Editor's Corner

by Mackubin T. Owens

In These Pages

Even as the United States fights simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defense must consider the makeup of the future U.S. force structure. Looking beyond both the present and near future is the purview of forces planning, the art of making decisions today about the size, composition, and mix of a future force structure, in light of plausible alternative security environments and resource constraints. This is the focus of this issue's "History and Future War" cluster of articles.

The Soviet Union's collapse and the Gulf War of 1991 saw the rise of an influential school of thought that claimed emerging technologies were creating a "revolution in military affairs" (RMA) that was transforming the very nature of war. Advocates of this school contended that these emerging technologies and "information dominance" would eliminate "friction" and the "fog of war," providing the commander and his subordinates nearly perfect "situational awareness," thereby promising "the capacity to use military force without the same risks as before."

For instance, the former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Owens, made the extraordinary claim that "technology could enable U.S. military forces in the future to lift the 'fog of war'. . . . Battlefield dominant awareness—the ability to see and understand everything on the battlefield—might be possible."

Critics of this approach to thinking about future war, including Williamson Murray and H.R. McMaster, contend that it is an example of historically undisciplined theorizing. Theory is important to the study of war, but not in the absence of historical context. For instance, they argue that technology may have changed the *character* of war, but not its nature. History teaches—and our troops' experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan confirm—that the nature of war includes chance, uncertainty, ambiguity and contingency. In addition, there is the danger arising from the complex interplay of decisions, actions, and events. And since causes interact in ways unforeseeable by even the historically sophisticated, similar causes do not

always produce similar effects; that initial conditions offer only a glimpse of the possible outcomes; and that accordingly, as long as war is a human undertaking, such phenomena as "friction" will persist.

In this issue, McMaster makes the case for a large, flexible, balanced land force possessing the capabilities necessary to deal with protracted irregular wars. He contends that the flawed doctrinal thinking that took root in the 1990s has resulted in unbalanced and vulnerable forces dependent on centralized resources and unable to overmatch the enemy in close combat. Accordingly, he says, U.S. force planners ought to be creating forces explicitly designed to fight under conditions of uncertainty.

Dave Deptula argues for an approach to force planning that leverages U.S. advantages in air, space, and cyberspace capabilities, permitting the United States to project precision effects over great distances, with asymmetries and speed not available in other domains. These capabilities would allow the U.S. military to project power while minimizing vulnerability—decreasing the requirement to put surface forces at risk. Long-range precision strike limits the ability of an adversary to contest U.S. actions.

Bob Work traces the evolution of U.S. naval power, arguing that we have now entered the "cooperative phase" of what he terms the "global era." During this period of globalization, no task is more important than maintaining maritime security. In order to achieve this goal, Work makes the case for a revitalized "national fleet" combining the attributes of the U.S. Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. The national fleet will maintain maritime security by leveraging the maritime capabilities of each of its components, as well as those of U.S. allies and friends.

In the final article of the "History and Future War" cluster, Bill Martel discusses a framework for understanding "victory." This framework is critically important for policymakers as they confront decisions about whether to intervene with military force. Without clear concepts and language for victory, argues Martel, it is difficult for policymakers to describe what they seek to achieve from military intervention.

Our other articles examine concerns about a nuclear-armed Iran and how to minimize the possibility of such an outcome, the human cost of the Iraq War and the implications for future U.S. foreign policy of an American withdrawal that is perceived to be a defeat, and two pieces on the United States and Asia from a recent FPRI conference. Other papers from this conference can be read at fpri.org.

Impromptus and Asides: Energy Security vs. Energy Independence

Soaring energy costs have intensified calls for achieving "energy independence," which focuses on "renewable" sources of energy, e.g. wind, solar, and biofuels. But energy independence is a chimera, especially in this age of

global interdependence. Advocates of energy independence would repeat the mistakes of the 1970s and early 1980s, when the government attempted to micro-manage the energy market and pick winners and losers. The results were dismal then and there is no reason to believe the outcome would be any different today. The problem is that, for technological and economic reasons, renewable alternatives are far too expensive and unreliable to compete on the market with oil and gas and, therefore, must be subsidized.

This problem is apparent when considering the case of the most popular biofuel: ethanol. In fact, ethanol producers have benefited from preferential treatment since 1978. The hope that ethanol would become viable in a few years and get "off the dole" has never been realized.

