The legal obligations described in Chapter Two are supplemented by an additional set of constraints on planners—constraints driven by political forces. Public and coalition sensitivity to friendly casualties and collateral damage often reduces operational flexibility more severely than does adherence to the international law of armed conflict.

Some political pressures push in the same direction as the law of armed conflict, such as when the public demands that civilian injury be minimized. But some political pressures push against international legal duties, such as when the public demands that risk to U.S. forces be minimized. Efforts to reduce vulnerability of U.S. and allied forces without sacrificing military effectiveness may entail greater risks for civilians in the conflict area; efforts to reduce the risk of collateral damage may require placing U.S. and allied forces in greater danger. During NATO’s recent Allied Force operations over Kosovo, for instance, the requirement that U.S. ground-attack aircraft stay above 15,000 feet to minimize risks to aircrews from shoulder-fired antiaircraft weapons helped satisfy political pressures to avoid U.S. casualties, but it probably resulted in higher chances (and perhaps more incidents) of misidentification of civilian vehicle traffic as enemy.

Political constraints derive from the need to maintain certain minimum levels of support for military operations among three audiences: the domestic public, the international community (most notably major and regional allies), and the local population in the conflict area. The relative weight of these audiences’ opinion on U.S.
decisionmaking varies considerably with context and type of operation. When vital U.S. interests are at stake, for example, decision-makers are less likely to adapt operations to placate international dissent; when peripheral interests are at stake, the relative importance of diplomatic backlash naturally rises and decisionmakers will tailor operations accordingly. During full-scale combat operations, the demands of the local populace will typically concern U.S. decisionmakers and planners less than during peacekeeping or humanitarian operations, where perceived impartiality and maintaining consent of factional parties may be critical to success. Even when U.S. vital interests are at issue, sensitivity among policymakers and the public about casualties, collateral damage, and civilian suffering affects strategic decisions about when and whether to conduct military operations at all, as well as operational decisions including choice of forces, weapons, and rules of engagement.

From an operational planning perspective, the resulting political pressures are often seen as impediments to sheer military effectiveness. But just as policymakers must understand how tight restrictions on tactical and operational decisionmaking might reduce military potency, military planners must appreciate that satisfying political demands may be vital to sustained support for military operations. In other words, the same restrictions that an operator views problematically as “constraining” may be critical enablers of military action at the highest strategic levels.

AMERICAN CASUALTY SENSITIVITY

Today, U.S. military operations are typically planned and conducted with high sensitivity to potential U.S. casualties. Policymakers and planners generally fear that U.S. casualties will—or at least might—erode support for sustained operations. Force protection is often of paramount importance in designing operations.

Until the Gulf War, commentators cast American casualty sensitivity as part of the “Vietnam syndrome.” Contrary to the predictions of those who saw Desert Storm as putting the Vietnam experience in the past, the relatively low American death total likely raised public expectations of “bloodless” foreign policy and fed policymakers’ and military planners’ perceptions that the public had softened in this regard. The further erosion of already fragile American public support that followed the October 1993 deaths of 18 U.S. servicemen
in Mogadishu evinced the strong pull that U.S. casualties can exert on policy. The extended deployment of U.S. ground forces to enforce the Dayton peace accords in the former Yugoslavia only confirms this tendency: Unlike those of other NATO partners, U.S. troops patrol in convoys and have avoided actions likely to provoke hostile responses from local factions.1

Although a number of empirical studies have shown that the effects of U.S. casualties on public support depend heavily on a number of contextual factors and other variables—for example, support is likely to erode with casualties when vital interests are not at stake or when the public views victory as unlikely2—this sensitivity affects policy and planning decisions both prior to and during operations, when concern for potentially adverse public reactions weighs heavily. The potential for casualties and resulting dissipation of support was one factor that motivated President Bush to demand a quick end to the Gulf War.3

Adversaries often view casualty sensitivity as a key component of the United States’ "center of gravity": its political will to sustain operations. Ho Chi Minh famously warned the United States: "You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."4 Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed reportedly echoed to Robert Oakley, the U.S. special envoy to Somalia during the U.S. intervention there, "We have studied Vietnam and Lebanon and know how to get rid of Americans, by

---


2 For such conclusions and evidence drawn from other studies, see Eric V. Larson, Casualties and Consensus (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996). Larson’s study showed that in a number of past cases support for a military operation declined as a function of the log of the casualties, although the sensitivity to casualties depended on the perceived benefits of and prospects for success. See also John Mueller, Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), who reports empirical findings from previous conflicts to support the theory that U.S. casualties, especially under certain circumstances, erode public support for continued operations. (pp. 76–77.)


killing them so that public opinion will put an end to things."\(^5\)

Accordingly, adversaries are likely to adopt counter-intervention strategies that impose high risks of U.S. casualties.

