

Strategy Research Project

America's Growing Disconnect from the Use of Military Force

by

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Abstract

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As the U.S. concludes the longest war in its history, it should assess the connection between its society and the use of military force. There are two factors which have helped distance the U.S. civilian population from the decision to use military force. First, technology has provided policy makers with the ability to provide military effects globally with little human cost to the U.S. Second, a civilian-military gap has widened since the creation of the all-volunteer force. These two factors have combined to allow U.S. leaders unprecedented freedom to take military action abroad due to reduced internal political pressure. This situation creates three main risks to the U.S.: using a simple, technological military solution to problems which may not fully address the issue, the potential to use the military as the preferred option, and a shift away from a values-based approach when pursuing U.S. national interests. Three recommendations are made to address these issues: improve transparency in use of unmanned aerial vehicles, focus on synchronized strategic communication, and increase the size of the Guard and Reserve relative to the active duty force.

America's Growing Disconnect from the Use of Military Force

As the United States (U.S.) ends the longest war in its history,¹ it is imperative for its leaders to reflect on the strains which have been placed upon the country. Such reflection is important in order for the U.S. to learn from its past and to guide its future as it plans for an uncertain global environment characterized by competition and persistent tension.² While no country or form of government is infallible, the U.S. has shown its ability to adapt to the changes inherent in its society and to deal with the inevitable possibility of deciding when or if to engage in war.

Surprisingly, despite the length and depth of U.S. involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the American public has been less connected with the lethal use of military force than ever before in the history of the Nation.³ A careful analysis of the factors which have contributed to this disconnection is important to the health of American society and its continued resilience. While there may be many factors, research typically focuses on two aspects of U.S. society which have distanced the public from the decision to use the military instrument of power in various situations. First, the argument has been made that U.S. reliance on technology to minimize the human cost of war has distanced the populace from the consequences of military action and risk to military members. Second, debate has continued through the previous several decades about the civilian-military gap that has developed as a result of the move in the 1970s to the all-volunteer military force.

This paper will address U.S. reliance on technology and the civilian-military gap to determine the extent of their impact on societal disconnect from the use of military force. It will then examine whether those disconnects have a significant impact on U.S. policy regarding the use of military force. Furthermore, it will analyze the potential risks

inherent from the technological focus and civilian-military gap. Finally, it will provide recommendations to address these two issues.

Historical U.S. Technological Focus

The U.S. owes much of its military success to its cutting edge technology that provides its military forces with an unprecedented ability to access any theater in the world at low risk to human life. The U.S. has been the leader in basic research and development since World War II,⁴ resulting in an incredibly advanced military force. The country has created an impressive research and development base in both the civilian and military sectors. While several other nations, particularly those in Asia, are increasing their research budgets, the U.S. is still the global leader in research expenditures.⁵ A true strength of this military-civilian partnership has been the ability of private industry and the military to quickly leverage technological advances and incorporate them into weapons systems.

The concept of developing and leveraging new military technology to stay ahead of competitors has been a U.S. focus since World War II. This U.S. technological focus grew as the country took on global leadership responsibilities following that war. The American way of war has come to rely on leveraging superior wealth combined with a culture of technological overmatch in its military forces.⁶ Global security competition has driven quick advances in military research with rapid transition times to operational use. For example, to address its Cold War challenges, in the mid 1950s the Lockheed “Skunk Works” was able to produce the U-2 spy plane in a short eight months.⁷ Its successor, the A-12 spy plane (later known as the SR-71), which required materials that did not even exist at the time, was flown within a few years of inception. Each of these developments leveraged technology to achieve a military aim of accessing contested

environments while reducing risk to American lives. The U-2 was able to fly higher than any existing threat at the time, while the S-71 utilized speed and altitude to avoid threats.⁸

Today, technology has continued distancing American pilots from risk in several ways. Fighter and bomber aircraft have been developed to deliver precision weapons from high altitude thereby reducing their susceptibility to enemy air defenses. Advances in stealth have further reduced risk to aircrews in contested environments. Most recently, unmanned aircraft with the ability to deliver lethal force are doing so via remote control from bases 7,000 miles from the threat.⁹ While there are still deployed forces required to secure airfields and to accomplish the takeoff and landing phases of flight, the preponderance of flight hours and lethal strikes are able to be accomplished via a satellite link from the continental U.S., which further minimizes the risk to aircrews.

