options for the United States: fighting to expel Iraqi forces, or sanctions to force Iraqi withdrawal. Political leaders voiced their opinions about the lack of hope concerning sanctions – a view largely shared by the public – which then left fighting as the only viable alternative. Because of this, it enjoyed much public support.<sup>24</sup> The choice was not made without consideration of the casualties that might be suffered.

The reasons for war with Iraq and stakes involved for the United States convinced the American public to support the conflict even with the expectation

of high casualties. When polled about casualties, Americans felt certain that U.S. forces would beat Iraqi forces but with associated high cost. This high cost was willingly accepted by the public as a risk worth taking to uphold the principle that rogue nations should not go unpunished for aggression. Only when pollsters phrased the questions about casualties in terms of "blood for oil" was the war not supported by the responses.<sup>25</sup> When questions about support for the war were asked in relation to differing casualty rates, support still remained high. Projected casualty estimates as high as the tens of thousands found support at a rate of three to one because Americans believed in the cause. Polling data gave evidence that in no case regarding future actions against Iraqi forces "...does support for the war seem to have been conditional on very low casualties."<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to existing beliefs about the American public desiring the withdrawal of military forces once casualties begin rising, Schwarz has found that Americans, once committed, are more likely to take a ruthless, win-at-all-costs attitude. By early February 1991 the American public was fed up with Saddam Hussein's refusal to withdraw from Kuwait. Pollsters found (even in light of expected terrible U.S. casualties) that nearly 70% of people polled wanted to pursue a war regardless of Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. The public had decided that Saddam needed to be removed from power whether he withdrew his forces or not, and they were willing to bear the burden of casualties to do it.<sup>27</sup> This same commitment would prove to remain high even in Somalia: a truly

limited intervention where the public saw little benefit to be gained and unclear U.S. interests.

## SOMALIA

In 1992, the U.S. intervention in Somalia was expressed to the public in purely humanitarian terms. News of the famine in the country and the United States' position as a superpower convinced the public to support the initial mission of sending U.S. troops as part of UNITAF (Unified Task Force) to stop clan fighting and enable the distribution of food to the needy. The public saw little benefit to the United States, but it also saw very little cost involved and a tremendous chance for success in the effort to do something noble and save lives. Because of this, initial public and congressional bipartisan support was high.<sup>28</sup>

Support for the Somalia intervention remained high until the summer of 1993. At that time, the humanitarian mission the public supported had evolved into a mission to capture a Somali warlord, Aideed. When he retaliated against the U.N. by killing 24 Pakistani peacekeepers in June, support for the decision to intervene dropped to 50% because of the recognized change from a low-risk, humanitarian mission.<sup>29</sup> This is an interesting fact because it shows that it was not *American* casualties that caused the initial decline in support, it was casualties period. More accurately, the fact that the mission had changed from what was thought to be a purely humanitarian role into a conflict where the Somali's seemed unappreciative of the humanitarian assistance received. This fits closely with Larson's fourth criteria of changing expectations. The American people

supported intervention when they saw it as a low cost opportunity to do good, but once it dissolved into a bloodletting, they were reluctant to support the decision to intervene.

Beginning in August 1993, when four U.S. personnel were killed by a command detonated mine, congressional support fell and criticism of policy began which brought with it a corresponding rapid decline in the American public's support. This fact, coupled with the fact that nearly all the American casualties in Somalia occurred nearly at the same time (spiked between August and October) contributed to the drop in support.<sup>30</sup> Consistent with Schwarz's findings for previous conflicts, the lack of support and declines shown in the polls equated to the public's disapproval of the handling of the Somali crisis now that Americans were being killed and wounded. Larson's fifth criteria which points out the public responds to what the visible public icons (public opinion leaders; powerful members of Congress) espouse can be clearly seen in the case of Somalia. Immediately following the reports of the October firefight between Somali gunmen and soldiers of Task Force Ranger which left 18 American servicemen dead, U.S. congressmen were calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces because the mission had changed from feeding starving people to hunting Aided. Senator Robert Byrd called for an end "...to these cops-and-robbers operations."<sup>31</sup> Public support fell drastically because of the way the mission had changed, but the deaths of the 18 members of Task Force Ranger generated intense calls for aggressive retribution from the public. The U.S. public, usually

averse to civilian dead in conflicts, seemed to have had no aversion to the (conservatively estimated) 1000+ Somalis who had died when the Rangers were killed.<sup>32</sup> Similar to findings in other conflicts, the U.S. public seemed ready to escalate the conflict in order to end it.

## **MEDIA**

The media's effect on public opinion during periods of conflict has received particular attention in recent years. There is an increasing perception among political and military leaders that CNN can get the U.S. into conflicts and CNN can get the U.S. out. Larson, Schwarz, Lorell and Kelly refute this perception throughout their studies, regardless of the improvements in media coverage and timeliness. Yet the so-called "CNN effect" seems to have an effect on decisions of U.S. intervention.

Johanna Neuman, a journalist, tried to determine if the CNN effect had a basis in fact. She found throughout history, politicians have complained about the speed of media reporting with every advent of new technology. With the introduction of newspapers, the telegraph, and radio, civilian and military leaders lamented the speed at which news reached the people and worried about the effects it might have.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, American leaders today feel pressure to act because of what shows up on the public's TV screens. Former UN Ambassador Madeline Albright captured this feeling in a speech to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when she said, "Television's ability to bring graphic images of pain and outrage into our living rooms has heightened the pressure both for

immediate engagement in areas of international crisis and immediate disengagement when events do not go according to plan.”<sup>34</sup>

Findings from the RAND studies and Neuman’s book do not support the conclusion at which Madeline Albright and other leaders have arrived. Politicians have the same amount of power to act in a situation as they always had, but instant communications and TV pictures only shorten the time they have to do it.<sup>35</sup> In the past, news of a crisis or adversary’s action could have reached U.S. leaders before the media was able to inform the public. This gave leaders time to formulate a response. When the news reached the public, the leaders still had to deal with it. The speed of media technology now means that often the leaders are receiving information about a crisis at the same time as the public. Today, when confronted with a crisis or situation portrayed by the media, politicians can still choose to “...expend political capital” to get their message out, but if they choose not to, then they willingly surrender the initiative to the media itself or an adversary. The “CNN effect” makes politicians’ responses have to be faster, but does not change their ability to respond to the situation.<sup>36</sup> A faster response time seems to be what politicians are lamenting, just as politicians of yesteryear lamented each new technological innovation.