In part because of casualty sensitivity, U.S. foreign policy also exhibits a tendency to choose military instruments that do not require putting U.S. personnel in harm's way any more than necessary. A long-standing tenet of the American "way of war" has been a reliance on materiel over manpower, high-technology over low-technology mass.\(^6\) The heavy reliance on the vast U.S. technological superiority, featuring in particular modern stealth and precision-guidance systems, has contributed to what Eliot Cohen has dubbed "the mystique of U.S. air power."\(^7\) Not only do such high-technology instruments provide sufficient target discrimination to satisfy the public's demand for minimizing civilian suffering, but they also allow U.S. forces to bring massive firepower to bear without placing significant numbers of—or, in the case of cruise missiles, zero—U.S. personnel in danger.\(^8\) The use of cruise missiles to attack suspected terrorist targets in Afghanistan in August 1998, and their threatened use against Iraqi forces in November 1998, reflected this tendency, even at the expense of predictably degraded military effectiveness.\(^9\)

**SENSITIVITY TO COLLATERAL DAMAGE AND CIVILIAN SUFFERING**

U.S. military operations are planned with concern for minimizing collateral damage, although, as with American casualties, policymakers' and public sensitivity to collateral damage depends on a number of contextual factors and other variables. During the

---


\(^8\) Although the apparent downing of an F-16 by Bosnian Serb forces in 1995 and an F-117 by Serbian forces in 1999 attest that U.S. forces remain at least somewhat vulnerable even to older generations of anti-aircraft defenses.

Vietnam conflict, perceptions that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces were conducting indiscriminate operations—perceptions that appeared validated by coverage of My Lai and other actual or alleged atrocities—combined with the indecisiveness of the war to fuel public disaffection. On the other hand, there was little adverse public reaction to the hundreds of Somali civilian deaths resulting from firefights with U.S. or UN forces, nor has there been vocal outcry since the Gulf War about Iraqi civilian deaths resulting from air strikes or economic sanctions, even though a majority of the U.S. public, at the height of the Gulf War, believed that the people of Iraq were innocent of any blame for Saddam Hussein’s policies. Nevertheless, significant segments of the U.S. population support minimizing risk to enemy civilians and general support will probably become less stable, and hence potentially more vulnerable to unpredictable dips, if military planners and operators do not take steps to minimize such risk. Moreover, as with U.S. casualties, collateral damage is likely to undermine public support when combined with the perception that U.S. victory is unlikely. The bottom line is that policymakers are extremely wary of authorizing actions posing high risks of significant collateral damage, especially when U.S. vital interests are not immediately threatened.

Even when the U.S. public appears willing to tolerate collateral enemy civilian injury, other members of the international community may not, and the risk of either public or international backlash

---

10 As Guenter Lewy explains, “The impact of the antiwar movement was enhanced by the widely publicized charges of American atrocities and lawlessness. The inability of Washington officials to demonstrate that the Vietnam War was not in fact an indiscriminate bloodbath and did not actually kill more civilians than combatants was a significant factor in the erosion of support for the war . . . .” Lewy (1978), p. 434.

11 A Los Angeles Times poll (February 15–17, 1991), showed that 60 percent of respondents thought that the people of Iraq were innocent of any blame, whereas only 32 percent thought that the people of Iraq must share blame for Saddam Hussein’s policies. Mueller (1994), p. 316. Likewise, accidental NATO attacks on a Serbian passenger train and Kosovar refugee convoys in the early weeks of Operation Allied Force did not undermine U.S. public support for air strikes. A USA Today poll (April 16, 1999) taken shortly after these events showed 61 percent support (approximately the same support level as the previous week), although such incidents began to take a toll as the conflict continued.