This technology has reduced many of the political barriers from the use of lethal military force. Whereas earlier military options almost always involved some risk of the death or capture of an American service member, that risk has largely disappeared with the introduction of this new technology. This technological edge has provided policy makers with the ability to use lethal force without putting boots on the ground thereby reducing the risks associated with the death or capture of U.S. service members. Additionally, the political risk of the military option is diminished when this technology is coupled with host nation support. These factors have given U.S. leaders an unprecedented ability to use the military instrument of power due to diminished political risk.

The exact consequences of this decreased human risk are difficult to quantify; however, there is a historical example which may provide some clarity. At the time of its development, it was believed that the previously mentioned U-2 spy plane was able to avoid detection from Soviet ground-based radar systems due to the extreme altitudes at which it flew. On May 1, 1960, it became clear that Soviet technology had caught up with the U.S. when a U-2 surveillance mission over the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) was shot down. The pilot, Major Francis Gary Powers, safely ejected from his aircraft and survived the ensuing 70,000 foot descent back to the ground where he was captured by the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB).¹⁰

The consequences of Major Powers being captured alive were significant as the resultant political fallout was enormous. U.S. officials initially claimed that an oxygen system failure had caused the pilot to black out and inadvertently fly into Soviet airspace; however, when the Soviets produced not only the wreckage of the aircraft but also the live pilot, President Eisenhower was finally forced to admit to the spy program. Major Powers was paraded through Moscow and was interrogated at length by the KGB. The Paris Summit, which was scheduled to occur the day after the Powers incident, ultimately collapsed.¹¹ This summit would have been the first official meeting between Soviet and Western leaders in five years and was planned to address issues including the nuclear arms race, Berlin, and Cuba. In the absence of a diplomatic solution to these problems and continued distrust, the Soviets elected to begin construction of the Berlin wall. Relations between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. deteriorated, and Khrushchev ultimately waited until Eisenhower left office to resume relations with U.S. leaders.¹²

In the end, the U.S. was forced to change its reconnaissance efforts to less adaptable, but safer, satellite-based imaging to prevent a similar recurrence. Despite the clear advantages of satellite technology, the limited dwell time over an area of interest meant that an adversary could simply hide things that they did not want photographed until the satellite passed. The U.S. continued to look for ways to increase the flexibility of reconnaissance missions while still mitigating the risks of manned over-flight.¹³

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Use (UAV)

In 2011, the world learned of the most recent way in which the U.S. had achieved its goal. A stealthy unmanned aircraft now acknowledged as the RQ-170 Sentinel crashed inside Iran.¹⁴ While the loss of this aircraft may have dealt a blow to U.S. intelligence efforts, it did not cause nearly the level of political fallout as the U-2 shoot down due to the fact that there was no pilot on board. The Iranians were able to show videos of their captured prize, but there was no human connection to raise the emotions of the American public. In a short time, the American people lost interest, and the story faded.

Another example, which further demonstrates the different levels of risk between applications of technology versus risk to human life, can be seen in comparing the Vietnam air campaign with the highly publicized “drone” program. While in Vietnam the human cost of air strikes was high on both sides of the war, the same cannot be said of the drone program. During the Vietnam War, U.S. aircraft losses totaled 1,737 to hostile fire and many of the crews perished or were captured from those incidents. The Vietnamese suffered tremendously under the bombing campaign as an estimated 50,000 civilians perished due to airstrikes.¹⁵ The political ramifications were additionally

high: the repatriation of the 1,463 Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action became the final obstacle to concluding the war.¹⁶