Some authors argue that the effect of the media coverage in the aftermath of the Task Force Ranger firefight in Somalia depicting U.S. dead being dragged through the streets caused immediate public reaction demanding withdrawal. These authors claim numbers as high as 89% of Americans polled supported

immediate withdrawal.<sup>37</sup> These authors base their arguments on opinion polls taken immediately after the media coverage of the battle reached the American people. Yet by looking at the original poll data, it is evident the responses fit more in line with precedents set in earlier conflicts. The 89% responded that “an important goal for the U.S. in Somalia” should be “bringing U.S. troops home *as soon as possible*. (emphasis added)” Those that argue the public wanted immediate withdrawal fail to show that in the same poll, a majority (63%) thought an important goal was also “capturing the Somali warlord responsible for attacking U.S. troops.” Did the American people realistically expect the military to accomplish that task by immediately withdrawing its troops? Additionally, while 37% said the U.S. should respond to the fighting in Somalia by removing troops immediately, 53% responded that the troops should remain up to six months longer or even be *increased*.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, a large part of the American public was angered by what it saw on TV and sought retribution for what happened to Task Force Ranger, not immediate withdrawal.

Many Americans, especially high level military and civilian leaders, believe that in the case of Somalia, media pictures of starving people got the U.S. involved, and media pictures of American dead in the streets got the U.S. out. Data from the period shows that preceding the U.S. decision to airlift famine relief supplies in August, 1992, there were few reports by any of the major national news services about Somalia. Reports increased following the announcement, but again tapered off until the November, 1992 Presidential

decision to deploy U.S. troops to the area.<sup>39</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to the perception among U.S. leaders that media reporting reaches a fever pitch forcing the government to respond. Concerning the media pictures of American dead, "It is at least arguable, however, that the public was angry not because of pictures of a corpse dragged through the street but because a corpse was dragged through the street."<sup>40</sup> This corresponds to earlier findings that the American public is likely to find fault with the way foreign policy is handled when casualties bring its deficiencies to light, not merely the casualties themselves.

## EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY ON CASUALTY AVERSION

Because of the technological edge America has long held, it is in a position where it can actually do something to limit casualties. Increasing reliance on technology has raised U.S. leaders' expectations that the military can achieve near bloodless conflict. In Vietnam, the U.S. relied on technological innovations to defeat an enemy that was proficient in small unit tactics. Desert Storm stands as the U.S. crowning achievement of technological warfare. In Somalia, U.S. forces again relied on technology to gain an edge while outnumbered by a warlord's gunmen. U.S. reliance on technology, while effective, may create a mindset in the American public and leadership that future adversaries might exploit. The trend for the future points to an ever increasing reliance on technological solutions to reduce American dead on the battlefield.

America has long sought to protect its service personnel by using technology to increase standoff ranges, detection of the enemy, and increased lethality to kill the enemy before he reaches U.S. troops. Technology serves as a means to remove American troops from the "...violent edge of the battlefield..." and may explain why the U.S., of all nations, is "...most taken with the mystique of air power."<sup>41</sup> This reliance on technological solutions affects American foreign policy as well. "U.S. foreign policy exhibits a tendency to choose coercive instruments that do not require putting U.S. personnel in harm's way. A long-standing tenet of the American 'way of war' has been a reliance on materiel over manpower, high-technology over low-tech force."<sup>42</sup> U.S. defense experts believe

the American trend towards high-technology solutions will continue. 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare may be defined by the hand-held missile, smart sub-munitions, precision guidance in every weapon, and the electronic helmet capable of giving graphic portrayals of the entire battlefield or parts of it.<sup>43</sup>

The U.S. concern over casualties also spills over into other aspects of waging war, namely causing civilian deaths. Technology is an answer to the lethal hazards of waging war, whether they be to U.S. personnel or civilians. The same precision guided, stand off weapons used to limit the risk to American pilots are also used to try to limit collateral damage and civilian deaths.<sup>44</sup> Especially in limited warfare, the public seems not to want anyone to suffer during the conflict. The U.S. public views only the adversaries government or military as the enemy and cringes at images of civilian suffering during a war. U.S. military leaders, also hesitant to portray the troops as reckless or bloodthirsty, use the issue of civilian casualties as a major determinant in their recommendation on the use of American military force.<sup>45</sup>

U.S. desire to eliminate casualties is further evidenced by non-combat efforts. Disease has historically killed more soldiers in battle than combat related injuries, and the U.S. has responded by pioneering efforts at disease control. American military forces stress field sanitation and hygiene regularly during training, and make efforts even in combat to provide the most sanitary and humane conditions. The U.S. has led the way in actions to rescue the wounded, both by ground and air, as well as establishing field surgeons and medical units

serving far forward, close to the battle lines. All efforts to reduce casualties using the technology at hand. No other nation has done as much. Nearly 10% of the total U.S. personnel sent to Desert Storm were medical.<sup>46</sup>

## VIETNAM

In the Vietnam War, America was anxious to try out its new technology on what seemed to be a foe it could easily defeat. The helicopter was viewed as a technological marvel enabling U.S. forces to attack the enemy quickly throughout the depth of the battlefield. It also enabled large scale use of helicopters to rush wounded troops to treatment that might otherwise die while being evacuated by much slower ground transportation.

While North Vietnamese troops moved supplies down the Ho Chi Minh trail on their backs, U.S. forces were inserted and resupplied by helicopter. The introduction of the helicopter into warfare gave the Americans a speed and vertical envelopment advantage never before seen in battle. Night vision equipment found wide use on the American side, as well as refined procedures for the delivery of artillery, naval gunfire, and air delivered ordnance. The North Vietnamese had to adopt new tactics of "hugging" the American lines when in combat to avoid the technologically enhanced delivery of artillery shells, napalm canisters, rockets, bombs, and 20mm cannons just outside the range of friendly personnel.<sup>47</sup> U.S. innovations provided new equipment throughout the war, such as the lighter-weight M-16, while the enemy relied on low-tech methods of countering the actions of U.S. troops. Americans often fought outnumbered, but

because of the technological edge, caused North Vietnamese leaders to have to adopt new tactics and be innovative in trying to find ways to defeat U.S. forces. In America's next war, the technological gap between U.S. and enemy forces would prove to be even greater than Vietnam.