12 A survey by the Pew Research Center in May 1999 suggested that public support for NATO air attacks on Yugoslavia decreased because of unintended civilian casualties combined with public concern that the attacks were ineffective. Richard Morin, “Poll Shows Most Americans Want Negotiated Settlement,” Washington Post, May 18, 1999, p. A18.
is typically enough to severely constrain U.S. air operations. The added political constraints attending coalition operations are described in more detail below. But even in unilateral operations, the sensitivities of allies and other international actors can influence military planning. For example, although the U.S. public has not significantly objected to collateral damage resulting from the numerous air attacks against Iraqi military targets in the years since the Gulf War, Arab states have, and the Iraqi populace’s suffering as a result of both U.S. military actions and other elements of U.S. Iraq policy (such as sanctions) have damaged international support for the U.S. stance. Civilian casualties in January 1993 resulting from an errant cruise missile aimed at a weapon-producing facility that hit a Baghdad hotel fueled such dissent, and may thereby have restricted further U.S. military actions. The Arab League issued a statement following the incident that it “regrets the policy of military escalation against Iraq,” and further complained that United States military action “extended to the bombing of Iraqi civilian targets inside Baghdad and led to the killing and wounding of civilians among the brotherly Iraqi people.” Even Britain and France, which generally supported U.S. efforts and took part in the attacks on air defenses in the no-fly zones, seemed to distance themselves from the cruise missile strike. Similar protests, especially from among the Arab states, have followed every instance of Iraqi collateral damage.

Sometimes operations must be planned with attention to minimizing enemy combatant casualties, in addition to minimizing injury to civilians. At the end of the Gulf War, near the Kuwaiti town of Al Jahra, allied aircraft destroyed hundreds of civilian and military vehi-

---


16 It should be noted, however, that whereas most Arab nations have publicly condemned U.S. military strikes against Iraq, some of their governments have intimated that they would welcome robust strikes that incapacitated Saddam Hussein’s regime. See John Lancaster, “Egypt Urges Diplomacy, Not Force, in U.S.- Iraq Dispute,” Washington Post, November 14, 1997, p. A35.
cles that Iraqi forces were using to flee north. Reports of the carnage on the "Highway of Death" led General Colin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to worry that the brilliant American military performance would be tarnished at home and abroad by images of excessive violence against retreating forces.\textsuperscript{17} So long as enemy forces in such situations have not signaled their surrender, they remain legally targetable—this case illustrates how political and diplomatic pressures can overlay a supplemental set of tighter constraints than international law. During Operation Deliberate Force planning, General Bernard Janvier, Forces Commander of the United Nations Peace Forces, expressed concern to NATO planners regarding Bosnian Serb army casualties; targeting choices were therefore amended to reduce the likelihood that military personnel would be hit.\textsuperscript{18} Concern over combatant casualties in this last case partly stemmed from the special considerations that drive peace enforcement operations, especially those where perceived impartiality is valued (this issue is elaborated below).

**RESTRICTIVE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND TARGETING**

Political constraints emanating from concern over collateral damage have for the past several decades severely limited planning options during conflicts. During much of the Vietnam conflict, and in every military operation since, political and diplomatic pressures—especially those related to civilian damage and injury—have translated into restrictions on which targets could be struck from the air, as well as when and how.

This is not to say that U.S. forces always operate in perfect accordance with the law of armed conflict. Interpretations of legal obligations and factual circumstances vary. Moreover, some political pressures push against rather than with the humanitarian goals of the legal regime; although concern for collateral damage may caution

\textsuperscript{17} It turned out that the “Highway of Death” air strikes destroyed many vehicles but killed few Iraqis (who abandoned their vehicles and fled into the desert). The images were more powerful than (and bore scant relation to) reality. Powell's concerns are discussed in Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), p. 453.

restraint in conducting air operations, concern for force protection, military effectiveness, and even financial expense may lead planners to undervalue civilian costs to operations, arguably beyond legal bounds. Undeniably, though, the political factors laid out earlier restrict operational flexibility in more ways than would international law alone.