Whereas the human element of POWs became a political impediment to the conclusion of the war in Vietnam, the lack of this human cost in the worldwide campaign against terrorist networks has allowed the U.S. drone program to flourish. This program uses armed UAV for reconnaissance and elimination of high value targets in countries and areas which are inaccessible to U.S. forces for a variety of reasons. The program, which was developed under the Bush administration in the early 2000s and was expanded under President Obama, has been deemed extremely successful in denying terrorist safe havens. Since 2008, the lethal drone strike program has increased dramatically.¹⁷ Lethal drone strikes increased from a total of 13 between 2004 and 2007 to a staggering 122 in 2011.¹⁸ This significant increase in UAV usage emerged out of the policy of “Counterterrorism Plus” that was proposed by Vice President Biden and adopted by President Obama.¹⁹ In essence, this policy option allowed the administration to trade “boots on the ground” for technology while still achieving the strategic goal of diminishing the operational capabilities of terrorist networks.

Thus far, the drone related programs have garnered significant U.S. public support due to its ability to reduce the terrorist threat while protecting American lives. In fact, 68% of the American public supports the use of unmanned “drone” aircraft overseas.²⁰ Internationally, that support is not only lacking, but it is potentially threatening U.S. national interests. Recent public opinion polls abroad indicate that an overwhelming majority of countries oppose the U.S. drone program as 17 of 20 countries had a greater than 50% disapproval rating.²¹ Even more telling is the fact that

the three countries that were not opposed to the program in this survey include the U.S. and the United Kingdom as well as India in which almost half of the population surveyed indicated “no opinion.”²²

Up until now, the U.S. leadership and the public have largely ignored international opinion since it did not directly threaten its ability to conduct UAV missions. Only 26% of Americans indicated that they worried about the damage done to the U.S. reputation as a result of these strikes.²³ Recent trends indicate that this disinterest in international opinion may be changing. The driver of this change may not be U.S. public opinion, but rather a need to maintain access to overseas bases to continue the program. Consequently, drone strikes have seen a noticeable decrease within the past year. Further, public outcry in Pakistan has resulted in not only the removal of U.S. drones from Pakistani soil,²⁴ but also in Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif calling for an end to the drone program in his country’s airspace.²⁵

Most interestingly, while overall international public opinion seems to be against the use of U.S. drone strikes, a poll conducted in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) provides additional insights. This tribal region has been the focus of a disproportionate number of drone strikes based on its use as a terrorist safe haven. While residents of the FATA are overwhelmingly against the U.S. military pursuing Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in their region (90% against), they support the Pakistani military pursuing those same objectives (70% for). In fact, the FATA residents surveyed are evenly split on the use of drone strikes if they were to be conducted by the Pakistani military instead of the U.S. military.²⁶

The results of this poll provide some important lessons for the U.S. First, U.S. goals may actually be in-line with the interests of the civilians living in the FATA. Second, due to either a lack of trust or lack of understanding, these residents do not want the U.S. to continue its policies even if they desire a similar end-state. Reconciling these issues will be important as the U.S. seeks to reassure allies of its commitment to the region and to legitimize its policies.

U.S. officials have quietly stated that the drone program has resulted in no or very few civilian casualties; however, due to the classified nature of the program, they have provided little evidence to support that position. This lack of transparency has potentially dire consequences for U.S. national interests. In the absence of information, U.S. adversaries and others are filling the information void with one side of the story which may inflame anti-U.S. sentiment and work against U.S. national interests. This possibility is now becoming a reality in areas such as the FATA.

Meanwhile, drone strikes continue to proliferate to other countries under the legal precedent of the Authorization for the Use of Military Force given by Congress to the President after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center.²⁷ Media reports now claim drone strikes are taking place not only in Pakistan but also in Yemen and Somalia.²⁸ While these strikes have undoubtedly killed numerous terrorists with hostile intentions towards the U.S., the longevity of the program with no public debate is concerning as strikes continue despite both the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan coming to a close. In the absence of public debate and a seeming lack of public interest, the U.S. government continues to take lethal military action in the name of its citizens.