## **DESERT STORM**

Desert Storm served as a watershed for what the public would expect in limited wars of the future. In fact, much work has been done since Desert Storm to replicate the low number of friendly casualties in any future battle, but also to attempt to limit the number of enemy and civilian casualties using non-lethal technology. The Gulf War gave an opportunity for the U.S. to showcase some of its best technology developed at the end of the Cold War. Advanced weapons lethality, JSTARS target detection, AWACS ability to control the massive numbers of aircraft performing a myriad of different missions during the air operations, are examples of a variety of these new technologies. Writing about the technological advances at work in the Gulf War, COL Jeffrey McCausland, Dean of Academics at the U.S. Army War College, said:

Penetration of air defenses was permitted by such advancements as stealth technology, electronic warfare improvements, and the ability to target and neutralize Iraqi air defense assets. This included not only direct attacks and electronic "spoofing," but even an attempt to infect an Iraqi command and control computer with a virus. Cruise missiles, because of their advanced guidance and low-level flight, also made a significant contribution to the coalition's ability to bypass Iraqi air defenses and continue attacks even in bad weather.<sup>48</sup>

A large measure of the American success and especially the low number of casualties can be attributed to U.S. technological superiority over the Iraqi forces. Air Force COL John Warden, a noted military author, considers Desert Storm an historic turning point. It marked a change from "the old concept of slaughter into a transition period where we can get the job done much more effectively and at a much lower cost to human lives, to our environment, and even to our budget."<sup>49</sup>

Because of the overwhelming success of Desert Storm, the American public expects future conflicts to have limited casualties. Many military and civilian organizations are now in the business of finding ways to make that concept a reality. The use of UAVs in Desert Storm gave rise to research into robotics as a further means of removing U.S. personnel from the deadly edge of combat. The technological capability for robotics is near, and with the expectation accompanying it, the movement is in full swing. Some members of the armed services even endorse the notion of using technology to remove troops from the battlefield. MG Jerry Harrison, former chief of development and research labs for the U.S. Army thinks, "...you protect your a-team, you protect your varsity squad – your soldiers, your pilots – until you absolutely have to put them into the conflict. And you do that by using a robot..."<sup>50</sup> Proven technology has members of the military speculating on new strategies that rely on fewer and fewer personnel to execute. In a research project for the Army War College, LTC Clifton Bray, Jr. examined the idea of combining precision guided munitions,

stealth technology, information warfare, psychological operations, and unconventional warfare into a strategy to break an enemy's will in limited wars.<sup>51</sup> Though the manner in which LTC Bray proposes to use this strategy can be debated, the technology exists to execute what he proposed. LTC Bray's concept also fits with the thoughts of some of the leading futurists like Alvin and Heidi Toffler. They argue that future wars will not occur superpower to superpower, but will be "niche" wars. The U.S. response to such conflicts will be done with "niche warriors" – special operations teams – trained to respond to a variety of distributed threats.<sup>52</sup>

Ideas spawned from the technology exhibited in Desert Storm can be pursued by the U.S. Recognizing the American role in future limited war scenarios, researchers continue to look for more improved "smart" technology. Work is already underway on exoskeletal armor suits reminiscent of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* which are capable of protecting soldiers while performing a myriad of functions for them.<sup>53</sup> The idea behind the suit is "...to increase the effectiveness of the individual so that you need fewer soldiers. The fewer 'soft-skin' soldiers we have out there, the fewer the casualties."<sup>54</sup> However, some are skeptical that an all out push for technology is the correct path for the U.S. military to pursue. Much of the high technology gear being developed – robots, sensors, UAVs, advanced communications – while advertised as able to be applied in limited conflicts is really best suited to conventional operations. The

U.S. military should not forget the lesson from Vietnam that technology cannot be an answer unto itself.<sup>55</sup>

## **SOMALIA**

The U.S. military in Somalia used overwhelming technological superiority to accomplish the mission. When Task Force Ranger began the mission to capture Somali warlord Aideed, they used rapid night raids that were possible because of high tech communications, helicopters, night vision gear, and AC-130 gunships. Raids were completed with a speed that overwhelmed potential adversaries. When the October 3<sup>rd</sup> firefight found the Ranger Task Force pinned down in urban terrain, the precision firepower delivered by supporting helicopters and situational awareness provided to the overall commander by airborne command and control platforms kept a bad situation from becoming much worse.<sup>56</sup> Technology served the U.S. forces well, but may have also contributed to the public reaction when soldiers were killed. The public expected American military prowess and technology to be so much greater than the enemy's the result should have been fewer friendly casualties. Somalia showed that a low-tech enemy could exploit American weakness created by a sense of invincibility.

## **ADVERSARIES**

Adversaries have long recognized U.S. technological superiority, developed in an attempt to limit American military casualties, as an exploitable weakness. During Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh claimed he could suffer ten times the

losses of the U.S., but still win the war in the long run. He believed the U.S. lacked the motivation to endure sustained casualties fighting for a country that only offered limited benefits to the American people.<sup>57</sup> In Desert Shield,

Saddam strongly believed that the United States's Achilles' heel was its extreme sensitivity to casualties, and he was determined to exploit this weakness to the full. As he told the American Ambassador to Baghdad, April Glaspie, shortly before the invasion of Kuwait: 'Yours is a society which cannot accept 10,000 dead in one battle'.<sup>58</sup>

