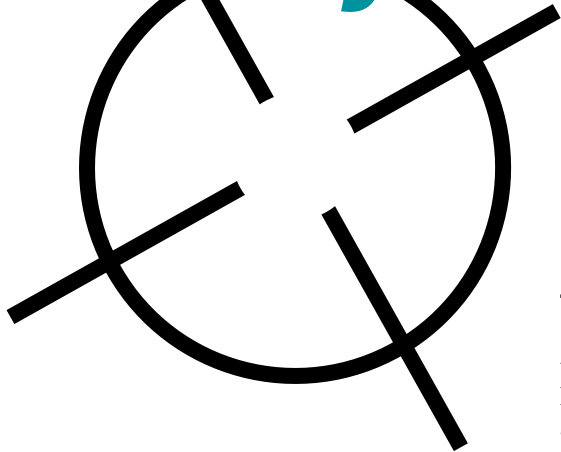


Stealth, information technology, and precision strike make the “force dominance” concept work.

Perry on Precision Strike



The “Offset” Strategy

“It’s hard from today’s perspective to take our minds back 20 years to what kinds of problems we were worried about in [1977]. Then, we were worried about the fact that we were faced with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and they had about three times as many tanks, artillery [pieces], and armored personnel carriers as we had, and we thought that they had a serious intent to use them, to send a blitzkrieg down through the Fulda Gap.

“It seems like a long time ago, but it was a very, very real problem to us then.

“We had no conceivable way of increasing the size of the US or the NATO forces to deal with that, and so the ‘offset strategy’ [devised by Defense Department officials] was no great leap of brilliance. It was simply a necessity. The only way we had of dealing with the three-to-one quantity advantage that Soviet forces had was to try to offset that with our superior technology. That was the key to our entire defense strategy in the late ’70s and on into the early ’80s.

“In retrospect, it seemed like a good strategy, and it even seemed like an obvious strategy, but . . . there was no shortage of critics in those days who questioned whether we could depend on technology. They argued that, when this modern technology was put into combat, the fog of war would make it ineffective. They also argued that this technology would be too sophisticated,

William J. Perry was Secretary of Defense for three years (1994–97).

Throughout the Carter Administration (1977–81), he was DoD’s top weapons development official and helped launch such programs as the B-2 and F-117 stealth aircraft and various types of cruise

missiles. On January 15, 1997, shortly before he stepped down

as Secretary, Mr. Perry addressed these remarks to a conference of the Precision Strike Association in Washington, D. C.

too complex for our military personnel to operate and to maintain.

“Well, they underestimated the technology, and they also underestimated the capability of our military personnel.”

“Reconnaissance Strike Force”

“What we put together then for the offset strategy was a combination. It was not just precision strike. Precision strike was at the heart of it, but it also involved stealth aircraft to deliver these precision weapons, and it involved an intelligence and reconnaissance system that would target for them. Those were the three components of what we called a ‘reconnaissance strike force,’ and the reconnaissance strike force was the heart of the offset strategy.

“Thankfully, we never had our offset strategy tested; the Soviet Union dissolved, the Warsaw Pact dissolved.

“But a funny thing happened to this technology. . . . In Operation Desert Storm, this same technology, which had been developed to deal with superior numbers of Warsaw Pact forces, was used against essentially equal numbers of Iraqi forces. And in Desert Storm, we faced, by the way, pretty much the same equipment, the same weapon systems that we had designed our systems against, because nearly all of the Iraqi weapon systems came from the Soviets.”

From “Offset” to “Dominance”

“Our equipment worked brilliantly well. I don’t need to recall for this audience how well it worked. But what we found was that what we had done for the offset strategy—the application of the reconnaissance strike force, the application of precision strike—had achieved an alternative policy objective. When used in a major regional conflict like Desert Storm, when used against an opponent with equal numbers, our technology did not simply offset the other side. It gave us the ability to win quickly, decisively, and with remarkably few casualties.

“When we saw that result, when we studied that result, we looked at the kind of policy problems and military operational issues we were going to be facing in the years ahead, and we said the very same technology that was developed to deal with the superior

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“When used in a major regional conflict like Desert Storm, . . . our technology did not simply offset the other side. It gave us the ability to win quickly, decisively, and with remarkably few casualties.”
Few casualties

numbers of Soviets would become the key to our new systems.

“Today, we don’t call it the offset strategy, because we’re dealing with a different problem. We call it ‘force dominance.’ . . . We’re facing Iraq or Iran or North Korea with about equal numbers. We want to be able to dominate the battlefield. We did it in Desert Storm.”

The Critics Still Yap

“Precision strike is, of course, at the heart of force dominance, just as it was at the heart of the offset strategy. And not surprisingly, there are still critics of force dominance, just like there were critics of the offset strategy.

“Most recently, we had a [General Accounting Office] report that really questioned whether precision strike was worth the effort—first, whether it was as good as we said, and second, even if it is as good as we said, why do we need it?

“The report made the profound observation that, in Desert Storm, dumb bombs were obviously much more important because we dropped a lot more of them, and they were less costly per bomb.

“This analysis, however, missed . . . the rather fundamental point: The cost-effectiveness measure is not how many bombs you drop but how many targets you destroy. By that measure, our precision weapons worked brilliantly.

“The GAO analysis missed a lot more, because these other points are

just difficult to analyze. It missed how precision strike weapons dramatically reduce collateral damage, protecting property and the lives of noncombatants. It missed how PGMs significantly lower the risk to bombers and aircrews, because fewer sorties are required to do the same job. And it missed the synergy that comes from combining precision strike weapons with operations, battlespace awareness, and stealth technology—in short, the reconnaissance strike force.”

Touchstone of the Future

“Adding all of these elements together gives you what I have called force dominance, and I can assure you that the decision-makers in the Pentagon today, next year, and for years to come are going to keep force dominance as the touchstone for their planning.

“Today, new generations of precision guided munitions continue to revolutionize how our military operates. The way we are going to obtain the next generation of PGMs is dramatically different [from the way we developed] the first cruise missile.

“Back then, the Defense Department generated the advanced technology we needed. Today, a lot of the technology we need is advancing in the commercial marketplace.

“So we face a new challenge, and that challenge is to tap the commercial marketplace for the technology and apply it to achieving force dominance.” ■