The world has recently witnessed the impact that public opinion can have on the political situation of a nation as demonstrated by the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia and was soon seen in Libya and Egypt.²⁹ While the underlying causes of each of those uprisings are different, they have demonstrated that a tipping point exists at which the public may take action against its government. Hence, a single misplaced use of lethal force may have far-reaching consequences, especially now that the media has focused significant attention on the issue of drone strikes.

A recent drone strike provides a further example of the political consequences of reliance on technology without transparency. In 2013 a drone strike occurred on a house in Afghanistan. The official government report stated that one male insurgent had been killed in the attack. While this statement was apparently true, there were gaps in the information. President Hamid Karzai denounced the strike by claiming that a two year old child was killed in the attack. The International Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan has publicly apologized for the civilian casualties.³⁰ This now draws attention to the military press releases and calls into question previous reports of no or low numbers of civilian casualties. This specific attack has dealt the U.S. a potentially serious blow by galvanizing President Karzai's decision to not sign the bi-lateral security agreement, which may potentially mean a full withdrawal of all U.S. troops by the end of 2014 that is counter to U.S. desires.³¹

U.S. public statements indicate that drone strikes are only taken when no other reasonable options exist. While other non-lethal options may exist, they typically carry more risk to American and Allied lives. The question then becomes whether the risks of lethal options are higher or lower than non-lethal options and who will bear that risk. The

American public has limited tolerance for casualties; however, international public support has eroded to the point where the U.S. may need to actively pursue other options such as using host nation military or police forces to capture versus kill in order to provide legitimacy and to preserve the political ability to use the full range of U.S. capabilities in the future.

While the U.S. technological advantage has given it the ability to shield its people from the dire consequences of waging war, the result has been a populace with little concern for the strikes being carried out in their name due to their disconnection from the events. This disconnection has allowed policy makers a free hand to engage in activities which may not be in the long term interests of the nation. It may be argued that a disconnection of the public via technology is a good thing because it provides policy-makers with “political freedom of maneuver.” This argument may hold some weight in a time of crisis, but as time progresses, the need for information and debate becomes more important to the healthy functioning of the American Republic.

American Society and the Civilian-Military Gap

Compounding the technological aspects of America’s disconnection with the use of lethal force is the growing civilian-military gap that has developed since the all-volunteer force was created in the wake of the Vietnam War.³² The last decade of sustained warfare has been borne by a very small segment of the American public. With each passing year as older World War II veterans pass away, fewer veterans are embedded in society. In fact, only 0.5% of the American public has been on active duty at any given time during the last decade compared to almost 9% during World War II.³³ While the “active duty” number does not account for every American in the military services, it does represent the bulk of the U.S. military. Based on the most recent

military demographics report available, 62% of Department of Defense uniformed personnel are on active duty with the remaining 38% in the Guard and Reserve.³⁴

This civilian-military gap has led to a perceived lack of understanding of the military and its issues. Studies now indicate that 84% of military members believe that the public does not understand the issues faced by service members and their families. Further, 71% of the general American public agrees about this lack of understanding.³⁵ More importantly, given the length of involvement of the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is surprising to find that half of the American people surveyed say that the wars have had little impact on their lives. Moreover, only a quarter of the population follows news reports of the wars closely.³⁶

For all intents and purposes, the American public has followed the guidance of President Bush after the 9/11 attacks. While the President did not tell the American public to “go shopping” as is alleged in several op-eds, he did encourage Americans to continue their lives as normal. In his Sept 20, 2001 speech, President Bush stated, “I ask for your continued participation and confidence in the American economy.”³⁷ He continued in a speech a week later to airline employees, “Fly and enjoy America’s great destination spots. . . . Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed.”³⁸ The argument has been made that President Bush missed a great opportunity to galvanize the nation to make sacrifices for the good of the whole. Thomas Friedman reflected on this potentially missed opportunity by stating, “They wanted to do something to strengthen the country they love. Instead, Bush told a few of us to go to war and the rest of us to go shopping.”³⁹