It seems clear that while technology has brought the U.S. some tremendous military advantages, adversaries recognize and seek to exploit America's self-imposed limitations to avoid casualties. In Somalia, it is difficult to show Aideed planned the reaction following the Task Force Ranger firefight, but he did deliberately use women and children as shields for his fighters in an effort to unnerve U.S. troops, which it did.<sup>59</sup> Military analyst Anthony Cordesman believes the American aversion to casualties is so obvious as to make potential adversaries' efforts to replicate U.S. retreats from Beirut and Somalia something that "can be taken for granted."<sup>60</sup> U.S. efforts at coercion with the threat of military force have been hampered because of its casualty aversion stance. The restraints America places on its forces both to keep from incurring casualties and to avoid causing excessive casualties on the enemy has placed a limit on the amount of coercion it can effectively deliver. "Adversaries can capitalize on such constraints and win a coercive contest despite being militarily, politically, and economically inferior."<sup>61</sup>

## LEADERSHIP

Casualty aversion has its strongest influence among the U.S. political and military leadership. Many of the polls that American leadership responds to may not accurately interpret the public views, but what the leaders see is a public unhappy with their handling of a crisis. They interpret the data as a message to withdraw American forces from the crisis, when in reality the message may be to take action and get the job done. Regardless of the message, leaders since Vietnam have drawn the conclusion the U.S. public will not stand for casualties in a limited conflict. By looking at the attitudes and opinions of leaders during Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Somalia, a solid understanding of the origin of casualty aversion among this group may be found.

Most Americans would quickly say that the nation should fight to defend and support its vital national interests. That phrase is used often in America's National Security Strategy. What does that mean to Americans today? During the Cold War, containment of the Soviet Union and facing them as a threat that could affect the U.S. way of life made it easier to identify vital national interests. Before that time and since, defining the vital national interests has been harder to do. Casualty aversion has thus risen to the forefront in considerations of intervention, because limited war derives limited means. The public and therefore the leadership gets more involved in debating interests that are deemed vital, so that "...in a democracy, the national interest is harder to define." It can

be "...simply the shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world. It can include values such as human rights and democracy, if the public feels that those values are so important to its identity that it is willing to pay a price to promote them."<sup>62</sup> This has an impact on military planners as they respond to the pressures of U.S. elected officials. Politicians are strongly swayed by the American public, and consequently the military will adjust as well. "Military commanders, when planning and conducting operations, must also respond to their civilian leaders' guidance (if any) concerning the number of casualties deemed politically acceptable."<sup>63</sup>

Casualty aversion is not something altogether political in nature. Good commanders attempt to conserve manpower for many reasons. Most will not risk their forces' destruction unless there is a high probability of success. Especially when employing a strategy of exhaustion, it would be foolish for a commander to attrit his forces quickly. There are also human factors of compassion and loss the commander feels at seeing a unit destroyed for which he is responsible.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, casualty aversion by military commanders is understandable.

## **VIETNAM**

In the Vietnam War, the American public gradually lost faith in the promises given from political and military leaders. The anti-war movement may have only wanted a successful end to the war and merely grew tired of an administration that failed to deliver on its promises. Recognizing that Vietnam

was a limited war and not expecting much benefit from a victory, the American public could no longer support a prolonged U.S. involvement and increasing casualties.

The lesson the U.S. political and military leadership learned from the Vietnam experience was not to preside over a high casualty-cost limited conflict that could not be won quickly. Elected officials felt the same concerns over the lives of the military members in conflict as military leaders, and they interpreted negative polls as a message to put an end to these deaths. Elected officials felt they must respond to the American people they represented, but unfortunately they misread the intentions of the people and have carried that lesson into the present.

### **DESERT STORM**

With the Ronald Reagan and George Bush administrations, many of the political and military leaders of the nation were men who had experienced the Vietnam syndrome and were wary to repeat the mistakes they perceived from that era. Their beliefs were best summarized by the Weinberger Doctrine. This strict doctrine was widely accepted among military and political leaders of the time and shaped their thoughts on the commitment of military power.

The use of military force for the Bush administration, as for any other, was dictated by the decision-makers' sensitivity to casualties as much as the public reaction. Due to the overwhelming success of Desert Storm, many now argue that that conflict erased the "Vietnam syndrome." However, it is arguable that

the low level of friendly losses during Desert Storm actually raised the expectations for the future beyond anything residual from Vietnam.<sup>65</sup>

It is clear the Bush administration developed policy based on lessons from the Vietnam War. The stated defense policy of the administration said, “we should provide forces with the capabilities that minimize the need to trade American lives with tyrants and aggressors who do not care about their own people. Thus, our response to regional crises must be decisive, requiring the high-quality personnel and technological edge to win quickly and with minimum casualties.”<sup>66</sup> From statements like this and the tone of the National Security Strategy, it is clear the American leadership at the time of Desert Storm was not going to repeat another Vietnam.

Leading into Desert Storm, the National Security Strategy was still focused on deterrence (of the Soviet Union) through direct defense, escalation (up to nuclear), and retaliation. While limited war, or Low Intensity Conflict, was mentioned, it took a back seat to the total war focus against the Soviet Union. The tone of the strategy accepted casualties as a price to be paid to make sure, “Adversaries must not conclude that U.S. and allied capabilities would be exhausted if confronted with a complex or prolonged military campaign.”<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that by the time the next version of the National Security Strategy was printed in 1990, while still focused on deterrence, the American leadership realized the nation’s emerging role in limited conflicts. It specifically mentioned scenarios in Third World nations “where American forces will have

to succeed rapidly and with a minimum of casualties."<sup>68</sup> This reference to limiting casualties was a new addition absent from the Soviet Union, total war focused strategies.

During Desert Storm, the U.S. forces enjoyed a tremendous advantage over the enemy that almost ensured low casualties on the friendly side. Perhaps due to this, the national leadership began to back away from incidents that caused civilian suffering, even during a declared war. In Iraq, U.S. activities were severely constrained after an attack on a communications facility that was also an air raid shelter for the families of Iraqi officials.<sup>69</sup> Similar strikes on electrical power grids, chemical production plants (that the Iraqi's claimed was a baby milk factory), and other infrastructure in Baghdad were curtailed because of the impression of civilian suffering the American leadership felt.