Targeting restrictions and rules of engagement are the most visible and perhaps important mechanisms through which legal and political constraints affect operations. The rules of engagement dated December 30, 1971, governing strike aircraft operations, for example, specified that “[a]ir attacks directed against known or suspected VC/NVA [Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army] targets in urban areas must preclude unnecessary danger to civilians and destruction of civilian property, and by their nature require greater restrictions than the rules of engagement for less populated areas.” These restrictive policies stood in contrast to U.S. bombing practices during the Korean War, where by the end of the conflict U.S. air

---


20 JCS Pub 1-02 (1994), the Department of Defense *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines rules of engagement as directives that delineate the circumstances and limitations under which military forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with enemy forces.

21 As a result, the rules of engagement (ROE) went on to direct:

1. Approval by both the senior tactical commander and the ARVN corps commander is required to conduct air attacks in urban areas including support of RVNAF. This authority will not be delegated except for the built-up areas of Saigon, Cholon, and Gia Dinh City . . . .

2. Air attacks in urban areas will be controlled by a FAC.

3. Prior to subjecting urban areas to an air attack, even when fire is being received from the area, the inhabitants must be warned by leaflets, loudspeakers, or other appropriate means prior to the attack and given sufficient time to evacuate the area.

forces were attempting to compel a favorable settlement through massive bombardment of industrial centers.22

The difference between the U.S. targeting policies in the two conflicts is certainly attributable, in part, to the nature of the conflicts and justification for American involvement: the North Korean invasion in 1950 provided clear grounds for U.S./UN intervention, whereas the Vietnamese communists’ propaganda machine harnessed pervasive media coverage to exploit doubtful world opinion concerning the legitimacy of U.S. efforts.23 Yet the Vietnam War also marked a turning point in the conduct of U.S. military operations, and since then the means and methods by which the U.S. armed forces pursue military objectives have come under intense scrutiny at home and abroad.

With strategic options likely to directly cause massive civilian casualties off the table (for the most part), restrictive rules of engagement at the tactical level are increasingly the locus of contentious policy and legal debate. Planners often attempt to minimize collateral damage and civilian injury not only by circumscribing certain targets and conditions for engaging enemy forces but also by limiting the timing of attacks. For example, attacks on certain targets might be restricted to nighttime, when fewer persons would be expected to be in the target’s vicinity.

Figure 1 illustrates some of the interacting constraints planners face. The figure represents a hypothetical “snapshot” view of a particular crisis. Although the graph is drawn without scale, the slope of the line is deliberately drawn to reflect the relatively intense political sensitivity of U.S. casualties and an implicit tradeoff discounting risks to enemy civilians.24 High sensitivity to U.S. casualties may

---

22 To be sure, bombing policy during the Vietnam War also had, as an element of its objectives, an intention to pressure the North Vietnamese regime by destroying the standard of living for urban populations. Urban targets during the latter conflict, however, were much more strictly circumscribed.


24 *USA Today* (February 15, 1991) reported immediately following the Al Firdos bunker incident that 69 percent of the public would accept deaths of civilians near military targets in order to save U.S. lives (about three-quarters of those polled supported continued bombing in Iraqi civilian areas). Again, the willingness of policymakers and planners to trade one risk for another will vary with contextual factors.
result in weapon system and ROE choices that arguably fall short of international legal obligations with respect to collateral damage.

Note that this figure omits an important independent variable discussed above: The United States may be willing to accept great risks of both U.S. and civilian casualties if the stakes are high enough. As a related matter, higher prospects for success are likely to increase political tolerance of civilian and casualty risks.

Considering again Figure 1, planners must select weapon systems and ROE that lie within the parameters imposed by political demands. The three choices of ROE for the piloted platform—here, an F-16—are drawn as points along a curve to illustrate the general, though not universal, principle that efforts to reduce risk to friendly aircraft will often increase the risk of collateral damage; likewise, efforts to reduce risk of collateral damage will often place aircraft in greater danger.25 Cruise missiles allow planners and operators to

---

25 During the planning and conduct of Operation Deliberate Force, for example, Special Instructions (SPINs) were issued to aircrews directing that (1) those attacking a bridge must make a dry pass over the target and attack on an axis perpendicular to it, releasing only one bomb per pass; (2) those carrying out suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) strikes were not authorized without special approval to conduct preemptive or reactive strikes against surface-to-air missile sites except under certain restrictive conditions. The first of these directives was subsequently rescinded because of concerns that it placed NATO aircrews at undue risk. Reed (forthcoming).
externalize most or all of the human costs of attacks by placing no U.S. personnel at risk.26