While President Bush's remarks were likely intended to address the U.S. economy, which was its key vulnerability at the time, the remarks have had long-lasting effects throughout society. Members of the military are now much more likely than their civilian counterparts to consider themselves patriotic. Only 37% of Americans now claim that they are more patriotic than the average citizen compared to 61% of military members.⁴⁰ This statistic indicates a much lower level of patriotism in the general public. Further evidence of the divergence of patriotic sentiment is shown by the fact that 82% of modern era veterans would advise a young person to join the military, whereas only 48% of the general public would do the same.⁴¹ This disconnect is further exacerbated by the fact that only 25% of the nation's youth are even eligible to serve in the military based on obesity rates, criminal history, and academic aptitude.⁴² Based on this data, the U.S. population is increasingly becoming disassociated with the military.

This civilian disconnect from the military has an effect on society's association with the use of military force. An extensive study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania looked at public attitudes regarding use of military force for those nations with all-volunteer and conscription systems. This research showed that those nations that utilized conscription were 17% less likely to support war than those nations utilizing an all-volunteer force.⁴³ The primary reason for this decrease in support was self-interest. The groups that would be most affected by the draft were the ones who showed the most propensity to not support the decision to enter into a military conflict.⁴⁴ In effect, the less connected broader society is with those members who actually fight and die in war, the less likely they are to oppose the use of military force.

This growing disconnect between society and the military is further evidenced by an examination of the makeup of its governmental representation. Despite the fact that the U.S. is finishing up the longest war in its history, the number of Congressional members with military experience continues to decrease. The 113th Congress now has only 108 members who are serving or previously served in the military (20% of total membership).⁴⁵ This represents the lowest level of military service in Congress in the history of the U.S. and continues the decline in military representation in government since the creation of the all-volunteer force. For example, the 97th Congress (1981-1982) had 64% of its members with military experience, while the 92nd Congress (1971-1972) had 73% of its members with military experience.⁴⁶

The real question then becomes: does the decreasing number of veterans in Congress lead to different decisions being made than had there been more veterans? William Bianco addressed this issue in a study of Congressional votes between veteran and non-veteran members using data from the 91st to 92nd House of Representatives and the 102nd to 104th House of Representatives. He analyzed these particular groups due to the large number of defense and foreign policy “key votes” which occurred as well as the high level of veterans present in the 91st and 92nd Congress. His research found that there are some cases where outcomes would have differed significantly, most notably in the legislation aimed at ending military draft registration in 1973. In this particular case, if a theoretical legislature had been composed entirely of veterans, the legislation to end the military draft would have been defeated versus the reality of passage of the bill. Surprisingly, however, he found that overall there is little correlation between veteran status and legislative decisions.⁴⁷

Mr. Bianco acknowledges that the data used in his analysis represents only a small portion of legislation considered and that the results cannot eliminate the possibility that veteran status might affect very specific legislation relating solely to veteran issues. Despite this fact, he found no overall institutional bias related to veteran status. Even if his results were to hold true for all legislation, and veteran status truly does not matter, the statement that “all politics is local” still poses a problem. Considering the previous discussion on the public disconnect from the military and national security issues, Congressional leaders may not need to be veterans themselves to make sound decisions, but their decisions will be influenced by the views of their constituency which has decreasing ties to the military.

Risk Analysis: Technology and Civilian-Military Disconnect

Based on growing research regarding both the increasing reliance on drone technology and the decreasing connection of society with the military overall, the disconnect between U.S. society and the use of military force appears to be real. Technology and the civilian-military gap may further compound each other to isolate the public from the impact of the decision to use the military instrument of power. The convergence of these factors presents the U.S. with a unique set of risks and challenges as it looks to the future.

