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Trends. Human Rights and Military Conflict: Numerology versus Quantitative Analysis

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A journalist comments on the United Nations Human Rights Commission vote to take no action on a human rights censure motion against the People's Republic of China. The vote was 22-17 for taking no action and therefore--states the analyst--five nations "tipped the outcome." In actuality, of course, any of three nations through a 3-vote swing (to 20-19 against taking no action) would have tipped the "no action" outcome.

A chief operating officer of a public-policy group concludes that the B-2 aircraft is a huge bargain. How is this conclusion reached? An operational alternative to the B-2, the B-52, costs \$8.3K an hour to fly, carries air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) at \$2M each, and thus engenders a cost of \$24,083,000 for a 10-hour mission to destroy a dozen targets. The B-2, on the other hand, costs about \$5.719K an hour to fly, carries satellite-guided bombs (SGBs) at \$23.2K each, and thus engenders a cost of \$335.59K for the same mission for the same targets. What the chief operating officer "forgets" to leave out is that the B-52 can carry other than ALCMs, the B-2s can carry other than SGBs, the B-2 development and production costs have been orders of magnitude higher than the B-52, the B-52 has been a training and operational workhorse for generations minimizing the development and production costs per aircraft, and that the B-2 was created for an operational environment--a nuclear war--that it is never likely to face and is being used for missions it doesn't need to face.

While numerology has no place in strategic decisions on human rights and military conflict, the faulty application of quantitative analysis may at times border on the reading of entrails. (See Harwell, M.R., et al. (1996). Evaluating statistics texts used in education. *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*, 21, 3-34; Olson, E. (April 24, 1999). China escapes censure in vote by U.N. human rights agency. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (1998). Teachers' attitudes toward statistics. *Psychological Reports*, 83, 1008-1010; Pressley, M., et al. (1996). The challenges of instructional scaffolding: The challenges of instruction that supports student thinking. *Learning Disabilities: Research and Practice*, 11, 138-146; Richardson, W.K., & Segal, D.M. (1998). Teaching analysis of interaction in the 2x2 factorial design. *Teaching of Psychology*, 25, 297-299.) (Keywords: Aircraft, China, Corruption, Human Rights, Intelligence Analysis, International Relations, United Nations.)