A key planning challenge has been to select from among the politically (and legally) acceptable options while still achieving satisfactory levels of military effectiveness (and within financial and resource limitations).27 Political concerns about friendly and civilian casualties impose ceilings of acceptable risk along the two featured axes. As higher levels of military effectiveness are demanded, the aperture of practicable options closes.28

During the Gulf War, planners imposed strict rules of engagement on coalition air forces, particularly when engaging urban targets. “To the degree possible and consistent with allowable risk to aircraft and aircrews, aircraft and munitions were selected so that attacks on targets within populated areas would provide the greatest possible accuracy and the least risk to civilian objects and the civilian population.”29 To this end, aircrews attacking targets in populated areas were directed not to drop munitions if they lacked positive target identification.30 Comparable emphasis on minimizing collateral damage had generated similar restrictions on aircrews during the April 1986 bombing of Libyan terrorist-related targets; the rules of engagement for U.S. pilots required redundant target identification checks, and several aircraft therefore could not release their bombs.31 Operation Deliberate Force rules of engagement for U.S. forces over Bosnia stated that “target planning and weapons delivery will include considerations to minimize collateral damage.”

---

26W. Michael Reisman, “The Lessons of Qana,” Yale Journal of International Law, Vol. 22 (1997), pp. 381–399, worries that such cost-externalization can skew decisionmaking toward the use of stand-off weapons when the law of armed conflict would arguably demand the use of more precise weapons (though ones that might require the attacker to accept some human risk of its own).


28However, effectiveness and casualty concerns are not entirely independent. For example, the U.S. political leadership may be willing to tolerate higher-risk levels of U.S. or enemy civilian casualties but only so long as they would ensure higher levels of effectiveness. And, as explained above, low levels of military effectiveness may erode public tolerance for casualties.


30Ibid.

eight percent of all munitions dropped by U.S. aircraft were precision-guided munitions (PGMs).32

Rules of engagement and targeting restrictions are sometimes subject to major revisions during the course of crises or conflicts. They may be modified to expand targeting options and operational flexibility. The Nixon administration’s frustration with unproductive air attacks on North Vietnam led it to remove many of the Johnson administration’s limitations, particularly those that circumscribed urban areas. A similar loosening of restrictions took place during Operation Allied Force, when NATO governments allowed military planners greater leeway to attack strategic targets after initial waves of attacks failed to move Milosevic.33

In many instances, however, rules of engagement constrict during a campaign or operation. Incidents or claims of excessive collateral damage can generate pressure for even tighter constraints as operations continue. After the North Vietnamese had accused the United States of flagrantly attacking civilian areas, allegedly causing massive suffering, during December 1966 air strikes against railway targets near Hanoi, Washington responded by prohibiting attacks on all targets within 10 nautical miles of Hanoi without specific presidential approval.34 Similarly, the Al Firdos bunker incident resulted in a tightening of political control over target selection; thereafter, all Baghdad targets had to be cleared beforehand with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.35

This last example of collateral damage risk aversion is particularly significant because, contrary to the fears of some political and military leaders, the U.S. public’s opinion of the air war was actually unmoved by the incident.36 The fear that public support will erode in the face of either casualties or civilian injury, a potential that is

32Reed (forthcoming).
36A USA Today poll the following day (February 15, 1991) reported that, when asked if the shelter bombing changed their support of the war, only 14 percent responded
difficult to measure or anticipate accurately, is sometimes enough to drive political decisionmaking. For military planners trying to translate political constraints into limits on operational decisionmaking, the problem is not just the degree of political restrictions but the unpredictability of constraints. One mistake or errant missile can dramatically affect perceived support for an operation; from a planner’s perspective, at least international law does not change overnight. In May 1999, for example, NATO warplanes refrained from attacking targets in Belgrade for several days after accidentally striking the Chinese embassy.37