The first risk to the U.S. is that the American public now has very little at stake when the government decides upon the use of lethal force. Not only have the vast majority of the American people not felt the loss of life in Iraq and Afghanistan, they have also not felt the economic impacts of war. Very little has changed in America despite fighting two extremely costly wars. This lack of direct impact on the public has resulted in a decreased U.S. political risk for the use of lethal military force abroad.

There may be less public support for use of ground forces abroad in the wake of Afghanistan and Iraq; however, the use of low-risk military options such as conventional air strikes, drone strikes, or naval cruise missile strikes continues to receive much higher support in public opinion polls.

Second, this lack of consequences for taking military action abroad has the potential to encourage the U.S. to use the military as the primary instrument of power. The U.S. military has proven itself capable of providing precision strikes anywhere in the world with little or no risk to American lives. Despite the fact that strikes may not solve the underlying reasons for the issue at hand or may not meet the strategic end state desired by the U.S., the limited military option may become the preferred choice to solve emerging crises as it gives immediately visible effects with seemingly little consequence. The diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power may be just as effective as the military option, but the lack of immediate, visible results has made these options less politically useful when compared to the low-risk military technological solution with its quicker tangible effects.

Finally, the U.S. has historically been able to pursue both values and interests based policies. President Obama's 2010 National Security Strategy outlines the importance of taking a values-based approach when pursuing U.S. national interests: "Time and again, our values have been our best national security asset."⁴⁸ It further acknowledges that certain U.S. policies have undercut its commitment to a values-based approach.⁴⁹ The ability of the U.S. to maintain the moral high ground espoused in its National Security Strategy may be in jeopardy if it cannot win the public relations battle occurring on the world stage right now regarding the use of lethal military force.

Recommendations

To ensure the continued success of the U.S. in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous⁵⁰ world while addressing the technological and civilian-military disconnects, this paper recommends that the nation's senior leaders take three actions: improve transparency in UAV use, focus on synchronized strategic communication, and increase the percentage of forces contained in the National Guard and Reserve. The reasons for these actions are now discussed.

Improve Transparency in UAV Use

The need to improve transparency will be a challenge as every government maintains secrets to protect itself and its interests, but there comes a time when the keeping of any secret becomes counter-productive. After a speech given by John Brennan, the Obama administration's counter-terrorism advisor in early 2012 acknowledging the existence of the drone program,⁵¹ the U.S. government went quiet on the program again and very little official information on the program has been forthcoming. However, the debate over UAV strikes is still occurring daily in the media in various venues as illustrated by the frequency of editorials and articles from reputable news organizations plus the enormous growth in advocacy groups calling for the end of these strikes. The world public and the media have already concluded that the U.S. is conducting attacks using UAVs in various theaters outside of Afghanistan.

The problem facing the U.S. government is that it is unable to contribute any information to the debate about UAV use and its implications regarding civilian casualties because it remains highly classified. Despite the recent public overtures of moving the UAV program from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the Department of Defense management where it might receive more transparency, the CIA still

maintains its own highly classified UAV program.⁵² In an increasingly globalized world, the U.S. may be approaching the point where world public opinion matters as much as U.S. public opinion. Applying the U.S. technological advantage still requires access to sovereign nations. If international opinion degrades sufficiently, the U.S. may be unable to gain or maintain the access it needs to leverage its distinct advantages.

Focus on Synchronized Strategic Communication

With the added transparency previously described, U.S. leaders need a way to better communicate their message to the American public. The creation of a synchronized strategic communication plan is the next essential step to bridge the gap with the public. With the advent of social media, information travels faster than ever before. The ability to leverage this new method of communication is becoming increasingly important. The act of a single individual can change the course of an entire nation as seen in the events which triggered the Arab Spring. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia came to signify the government oppression felt by the people.⁵³ Social media enabled the public to coordinate and collectively resist the government and played an important part in starting a revolution that overthrew the government and was followed by uprisings in other parts of the Middle East.⁵⁴

