

Letter submitted to the *Washington Times* (A version ran in the *Times* Sept. 6, 2006.)

Less Divisive Rhetoric, More Decisive Military Capability

The recent article impugning airpower's ability to contribute decisively in conflicts ranging from Lebanon to Iraq, misses the mark on what nations should expect from their Air Forces as part of joint military capability.

Since the evolution of air, land, and naval components in joint warfare, no strategically successful military leadership has expected one service to be "decisive" on its own. The idea that Israeli air power failed because they did not unilaterally defeat an entrenched Hezbollah guerrilla force is just as wrong as blaming ground forces for failing to seize and hold ground alone without help from air, sea and space. Concerning the U.S. Air Force, to portray airmen who are trained to fully exploit technologies of the high ground—rooting out insurgent enemies like Zawahiri, locating and destroying roadside explosive devices, providing critical intelligence, mobility, and rescue support for ground forces—as somehow playing with hormone-inspired whizbang toys, does them a disservice and demonstrates a shallow command of the nature of modern warfare.

It is time to stop selectively referring to assertions made by early air power doctrine writers 65 or more years ago and get to the latest chapters on air and space thinking to understand the real wars of today. As one of the people who would have been in charge of "overpromising" in recent conflicts involving the United States, I can assure Mr. Reed and his readers that airpower promises in recent years have resulted in development of unmanned platforms, unprecedented integration with ground forces, improved networking of space capabilities, and more airmen on the ground, among other key combat capabilities. Is there more to do? You bet—and as we have seen in every generation, our men and women in all services, at home and in the field, are finding new ways to solve the latest challenges. Fighter and bomber aircraft that Mr. Reed suggests are only good for destroying bridges and buildings respond daily to requests from ground forces, and respond in minutes to any point of action with accuracy, lethality, and survivability. Their weapons come in all sizes to deal with what our soldiers and marines need to get their jobs done.

Responsible commentators would also point out that the weapons we buy today must be capable of dealing with whatever confronts us for the next 40 years, just as we are adapting systems purchased decades ago to meet diverse threats across the conflict spectrum. Even as we deal with asymmetrical warfare in the form of insurgency, nations around the world are investing in modern air and naval weapons that can challenge even the most advanced U.S. technology—the heart of our core competencies. As my good friend Vern Clark, the retired Chief of Naval Operations has pointed out, "No war is like the last war, nor will it be like the next war, it's only like this war."

We need to devote our energies to developing superior weapons systems we can afford, practicing Joint Concepts of Operation that reduce redundancies while delivering warfighting dominance, and integrating joint technologies at all levels of operations. Our forces in the field—and the hard working staff officers who support their efforts—would also benefit from less of the divisive interservice putdowns that are far more prevalent today in the pens of pundits than in the minds of American warfighters. These things, more than any technology, will help our men and women in uniform adapt together to an uncertain future.

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