An interesting phenomenon in this regard has been the recent, partial shift from political micromanagement of targeting decisions to micromanagement by the high military command levels themselves. The military’s own self-restraint is aptly demonstrated by the tight control that then–Lieutenant General Michael Ryan, who commanded NATO’s air forces, exerted over targeting during the 1995 Deliberate Force operations over Bosnia—operations that ultimately helped push the Serbs to the Dayton bargaining table. The political sensitivity surrounding the operation drove him to select personally every aim-point, even after potential targets had already been scrubbed to avoid significant risk of civilian casualties. According to one account, “General Ryan felt that the political sensitivity of the operation demanded strict accountability on the part of the air commander. He believed that every bomb dropped or missile launched not only had a tactical level effect, but could have a strategic effect as well.”38

affirmatively, whereas 38 percent expressed no change in their support and 41 percent said they were more supportive of the war. Mueller (1994) also cites public opinion data showing that a majority of the public, both before and after the bunker incident, thought that the United States was making enough effort to avoid collateral damage. (pp. 317–319).

37Similarly, during the previous month, procedures were modified to require that American aircrews radio for authorization before striking military convoys, after a U.S. warplane mistakenly hit a refugee convoy. Elaine Harden and John M. Broder, “Clinton’s War Aims: Win the War, Keep the U.S. Voters Content,” New York Times, May 22, 1999, p. A1.

38Reed (forthcoming).
COALITION OPERATIONS AND MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR

As already mentioned, potential international outcry over collateral damage and civilian suffering resulting from U.S. military actions often results in the imposition of severe constraints on operations. This phenomenon is more pronounced in coalition operations, where allied partners can leverage U.S. proclivity toward securing their support to dictate restrictions on the use of force to suit their particular interests.

A related set of issues—and an additional set of constraints—arises in the context of military operations other than war (MOOTW). These operations are typically conducted under the auspices of international organizations or ad hoc coalitions, and the demands of peacekeeping, securing relief aid, and other tasks often require severe limitations on the use of force.

Coalitions and Diplomatic Constraints

The United States often conducts military operations as part of a multinational coalition. Coalition-building adds legitimacy at home and abroad to military operations, and coalition partners sometimes contribute valuable military assets (including ground troops) or provide basing or overflight privileges. One price of coalition support, however, may be an added layer of constraints on uses of military force.

Each coalition member brings to an operation its own set of state interests and domestic political concerns. Even when their overall strategic objectives converge, member states have different threat perceptions, vulnerabilities, doctrines, and capabilities. As a result, any state committing forces to a coalition operation will demand that it retain some control over that operation. This control takes a variety of forms, but typically involves direct participation in military planning and decisionmaking and/or insistence on narrow operation mandates or restrictive rules of engagement. Any of these forms pose difficulties for air planners because burdensome decisionmaking procedures or tight guidelines negate some of air power’s most salient attributes, including its speed and flexibility.39

39 These issues are analyzed in more detail in Daniel Byman, Matthew Waxman and Eric Larson, Air Power as a Coercive Instrument (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999), Chapter Five; and Matthew C. Waxman, “Coalitions and Limits on Coercive Diplomacy,” Strategic Review, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 1997).
Some coalition partners may be even more sensitive than the United States to civilian injury resulting from military operations. Especially if the coalition as a whole is dependent on the support of a member with extreme sensitivities to collateral damage or perceived aggression, the result may be a lowest-common-denominator effect on rules of engagement and target selection: Planners must design operations to fall within the political and legal constraints of the most sensitive member.40 During the early phases of NATO’s Operation Allied Force against Yugoslavia, major targets were scrutinized by representatives of many capitals. For U.S. decisionmaking with regard to politically sensitive targets, General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander, required authorization from the Joint Staff in the Pentagon, which in turn passed decisions on major targets up to the defense secretary and ultimately to the president.41 Similar processes repeated themselves in other NATO member governments.42

Somewhat ironically, the United States often recruits allies and coalition partners for political purposes (among them, to promote an image of burden-sharing), but these partners may contribute little militarily because they lack the necessary precision capabilities to satisfy political constraints emanating from collateral damage sensitivity. If the U.S. military progresses in the technological areas described later in Chapter Five faster than its allies, this issue will grow.43


41 Steven Lee Myers, “All in Favor of This Target, Say Yes, Si, Oui, Ja,” New York Times, April 25, 1999, sec. 4, p. 4.

42 Even in NATO, which ostensibly acts on a consensus basis, the degree of member states’ influence on collective decisionmaking will, in a practical sense, vary considerably. Operation Allied Force shows vividly how members’ particular sensitivities can limit military flexibility. Italy and Greece, in particular, insisted on various targeting restrictions; the Serbian presidential palace was off-limits to bombers, in part because some allied policymakers worried about destroying the Rembrandt painting housed inside.