U.S. adversaries are effectively applying this new communications medium to win support for their efforts. To counter this move, the U.S. needs to effectively get the correct information out to the intended audience in a timely manner. That information must be synchronized and distributed through various communications methods to include social media, but more importantly, it may need to be conveyed by non-U.S. entities to add credibility. A recent statement from the Pakistani government provides a positive example of better utilizing strategic communication. The Pakistanis released a

report claiming that civilian casualties due to drone strikes since 2008 have only been three percent.⁵⁵ This number is much lower than previously thought. In fact, the official Pakistani number is less than half of estimates given by independent organizations and other government departments.⁵⁶

Additionally, the U.S. synchronized communications plan should focus not just on international audiences but internally as well. Domestic debate is essential to maintaining credibility both at home and abroad. This debate will happen regardless of U.S. government participation. By coupling improved transparency with the ability to rapidly disseminate its position to the public; the U.S. government has the opportunity to counter many of its detractors' arguments.

Increase the Percentage of Military Forces Contained in the Guard and Reserve

In an effort to increase the ties between society and the military and to address the disconnect discussed earlier, increasing the percentage of National Guard and Reserve forces relative to their active duty counterparts in the current military drawdown environment is an important part of the solution. General Odierno, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, has requested a final ratio of Guard and Reserve forces to active duty of 54% based on internal Army studies.⁵⁷ This would be a slight increase in Army Guard and Reserve forces from approximately 50% at the height of combat operations.⁵⁸ The Brookings Institute produced a study which would cut deeper into the active component Army, but preserve combat capability through an increased Guard and Reserve force. This recommendation is to cut the active component Army by 200,000 and add 100,000 Reservists to reduce personnel costs in peacetime while maintaining scalability if a ground war were to occur.⁵⁹ It is recommended that the U.S. Army adopt the findings of the Brookings Institute study. Additionally, the other services should conduct similar

studies in an effort to move as much force structure into the Guard and Reserve as feasible.

The Guard and Reserve have proven their ability to successfully engage in protracted war. By transferring more forces to the Guard and Reserve, the U.S. can achieve multiple benefits. First, Reserve component military members are more thoroughly embedded throughout society by combining full-time civilian work with their part-time military duties. Second, this larger part-time force provides a scalable, cheaper alternative to a large standing military force. A part-time drilling reservist costs about 15% of an active duty equivalent. A reservist on full-time duty for a year costs 80-95% of the active duty cost.⁶⁰ Finally, the deepening relationship between society and the military through a larger Reserve Component force provides another check and balance concerning the use of military force. Because using military force would affect a much larger part of society and its impact on the overall economy, the decision to use the military option would require a broader appeal to society than previously.

Conclusion

Based on this examination of the research that exists on the disconnect between society and the decision to use military force, several conclusions can be made. First, technology will likely continue to be a major element of the “American way of war” because it allows the U.S. to leverage its strength both economically and in the area of research and development. While this technology focus may continue to distance Americans from the effects of the military actions their leaders choose to make, a robust public debate will be essential to ensuring the best decision is made.

Second, a gap has developed over time between the American public and the military. This gap has resulted in a subsequent decrease in the number of political

representatives with direct military experience. While the research supports that a gap exists, it does not support the idea that this has had detrimental effects on either the American willingness to take military action nor has it created an unwillingness to act when it is in the national interests of the country.

In essence, the U.S. is at a crossroads as it begins to divest itself from the longest war in its history. Today, the country has the opportunity to reassess its policies and decisions to use military force as it looks to a future with no clear military adversary. Now is the time to make the changes necessary to prepare the nation for the next time it may find itself in crisis. Much as the Founding Father's spent significant time debating and crafting the Constitution to ensure its longevity, so to should the American public be afforded the opportunity to discuss and debate the issues which are paramount to when and how the nation chooses to use military force to meet its challenges. The best way to achieve that debate is to reconnect society with the military and to improve communication with the public via transparency.

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