A related theme that seemed incredulous to many U.S. military officers was the national leadership's concern over enemy casualties during Desert Storm. When the ground war was underway and U.S. forces were enjoying overwhelming success, American political and military leaders called an abrupt end to the campaign. So much had been accomplished in the few days of the ground war with so few U.S. casualties, the American leadership (Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf in particular) felt that luck would run out and the friendly casualty list would climb. "It was considered extremely unlikely that the Iraqi's could have successfully stopped a coalition offensive, but they might have markedly increased the casualties involved in further operations."<sup>70</sup> The American

leadership also felt pressure from scenes of the “highway of death” to avoid causing excessive enemy casualties.<sup>71</sup> This horrifying spectacle of Iraqi soldiers being killed while trying to flee the American juggernaut began to look to the administration more like murder than battle. President Bush would later respond to criticism that he allowed the escape of the Iraqi Republican Guards by saying that the U.S. military was not in the business of slaughter.<sup>72</sup> Military officers would argue that the best time to seize a stunning victory is when the enemy is in full retreat. America had the opportunity to totally eliminate the Iraqi military threat. The actions and statements from the administration show how far the aversion to casualties, whether friendly, enemy or civilian, was ingrained.

Following Desert Storm, the Bush administration tried to further refine the direction of involvement for the nation in the 1993 National Security Strategy. Still influenced by the Weinberger Doctrine, the President recognized “there are limits to what we can or should do – we will have to be selective and discriminate in our global undertakings.”<sup>73</sup> Yet he also acknowledged the U.S. would have to take the lead in helping some of our allies in areas where they would be too weak to take on an effort of their own vital interests. The President also confirmed the belief in casualty aversion in crisis response situations, or limited conflict, by saying that the U.S. needed forces able to react quickly and end a conflict “on terms favorable to us and with minimum loss of life.”<sup>74</sup>

Presumably, the statement about minimum loss of life applies to the enemy and civilians as well as U.S. troops.

## **SOMALIA**

When the U.S. began involvement in Somalia, the leadership was swayed by the so-called "Powell Doctrine," established by the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and seen as an extension of the Weinberger doctrine. Gen. Colin Powell's doctrine called for no use of force unless the missions were limited in such a way that they could be defined as achieved; force should be decisive and followed by a prompt exit so to avoid a military quagmire; and the image of the armed forces should be protected.<sup>75</sup> While acknowledging the need for the use of limited military forces to attain purely political aims, Gen. Powell's doctrine was seen as still a distillation of the lessons learned from the Vietnam War. The new administration seemed reluctant to make changes to this doctrine until it had more practical experience with which to evaluate it.

In Somalia, the U.S. intervened to relieve the suffering of starving people, a fairly simple mission with low risks. Yet, by the time the mission ended, Somalia became a defining moment for U.S. force commitment in modern times.<sup>76</sup> The U.S. achieved its aims of relieving starvation, but remained in the country and eventually fell under supervision of the United Nations. Under UN direction and with little guidance from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the mission in Somalia dissolved into one of American Army Rangers and Delta Force troops trying to capture a Somali warlord. The result of the deaths of 18 military

members of the Task Force Ranger in October of 1993 was the backlash from the public but more importantly, from the American politicians. Fearing negative future election outcomes, the administration made the decision for the U.S. public and “pulled the plug” on the whole operation.<sup>77</sup> This event marked a new way the policy of U.S. troop commitments to interventions would be handled by political leaders.

A November 7, 1999 Washington Post article by Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, political science professors at Duke University and researchers for the Triangle Institute for Security Services (TISS) came to the same conclusion. They argue that the U.S. leadership “lost its stomach” for Somalia within 24 hours of the October 3<sup>rd</sup> Task Force Ranger firefight. Studies of the public at the same time prove they were willing to escalate and accept more casualties to ensure Aideed was punished for the actions on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. The sight of dead American soldiers undermined the Somalia operation only because the William Clinton administration failed to frame the casualties as anything other than a disaster in a mission that had drifted off course.<sup>78</sup>

U.S. policy in the late 1990's uses the threat of military force and economic sanctions, but either aren't carried through or result in only limited attacks that fail to achieve their political-military objectives. The American leadership seems to prefer to use cruise missiles that ensure no pilots are lost but “...little would be accomplished.”<sup>79</sup> Some believe the Clinton doctrine can be summed up as using force, but never going all the way to war. The President pursues an agenda and

devotion to peace, but in so doing attempts to employ force in measured increments against selected (and preferably inanimate) targets to avoid the slaughter associated with war.<sup>80</sup> This high-tech approach allows the U.S. to attack from afar, minimizing the risk of casualties, trying to achieve limited purposes while avoiding anything seeming like combat. In this way, the American leadership can act in a manner that “all but eliminates uncertainty,”<sup>81</sup> but rarely is decisive. This can be a dangerous situation where political leaders in democratic nations are so sensitive to casualties they undermine their very purpose because of it.<sup>82</sup> If this is the political mindset, why does the military leadership go along with it?

The military leadership appears to support the political views on casualty aversion for several reasons. Some authors believe the American military realizes it must provide a service to the nation beyond simple “defense,” since there is no peer competitor threatening national interests now.<sup>83</sup> For that reason, taking part in limited operations and being constrained as to the means and ends available is necessary for the U.S. military to remain viable. Additionally, there is speculation as to the effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Act on the military, reducing the President’s military advisors from the Joint Chiefs to only the Chairman. The President can effectively bypass the military leadership by only getting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on board with his guidance.<sup>84</sup>

Evidence to the contrary shows that the military leaders, while concerned over friendly casualties, do not let that be their deciding factor in advising the

administration about U.S. troop commitments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, comprised of career military professionals, considered friendly casualties in discussions, but also considered that sacrifice to be a part of military service. Rather, the amount of expected civilian casualties seemed to weigh heaviest in the decisions made, as military leaders felt the pressure to avoid the impression that U.S. troops were inflicting unnecessary suffering on the “innocents” in a conflict. The senior military advisors tend to be the most cautious of any of the inter-agencies with regard to casualties because they realize that when friendly, civilian, or excessive enemy casualties occur, the members of their services directly responsible will often have to answer to members of Congress and the American media. This all too human concern derives from the mindset military advisors have formed throughout their entire careers. “Military officers are not brought up in a political environment in which you suddenly see yourself castigated in the public forum, your family humiliated, and your career ended, as a result of ‘empowering your subordinates, and standing up for them when they fail.’”<sup>85</sup>

The legacy of Somalia seemed to give credence to the belief in the CNN effect. Some felt that public opinion directly affected foreign policy on a reduced timeline and made issues that “warrant a lower priority” to the national leaders high on the public agenda.<sup>86</sup> While the public opinion data presented earlier refutes that, it seems to have become an accepted impression among the American leadership. The result was a revised National Security Strategy.