43 By one estimate, only 10 percent of the roughly 5000 combat aircraft European militaries could theoretically use for air strikes have precision bombing capabilities. “Armies and Arms,” Economist, April 24, 1999 (NATO Survey, pp. 11–12). Operation Allied Force highlighted European defense deficiencies and Europe’s need to promote development of advanced systems and to devote greater budgetary resources to research and development rather than personnel. The impetus produced by the Kosovo experience toward such European efforts may help close the U.S.-European capability gap. See Vince Crawley, “U.S. Urges Arms Buildup for Allies,” Defense Week, April 26, 1999.
The problems associated with coalition-driven constraints are exacerbated when planning for the urban environment. The features of urban environments—population density, civilian-military asset mingling, and shared civilian-military resources—that pose potential difficulties for legal adherence also complicate coalition decisionmaking. Even after NATO’s North Atlantic Council approved new guidelines after several weeks of bombing Serbian targets—guidelines that gave General Clark substantial autonomy—consultation with the NATO political leadership was still required before strikes could be ordered on three types of targets: those in downtown Belgrade, those considered industrial, and those that risked large numbers of civilian lives.44

MOOTW and Additional Constraints

Political constraints on urban air operations will often be tightest in MOOTW, both because they are typically conducted through a coalition (and sometimes under the auspices of the UN or other international body) and because the strategic demands of these operations generally require tight restrictions on the use of force. In humanitarian or peace operations, more so than in warfighting, even the smallest tactical move may have grave strategic effects. Because all UN uses of force come under close scrutiny, and are frequently conducted simultaneously with diplomatic negotiations, the precise manner in which military force is used becomes even more important. In the Bosnian conflict, UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) rules of engagement required minimum necessary uses of force and ceasing fire when an enemy disengaged.45 NATO air power was restrained by, among other things, the infamously burdensome “dual-key” command chain that required authorization from both NATO and UN leadership to launch close air support strikes.

As alluded to earlier, some recent military operations have been planned with sensitivity to risks of enemy combatant deaths. This is particularly true when planners seek to maintain an image of impartiality. In November 1994, Serb forces detained over 200 UN personnel as hostages after NATO bombings of Serb air bases and surface-

to-air missile systems. Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic warned: “If a NATO attack happens, it will mean that further relations between yourselves and our side will be rendered impossible because we would have to treat you as our enemies. All United Nations Protection Force personnel as well as NATO personnel would be treated as our enemies.” Policymakers are especially likely to place severe restrictions on potentially escalatory military actions when they fear such a breakdown in relations with local parties.

The constraints arising from coalition maintenance and the demands of MOOTW combine with additional issues unique to humanitarian operations. Relief efforts by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) face major obstacles when conducted in conflict-ridden areas because they may have to rely on the voluntary consent of warring parties to deliver aid. Concurrent military operations risk compromising the already fragile image of impartiality NGOs may need. Moreover, an adversary may retaliate to escalatory moves by disrupting NGO activities or even threatening their vulnerable personnel.

CONCLUSION

Political sensitivity surrounding casualties and collateral damage often result in the imposition of severe restrictions on U.S. and allied military operations. A formidable task facing planners is to design operations within narrow parameters of tolerable risk to U.S. and allied servicemen and risk to civilian populations on the ground. This assignment is further complicated when planning for urban environments, where key targets may be situated but where the risks of collateral damage are magnified.

These pressures on planners are generated by the political process. From a military planner’s perspective, they might appear as constraints, perhaps problematically restricting otherwise militarily effective actions. From a policymaker’s perspective, they reflect societal priorities and goals that may be in tension, including public demands about protecting U.S. servicemen, humanitarian proclivities, and other policy or value choices. Restrictions on how force is

---

employed in the combat zone may therefore be necessary to make the very use of force politically feasible. For military planners and political decisionmakers at all levels, a key challenge is to understand these tradeoffs, appropriately balance conflicting pressures, and design and promulgate restrictions that, although they may limit pure military effectiveness, achieve strategic effectiveness.