There is another problem with biofuels mandates. The undeniable fact is that human action generates unintended consequences. Increases in ethanol production, even before the volume mandated by Congress, have led to the diversion of land and corn from food production and animal feed, increasing food prices for U.S. consumers. And even if the nation's entire corn crop were devoted to ethanol production, it would still only meet a fraction of annual U.S. gasoline demand.

Rather than chasing after the chimera of energy independence, the United States should be striving to achieve energy *security*. While the former, the goal of which is to become self sufficient in the production of energy, is a pipe dream, the latter is achievable because it focuses on increasing the *supply* of energy by maximizing all of the sources available to us.

For instance, current policy discourages the production of domestic oil and natural gas. Energy security suggests that we should expand access to non-park federal lands in the West, Alaska, and under the waters off our coasts. These areas hold an estimated 635 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas—enough to meet the needs of the 60 million American homes fueled by natural gas for over a century—and an estimated 112 billion barrels of recoverable oil—enough to produce gasoline for 60 million cars and fuel oil for 25 million homes for 60 years.

This doesn't even include the substantial oil shale resources that are economically recoverable at oil prices significantly lower than those that prevail today. It is estimated that anywhere from 800 million to 2 trillion barrels of oil are available from oil shale in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming.

Energy security would also be advanced by converting coal into liquid fuels, exploiting the vast deposits of unconventional natural gas available domestically, and reversing our rejection of nuclear power. According to data compiled by the World Association of Nuclear Operators, all of the key indicators of nuclear plant performance—from unplanned reactor shutdowns to radiation exposure—have shown

high levels of safety at U.S. nuclear power plants during the past decade. Nuclear energy is also efficient (France, for instance, gets 75 percent of its electrical power from nuclear energy). The efficiency of nuclear power has improved by 36 percent since 1990, the equivalent of adding over twenty-three 1,000 megawatt power plants.

The requirement for energy diversity and clean air would seem to support expansion of nuclear-generated electricity, yet no new nuclear plants have been ordered since 1979. Indeed, since nuclear power accounts for about 75 percent of the nation's clean power generation, and given that it is the only base-load energy source that can make a decisive contribution toward reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, it should be embraced by environmentalists. But environmental activists have not only obstructed the construction of new nuclear power plants but also opposed renewing the licenses of nuclear power plants currently in operation.

What proof is there that increasing the supply of energy by freeing up domestic resources will enhance energy security? The best example of how the market, not government pursuit of energy independence, contributes to energy security is President Ronald Reagan's decision to lift price controls on oil in 1981.

At the time, the price of oil was at a level that in real terms is only now being matched, thanks to the decision by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to curtail output. Domestic price controls ensured that the OPEC cartel would face little or no competition in the production of oil. Domestic price controls were exacerbated by other wrongheaded policies stimulated by the two "energy crises" of the 1970s. One of the most egregious was the infamous "windfall profits" tax designed to punish oil companies for alleged profiteering. But since it applied to even newly discovered oil, its main impact was to discourage the exploration and drilling that would have increased oil supplies.

Although the energy problems of the 1970s were traceable to government policies, Reagan's decision to deregulate oil prices was ridiculed by policy makers, especially those who had served in the previous administration. For instance, Frank Zarb, who had been Jimmy Carter's "energy czar," predicted that decontrolling the price of crude oil would lead to gasoline prices of $10 a gallon.

Instead, the world price of oil plummeted, helping to fuel the extraordinary economic growth of the 1980s. The reason for this outcome should be clear to anyone with an ounce of economic sense. As long as the OPEC cartel faced little competition in the production of crude oil, its members benefited from keeping the commodity in the ground, confident that increasing demand would make it more valuable in the future.

Reagan's deregulation of crude oil prices created incentives for domestic producers to invest in exploration and to increase produc-

tion. The threat of increased output by non-OPEC producers destroyed the discipline among OPEC members necessary to restrict production to maintain high prices. But facing the likelihood that an increase in supply would lead to lower future prices, OPEC producers increased output in the hopes of maximizing profits before prices fell. The cascading effect caused oil prices to tumble.

As in the 1970s, U.S. energy policies have essentially restricted the exploitation of domestic sources of energy. Curtailed supplies have combined with rapid worldwide energy demand to increase the price of oil and other sources of energy. This provides leverage to foreign producers and threatens U.S. energy security. Freeing up domestic energy resources will do today what President Ronald Reagan's decision to deregulate oil prices in 1981 did then: cause oil prices to fall, thereby enhancing U.S. energy security.