In the 1994 National Security Strategy, engagement and enlargement emerged as the new focus. There was much discussion about deciding how and when to employ forces, not only for "...vital or survival interests..." but also in areas where U.S. interests or those of our allies are involved but are not vital. However, this strategy laid out some principles of the emerging Clinton doctrine on the use of force in the form of questions to be asked by the national leadership. First, are non-military means available? Second, what type of force is to be used and is it matched to the political objectives? Third, is there reasonable support from the American people and Congress? Fourth, are timelines or milestones in place to measure success? Fifth, is there an exit strategy? Finally, the engagement must meet reasonable cost and feasibility thresholds.<sup>87</sup> Clearly, the emphasis on support of the people, exit strategies, costs, and even non-military means shows the administration's concern with limiting military casualties.

The 1995 National Security Strategy maintains much the same tone as its predecessor, but also establishes a "humanitarian interests" category for the use of U.S. forces. The focus in this area is one of non-combat forces, presumably operating in areas of strict humanitarian need without the threat of violence, and still linked to a clear exit plan. Interestingly, this version mentions the danger of "reflexive calls for early withdrawal of our forces as soon as casualties arise" as being harmful to U.S. interests, possibly encouraging adversaries to cause casualties in an effort to force U.S. intervention out.<sup>88</sup> This seems to be what the

administration learned from Somalia. Yet the easy answer to Somalia is that "Americans don't accept casualties." This seems too simple and is refuted by evidence offered earlier about the public. It is more accurate to say that "Americans are reluctant to accept casualties only in cases where their only foreign policy goals are unreciprocated humanitarian interests."<sup>89</sup> Does that imply that America should avoid humanitarian issues in the world? Hardly, as the nation cannot stand by and allow another Holocaust to occur simply because it refuses to suffer casualties for something not viewed as combat in defense of vital national interests.<sup>90</sup> The U.S. cannot afford to avoid limited conflicts that may ultimately effect it through allies or cause problems that become a direct threat to the nation later. The problem seems to be more one of having interests and objectives clearly defined and making those understood to the American public. "Without an adequate objective against which to measure operational effectiveness, the measure often becomes the cost of the operation. As casualties become the measure by which success or failure is determined, operational or strategic decisions can be directly affected."<sup>91</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The perception among political and military leaders that the American public demands withdrawal of troops as soon as casualties are taken has been shown to be wrong. The media, currently perceived as having a large influence on policy decisions, has been shown to have less effect than previously thought. The influence of the media is proportioned to the extent that military and political leaders allow it, and is a poor measure of public opinion. Although technology adds a tremendous potential to U.S. military capability, it also creates an illusion of invincibility that is exploitable by adversaries. Finally, the belief that casualties should be avoided, regardless of the value of the mission, seems to have been learned from the lessons of past limited conflicts without regard to the underlying beliefs of the population or real national interests.

The American military and political leadership must be careful not to draw the wrong conclusions from the nation's recent limited war operations. The American public is concerned with casualties, especially in limited wars and conflicts, but not to the degree normally attributed to it. The public generally supports elected officials and can often see the benefit that U.S. intervention can bring. Because of this, the public seems much more willing to support U.S. commitment and get the job done. Yet, limited wars stand in sharp contrast to what the public expects during a total war. Some feel that political and military leaders in limited wars must contend with not only the public's attitude towards friendly losses, but also opposition within the political arena. Many factors can

affect these feelings, but foremost is the degree to which the nation's involvement in the conflict is vital to its interests.<sup>92</sup> While this is important, the public may better support actions in a limited war if the costs and benefits are effectively addressed from the start.

The public scrutinizes the costs and benefits of involvement in a conflict before it begins. Americans want to know that their military forces are being used wisely and the intervention will turn out positively for the nation. If they can perceive a victory and some benefit from it, they are more likely to support the decision to commit America's military forces. Once the public is committed to American military involvement, public opinion demands a satisfactory conclusion in spite of casualties.

The media has been given undue credit for influencing whether U.S. troops are committed to an intervention or whether they are withdrawn. In reflection, the media's influence is among political and military leaders and what they believe regardless of the public's attitude. Commonly, the most intense media reporting *follows* a decision made by U.S. political leaders. For example, there was a "CNN effect" during Somalia, but the effect was less among the American public than on the U.S. government leadership.

Technology has given the U.S. the ability to wage war beyond the capabilities of any other nation. This edge has created the expectation among political decision makers that near bloodless combat is possible and force protection measures will limit U.S. casualties. However, U.S. military

technological prowess does not necessarily mean war is now cost-free as combat will always embody some form of destruction or expenditure of national treasure. Political leaders attempt to mitigate self-imposed casualty limits by relying on technological means. Potential adversaries realize this and try to cause U.S. military casualties to undermine America's political leaders' confidence.

Casualty aversion, as attributed to the American public, is a myth. Conversely, it has a strong influence inside U.S. political and military leadership circles where it becomes "truth" in the minds of U.S. decision makers. These leaders have the power to conduct operations as if the public had little aversion to casualties, yet by their own internal beliefs based on supposed lessons learned, they elevate casualties to a decisive factor.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The majority of the American people will accept combat casualties if the mission has the potential to be successful and is beneficial to the U.S. "The public can distinguish between suffering defeat and suffering casualties."<sup>93</sup> Therefore, public affairs operations become particularly significant in limited, small scale operations. Effective public affairs begins with an explanation of the intervention objectives and policies that the Congress and American people can support. "Any change in objectives or increase in combat involvement needs to be explained, along with the possible costs. Civilian casualties or collateral damage caused by U.S. forces require prompt action. In past operations when

the response to such incidents was slow or absent, the resulting adverse fallout was magnified.”<sup>94</sup> Public support can remain high for limited operations if the American leadership approaches the intervention intelligently while keeping the public informed. As was shown from Somalia, the worst reaction to casualties comes when the American public is told one situation exists (humanitarian only) and finds out differently as the scenes of dead U.S. soldiers appear on TV.

