

Treaty Organization], and unilateral American power as its extreme last resort. . . . If a less interventionist United States means a less tidy world, with greater instability in some areas and unfortunate ethnic strife in others, so be it.”

- “Reciprocal free trade fortified by a crusade on behalf of a global workers’ bill of rights.” Access to the U.S. market would depend on reciprocity and adherence to “a set of agreed-upon international workers’ rights and employer [standards].”

- “A realistic strategy to control immigration.” Alterman says that “the American people want a carefully controlled, extremely limited policy of immigration, based on the country’s domestic needs.”

A liberal republican foreign policy, Alterman continues, would also seek to terminate all U.S. covert activities abroad, control and reduce international arms sales, and promote “a sustainable global ecology.”

The Establishment’s tradition of acting independently of public opinion goes back to Franklin Roosevelt’s efforts to counter Nazi Germany’s strategic aims before Pearl Harbor, despite the isolationist mood of the public. But there is no Nazi threat today to justify the Establishment’s actions. Its defiance of “the clearly stated values of the American people for purely political or ideological reasons,” Alterman believes, is undermining American democracy.

The ‘Vilest Thing’

Casting a suspicious eye on gala commemorations of war, Paul Fussell, a professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and “a superannuated, badly wounded, former infantry lieutenant,” warns in *Society* (Sept.–Oct. 1996) against the political uses of patriotic gore.

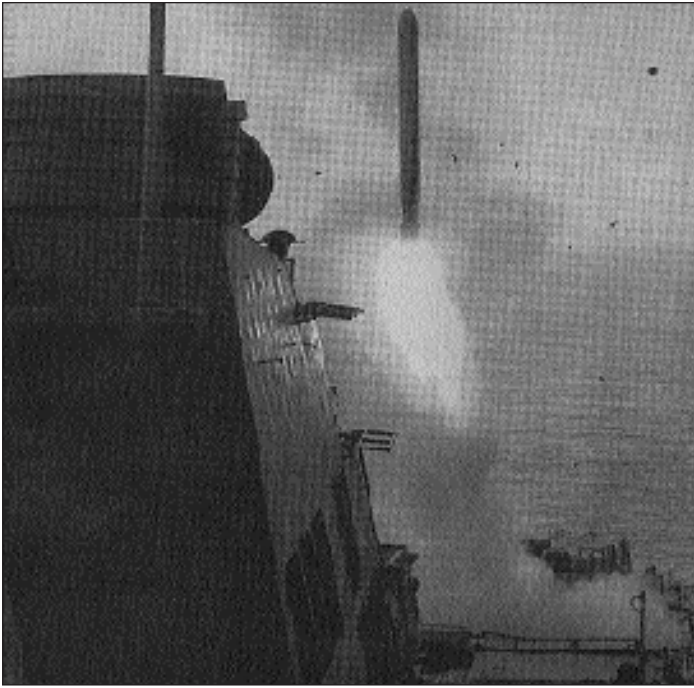
The truth is that very few people know anything about war. In an infantry division, for example, fewer than half of the troops actually fight, that is, fight with rifles, mortars, machine guns, grenades, and trench knives. The others, thousands upon thousands of them, are occupied with truck driving, photocopying, cooking and baking, ammunition and ration supplying, and similar housekeeping tasks. Now those things are no doubt necessary, but they are hardly bellicose; they do not provide the sort of experience required to define what the word “war” might mean. This is the reason why most combat veterans tend to smile cynically and sardonically at veterans’ reunions when those reunions are attended by very large numbers. Very few of those attending, the real veterans know, deserve to be there. For most soldiers participating in World War II, the war meant inconvenience rising sometimes to hardship, enforced travel and residence abroad, unappetizing food, and the absence of tablecloths or bedsheets. For those unlucky enough to be in the forward combat units, the war meant death or maiming, usually in extraordinarily dirty and undignified circumstances. At the very least, for most it meant a rapid and shocking metamorphosis from boyhood innocence to adult cynicism and bitterness. . . . Tolstoy’s words are worth recalling: War, he said, “is not a polite recreation, but the vilest thing in life, and we ought to understand that and not play at war.”

Virtual War?

“Morality and High Technology” by A. J. Bacevich, in *The National Interest* (Fall 1996),
1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

The dazzling high-tech swords that U.S. forces unsheathed during the 1991 Persian Gulf War—stealth aircraft, antiballistic

missiles, and “smart” munitions—seemed to herald the dawn of a new age of “sanitary war.” Americans would be able to exercise



The destroyer USS Laboon fires a Tomahawk cruise missile last September at a target in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

commanding influence around the globe while avoiding the moral ambiguities that accompany conventional war. Unfortunately, the reality is not likely to be so simple, warns Bacevich, executive director of the Foreign Policy Institute at the Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

After the war, many defense specialists waxed enthusiastic about the potentially revolutionary effect of new technological marvels. U.S. commanders would be able to operate on "a transparent battlefield," with military intelligence so good they could almost "see" what the enemy was doing before he did it. They would be able to hit distant targets with such precision that civilian casualties and other "collateral" damage would rarely occur. And they would be able to make informed decisions and communicate them so quickly that enemy generals would not even have time to lace up their boots. All this seemed to promise that the moral questions involved in waging a "just war"—much discussed by Americans before Desert Storm—would be easily answered in the future.

The problem with this high-tech vision, Bacevich says, is that America's future adversaries are unlikely to go along with it. Military revolutions beget military revolutions. For

example, after Great Britain transformed naval warfare in 1906 by launching the *Dreadnaught*, the first in a new class of very fast, heavily armored, big-gun battleships, Germany turned in World War I to undersea warfare—the U-boat campaign. Like the German navy, Bacevich says, America's challengers will seek ways to render the latest military technology superfluous. Unconventional warfare is an obvious option: "people's war, subversion, terror, and banditry." And combating such attacks, he notes, presents grave difficulties for those

who would adhere to "just war" morality.

But just as the U-boat revolution was superseded by a third, even more sweeping transformation in the nature of war—the advent of naval air power—so, Bacevich suggests, a more fundamental transformation may be in the works now. Our increasingly wired world, utterly dependent on free flows of financial, technical, and other information, is becoming more vulnerable every day to "virtual war"—undeclared, continuous, and fought by "computer-wielding technicians." The object in such a conflict would be not massive physical destruction but disruption of "high-value networks critical to the smooth functioning of society," Bacevich suggests. The targets would be economic and political systems rather than masses of soldiers and machines, and the damage, while different in nature, might well be more widespread. This "virtual" warfare would present a fresh challenge to the just-war tradition with its concepts of discrimination and proportionality in the use of force.

Thus, Bacevich concludes, America is likely to be faced with not one military revolution but several. In this "tangled reality," there will be no shortage of moral dilemmas—and technological wizardry will not provide any "shortcut to a clear conscience."