

By John T. Correll, Editor in Chief

The Purpose of War

IN days gone by, it was commonly agreed that the way to fight a war was to destroy the enemy's army and occupy his capital. The centerpiece of the strategy was the clash of one massed force with another.

It was a bloody enterprise, attrition warfare in which the winner might take higher casualties than the loser, as Ulysses S. Grant did in the Wilderness and at Cold Harbor.

Nevertheless, the attrition model of war prevailed into the 20th century.

Then, about 10 years ago, people began talking about a Revolution in Military Affairs, a new way of war in which it was possible to achieve the effects of mass without the actual massing of forces.

In some cases, we might be able to exploit such new technologies as stealth, information dominance, and long-range precision strike to defeat an enemy at a lower cost of lives and resources on both sides.

Strong evidence for that proposition was seen in a series of military operations in the 1990s, beginning with the Gulf War.

That conclusion is disputed, however, by land power advocates who believe the Revolution in Military Affairs is an exaggeration and that the classic model of war is still in effect. Echoing an earlier conclusion from the Army's official history of the Gulf War, retired Gen. Gordon Sullivan, former Army Chief of Staff, said in May that "the fundamental nature and objectives of warfare have not changed."

Conrad Crane, professor of military strategy at the Army War College, says the United States has been most successful in war "when it concludes with a triumphant march through the enemy capital, whether it was Mexico City, Richmond, Berlin, or Tokyo."

Professor Crane mounts his case in specific rebuttal to a concept called "Effects-Based Operations," which he sees as favoring airpower and diminishing the primacy of land battle.

The idea of Effects-Based Opera-

tions is that success in armed conflict should be measured by results, not by destruction. Did the operation compel a positive political outcome? Did it yield the desired strategic results? Did our will prevail over that of the adversary?

Body count wasn't a good idea in Vietnam. It still isn't. Destruction of

The objective is not to destroy the enemy but to gain a strategic result.

the enemy was never more than the means to a strategic end, not an end in itself.

In World War II, for example, our real objective was not destroying Germany and Japan. In fact, as soon as the war was over, we turned our energies to helping them rebuild. Our goal was to stop their aggression, defend their victims, and restore order.

It is conceivable that in some cases, our strategic objective may still be to destroy the enemy's army and occupy his capital, but more likely, what we really want to do is something else. Keep enemy armor from massing. Halt an invasion. Take away the enemy's ability to command and control his forces, as we did within hours at the beginning of the Gulf War.

Effects-based targeting leads to economy of force. In the Gulf, shutting down the power grid that supplied electricity to the air defense system took fewer resources than destroying every element of the air defense system.

In other instances, it may be sufficient to inhibit or intimidate the enemy. Keep him from turning on the radar serving his missile sites, since

the radiation would attract an air strike. Cause the enemy's troops to desert for fear of bombardment.

The highest form of intimidation is deterrence. The Cold War introduced an early example of Effects-Based Operations, in which we realized that the objective was to deter a nuclear-armed enemy, not outfight him.

The Strategic Air Command motto, "Peace is Our Profession," bothered some fighter pilots, who thought that war should be our profession, but at the level of effects, SAC had it right.

The attrition model of warfare will be an even worse fit with our purposes as we move into new regimes of conflict, such as space. Will we choose to stop an enemy's communications by blowing away a commercial satellite, or perhaps one belonging to a third party nation? Or would we prefer to try jamming or some other method of disruption?

We have more options than Grant did at Cold Harbor. As recently as World War II, the circular error probable—the Air Force's standard calculation of accuracy—for long-range bombers was 3,300 feet. Today, it is 10 to 20 feet. A single bomber will soon be able to strike 80 separate targets on the same sortie. Platforms in air and space make it hard for an adversary to hide or to conceal his preparations for war.

Effects-based planning applies across the spectrum of conflict, from smaller-scale operations to major theater war. Until now, the concept has been identified chiefly with airpower, but the US Joint Forces Command believes that its value should transcend service boundaries.

Charles D. Link, a retired Air Force major general with a keen eye for strategy, points out that this approach is well suited to our national purposes. We have no need or desire to capture or occupy another nation's territory, appropriate its resources, or rule its people.

It is nonsense to argue that warfare is unchanged. The question is whether we will have the wisdom to exploit the change. ■