America, as the pre-eminent superpower entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cannot ignore the use of force in support of limited objectives. Disorder in the world affects the nation, either as a direct threat or economically, and that requires the U.S. to stay involved in limited operations. The U.S. must do more than just set a good example – it must use “...hard-power resources,” because a superpower cannot expect to exert influence without the credible threat of force.<sup>95</sup> Americans must be willing to invest in the world. The cost of that investment is not only money and time, but possibly casualties.<sup>96</sup> The national leadership cannot afford to limit commitments and response efforts in the future world environment because of a desire to minimize casualties.

The predominant American military attitude today is an “unwarranted perception that the American Public now believes we can do military operations casualty free.”<sup>97</sup> This perception causes military commanders to believe they must justify each casualty to the national political leadership. If this trend continues, America is on a dangerous road where casualty aversion will ultimately “drive military courses of action and detract from mission

accomplishment.”<sup>98</sup> The American military must be ready to fight and win in future conflicts with an eye towards victory that may cost U.S. military lives. The problem now is, “...if commanders learn through experience that force protection is valued more by the organization than is boldness, with its attendant dangers, an entire army’s approach to war will reflect as much.”<sup>99</sup> The current trend towards casualty aversion is recognized at the highest levels of the military as having a negative effect on commanders exercising initiative and taking risks.<sup>100</sup> In the future’s uncertain environment, the U.S. cannot afford to suffer increased casualties because military commanders of today were not trained to act boldly when the situation demands it. In the end, increased casualties may be suffered because “...a distinguished commander without boldness is unthinkable.”<sup>101</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> LTC Lawrence E. Key, "Cultivating National Will: An Introduction to National Will." *Maxwell Papers* no. 5, (August 1996) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars." *Parameters* XXVI, no.2 (Summer 1996) 124.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 124 .

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>5</sup> LTC D.T. Eccles, *A British View of Risk Aversion and the Zero Defects Culture*. Database online:  
<http://home.earthlink.net/~sherikez/rivtroa/britview.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Walter E. Kretchik, "Force Protection Disparities." *Military Review*, (July-August 1997) 6.

<sup>7</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U. S. Military Operations*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996) 10-12. Changing expectations further explained. The public sets initial expectations about an intervention or conflict as a frame of reference to evaluate subsequent developments. Dramatic events like Tet or the Chinese entry into the Korean War shatter those initial expectations and can cause the public to revise its original ends-means decision, thereby changing its support.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Lorell and Charles Kelley Jr., *Casualties, Public Opinion, and Presidential Policy During the Vietnam War*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1985) 80.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Robert B. Smith, "Disaffection, Delegitimization, and Consequences: Aggregate Trends for World War II, Korea, and Vietnam," *Public Opinion and the Military Establishment* vol.1, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971).

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<sup>12</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U. S. Military Operations*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996) 27-29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion, and U. S. Military Intervention: Regional Deterrence Strategies*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994) 1-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 11. Schwarz compares Vietnam to Korea and finds that in both conflicts the evidence makes it clear that the public disapproval of each war did not translate directly into a desire to have American forces withdrawn. While a strong majority regretted the decision to get involved in Korea and Vietnam, an overwhelming majority still did not wish to quit.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>19</sup> Remarks Prepared for the Hon. Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. Database online: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/wienberger.html>. This is from a November, 1984 speech by the Secretary of Defense and is recognized as the first time he had articulated his six tests to be applied when U.S. leaders were weighing the use of military forces abroad. These tests quickly became known as the Weinberger Doctrine and were widely accepted by many U.S. political and military leaders. However, others, most notably Secretary of State George Shultz, argued that Weinberger's doctrine was too restrictive and that there were still limited situations where a "discrete assertion of power" was needed to support U.S. limited objectives. Shultz believed that diplomatic efforts not backed by a credible threat of force in a limited role would prove ineffectual and ultimately damage U.S. interests. (From a related article at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/article.html>.)

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion, and U. S. Military Intervention: Regional Deterrence Strategies*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994) 17.

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<sup>21</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U. S. Military Operations*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996) 30-34.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion, and U. S. Military Intervention: Regional Deterrence Strategies*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994) 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U. S. Military Operations*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996) 34.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion, and U. S. Military Intervention: Regional Deterrence Strategies*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994) 20.

<sup>28</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U. S. Military Operations*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996) 42-43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. The American public and Congress were satisfied with the mission (humanitarian) in Somalia until it was turned over to the U.N. in May 1993 and entered the new phase of "warlord hunting." Data shows that the public support fell to 50% in June following the slaughter of 24 Pakistani troops by Aideed's gunmen. Four U.S. deaths occurred in August and three more in September, 1993. Coupled with Task Force Ranger's initial unsuccessful raids, public support for having intervened fell to only 36% by September.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45. See endnote #29.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999) 310.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating U. S. Coercion." *Survival* vol. 41, no. 2, (Summer 1999) 107-120.

<sup>33</sup> Johanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) 21.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Young and Peter Jesser, *The Media and the Military*, (New York: St. Martin's Press) 219.

<sup>38</sup> G. Church, "Anatomy of a Disaster," *Time* vol. 142, (18 Oct 93) 40-50.

<sup>39</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U. S. Military Operations*. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996) 45-46. The White House decision to emergency airlift supplies to Somalia came on August 14, 1992. During July, there were a total of three reports on Somalia from ABC, CBS, and NBC combined and only one from CNN. In the two weeks of August preceding the decision, ABC, CBS, and NBC carried a combined total of ten reports and CNN carried nine during their around the clock reporting of the period. Following the announcement, reporting about Somalia increased on all news services, but again tapered off rapidly. Only CNN increased reporting again in October when the Somali clan fighting prevented the delivery of relief supplies. Even this tapered to minimal levels by the third week of October, and reporting by any of the news services did not increase again until after the November 26 Presidential announcement that U.S. troops would be deployed to Somalia.

<sup>40</sup> Johanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) 230.

<sup>41</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters* XXVI, no.2, (Summer 1996) 120.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating U. S. Coercion," *Survival* vol. 41, no. 2, (Summer 1999) 110.

<sup>43</sup> What price peace—in the twenty-first century, *Executive Speeches*, (Dayton, Feb/Mar 1996).

<sup>44</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters* XXVI, no.2, (Summer 1996) 122.

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<sup>45</sup> Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Gen., USMC (Ret.), 30<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps. Interview by author, 24 October and 3 November, 1999, Alexandria, VA. Telephone and electronic mail questions and responses.

<sup>46</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters XXVI*, no.2, (Summer 1996) 120.

<sup>47</sup> Harold G. Moore, LTG, USA, (Ret.) and Joseph L. Galloway, *We were soldiers once...and young*, (New York: Random House, 1992) 10-11, 23, 105. While it seems commonplace today, air assault by helicopter was emerging technology during the Vietnam War. LTG Moore related how radical the idea of vertical envelopment and helicopter speed for ground forces was at its inception. He also frequently comments on the "seething inferno" of artillery and air delivered ordnance that the North Vietnamese forces had to endure while trying to get at the American lines around LZ X-ray.

<sup>48</sup> COL. Jeffrey D. McCausland, "Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces: What the Gulf War Portends," *Parameters XXIX*, no.2, (Summer 1999) 10.

<sup>49</sup> Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993) 128.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>51</sup> LTC Clifton L. Bray, Jr., "Scorpion: A Low Cost, Low Risk, Low Asset Strategy for Resolving Low Level Conflicts," *U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Project*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: April 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993) 89-90.

<sup>53</sup> Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, (New York: Ace Books, 1959) 80-82. Heinlein's futuristic Mobile Infantry, suited in high-tech armor suits, don't seem so far-fetched by today's standards. His description was of a suit with pressure receptors that responded to a man's every move, giving him greater strength and endurance and allowing him to carry tremendous weapon systems while receiving intelligence feeds in a heads up display. The suit offered protection as well as communications, information, and a multi-faceted ordnance delivery platform all while allowing the man inside to bound over half-mile chunks of terrain. Many of the capabilities Heinlein described are available today or the very near future.

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<sup>54</sup> Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993) 120.

<sup>55</sup> "Military Force in an Age of National Cowardice." *Washington Quarterly*, (Autumn 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999) 112-113, 215-216.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating U. S. Coercion," *Survival* vol. 41, no. 2, (Summer 1999) 108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters XXVI*, no.2, (Summer 1996) 124.

<sup>60</sup> "Military Force in an Age of National Cowardice," *Washington Quarterly*, (Autumn 1998).

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating U. S. Coercion," *Survival* vol. 41, no. 2, (Summer 1999) 107.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, (July-August 1999) 24.

<sup>63</sup> Karl W. Eichenberry, "Take No Casualties." *Parameters XXVI*, no. 2 (Summer 1996) 109.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating U. S. Coercion," *Survival* vol. 41, no. 2, (Summer 1999) 108.

<sup>66</sup> Karl W. Eichenberry, "Take No Casualties." *Parameters XXVI*, no. 2 (Summer 1996) 113.

<sup>67</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988) 20.

<sup>68</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990) 27.

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<sup>69</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters* XXVI, no.2, (Summer 1996) 122.

<sup>70</sup> "Defending the End: Decision Making in Terminating the Persian Gulf War," *Comparative Strategy*, (October-December 1998) 367.

<sup>71</sup> Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters* XXVI, no.2, (Summer 1996) 121.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>73</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993) 3.

<sup>74</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993) 14.

<sup>75</sup> Charles A. Stevenson, "The Evolving Clinton Doctrine on the Use of Force," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Summer 1996) 516-517.

<sup>76</sup> Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Gen., USMC (Ret.), 30<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps. Interview by author, 24 October and 3 November, 1999, Alexandria, VA. Telephone and electronic mail questions and responses.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Peter D. Feaver, and Christopher Gelpi, "How Many Deaths are Acceptable? A Surprising Answer," *The Washington Post*, (November 7, 1999) Section B, 3.

<sup>79</sup> "Military Force in an Age of National Cowardice," *Washington Quarterly*, (Autumn 1998) 3.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Policing Utopia: The Military Imperatives of Globalization." *The National Interest*, (Summer 1999) 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>82</sup> *Some More Specific Consequences for Enhanced Effectiveness of U.N. Collective Security, Peacekeeping, and War Avoidance*, Charlotte: University of

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Virginia. Database online: <http://minerva.acc.virginia.edu/~cns1/public.html>.  
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<sup>83</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Policing Utopia: The Military Imperatives of Globalization." *The National Interest*, (Summer 1999) 7.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Gen., USMC (Ret.), 30<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps. Interview by author, 24 October and 3 November, 1999, Alexandria, VA. Telephone and electronic mail questions and responses.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, (July-August 1999) 25.

<sup>87</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994) 10-11.

<sup>88</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, The White House, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995) 12.

<sup>89</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, (July-August 1999) 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>91</sup> James F. Lindner, "Force Protection: A Critical Function During Military Operations Other Than War," (Naval War College, Newport, RI: June 1995) 2.

<sup>92</sup> Karl W. Eichenberry, "Take No Casualties." *Parameters* XXVI, no. 2 (Summer 1996) 110.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer, Maren Leed, David Persselin, , Jerry M. Sollinger, Ronald E. Sortor, and Jennifer M. Taw, *Bettering the Balance: Large Wars and Small Contingencies*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997) 9.

<sup>95</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, (July-August 1999) 26.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>97</sup> LTC Walter E. Kretchik, "Force Protection Disparities," *Military Review*, (July-August 1997) 6.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>99</sup> Karl W. Eichenberry, "Take No Casualties." *Parameters XXVI*, no. 2 (Summer 1996) 112.

<sup>100</sup> Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Gen., USMC (Ret.), 30<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps. Interview by author, 24 October and 3 November, 1999, Alexandria, VA. Telephone and electronic mail questions and responses.

<sup>101</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 192.

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