Naval War College Review

Volume 53
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 9

2000

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FOR THE FOURTH TIME IN A HUNDRED YEARS, the United States is in an interwar period. However, unlike the days of Nazi Germany, imperial Japan, or the Soviet Union, there is no *single* clear and present danger to the security of the United States. Even with an awakening China and a nuclear India on the horizon, the American giant is swimming in a sea of minnows. America's military, particularly its navy, has little idea where, how, or whom it will fight. It is a truism that the accelerating pace of technological change will transform the way we think and act about national security. If there is a coming clash between "star wars" and "muddy boots," the ultimate question is whether U.S. grand strategy can adjust to anticipate that fight.

The conventional wisdom is that "star wars" is in permanent ascendancy and that a "revolution in military affairs" is transforming warfare. The advocates of the "revolution" argue that since computer technology is redrawing the boundaries of civilian life, it will completely unhinge the traditional military art. Yet no matter how profound the change, one must ask if technical wizardry is merely evolutionary, with historical experience and human passion still relevant to tomorrow's battlefield.

Naval War College Review, Spring 2000, Vol. LIII, No. 2

The roles of the U.S. Navy are conceptually simple: to deter attacks on the United States and its allies, ensure freedom of the seas, project American power abroad, sustain a forward presence, and support joint and combined operations. Given those missions, will the strategic lodestar of the Navy be very different in 2001 from that of 1901, when the "Rough Rider" entered the White House? Was Alfred Thayer Mahan correct in stating that there are certain strategic constants in naval affairs that are not subject to change, despite quantum leaps in technical development?

The term "revolution in military affairs" (or RMA) evolved from a concept developed by Soviet military theorists, the "military technical revolution." [1] The Soviets pointed to two periods of "revolutionary" change in military affairs during the twentieth century to bolster their theory. The first was the emergence of the airplane, the submarine, and mechanized warfare during World War I.[2] The second was the development of guided missiles, rudimentary computers, and nuclear weapons during World War II.[3] In the mid-1980s, the Soviet General Staff suggested that another new era in warfare was on the horizon—this based on precision guided conventional ordnance, comprehensive sensors, and stealth technologies.

The Soviets further defined an MTR, or RMA, as an occasion when one side in a conflict incorporates changes in militarily relevant technology and operational and technical theory in order to achieve an abrupt victory.[4] However, since the industrial revolution, technological advancement has been a constant in Western military and societal development. Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution has observed that "RMAs don't simply happen; they are created by a combination of technological breakthrough, institutional adaptation, and war fighting innovation."

Since technological progress is so commonplace, changes in that spectrum can rarely be called revolutionary. Nevertheless, the debate has begun, and how the services deal with it will determine the nature of American security policy in the next century.

Of all the armed services, the U.S. Navy is the most technically complex. Its platforms are sophisticated and varied, and it is the only service that can wage war at sea, in the air, in space, and on land. If there truly have been revolutions in military affairs in the twentieth century, the U.S. Navy has participated in all of them.

The introduction of steam and propulsion, coupled with knowledge gained from the early ironclads, produced the dreadnought battle line of which Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet was an early exemplar. In addition, the modern submarine (a child of the

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Confederate navy) rearranged the hierarchy of power at sea. The development of aircraft and missile systems extended naval striking power hundreds of miles inland.

The explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki changed the Navy as well. After winning a place in the delivery of nuclear weapons to complement the newly formed Air Force, the Navy took the atomic age to new levels by creating an invaluable weapon system with the marriage of the nuclear submarine and the long-range ballistic missile, which soon became the most important arm of the nuclear triad.

During this century, as the Navy's weapons of choice moved from dreadnought to Trident, the naval service constantly reconfigured itself. In the immediate post–World War II period, the Navy created a "balanced fleet," whose mission was to take and support forward bases for general strategic bombing as well as to prepare to invade the Soviet Union itself.[5] The balanced fleet could also, of course, project American power into third-world conflicts, such as in Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam.

After the Vietnam War, the Navy reduced its amphibious assets and became a force whose strategy Mahan himself would have recognized and appreciated. The Navy of the 1980s aimed to seize control of Mahan's "oceanic commons" and destroy Soviet naval power, afloat and in port.[6] In that regard, the Navy was not driven by revolutionary doctrine, much less technology. If anything, the Navy

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portrayed its role in classic Mahanian teams: to seek out and destroy the enemy fleet and drive it from the oceans. Nuclear weapons and super-computers had not changed the Navy's fundamental mission.

Correctly or not, the Persian Gulf War accelerated the notion that a revolution in military affairs was already a reality. The swift and devastating victory over Iraq gave many in and out of governing circles the impression that the nature of warfare itself had changed. The coalition destroyed the morale of the Iraqi military with a lethal barrage of airpower, stealth, anti-radio-frequency technology, and cruise missiles. The precision firepower that had been predicted by the Soviet General Staff shifted the battlefield advantage away from the tactical defensive toward attack by a force that often could not be detected before it struck.[7] It is instructive to look back at 1991 and remember how many times media commentators portrayed the Iraqi army (then the fourth-largest in the world) as a deadly and modern mechanized force; in the end, however, Iraq was overwhelmed by a force that had complete mastery of the conventional, radio-frequency, and digital spectrums.

There is a tendency among strategists, and more so with politicians, to read too much into the outcome of the most recent conflict. The cliché is that generals are always fighting the last war. The Gulf War could become a case in point, unless its unique features are appreciated. To begin with, the United States and its coalition partners confronted an imbecilic enemy. One commentator, Eliot Cohen of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, even contends that "the Iraqis presented the American military with an ideal array of targets. Had the Iraqis fought with somewhat greater determination and cunning (had they been as tough and as clever as the North Vietnamese, for instance) they would have administered a severe battering to the coalition."[8]

An unfortunate by-product of victory in the Gulf may have been that it convinced a political leadership with little knowledge of the intractable demands of battle that war is little more than an expensive video game and that unleashing the high-tech genie produces bloodless victories—that war can be waged on the cheap. There is, of course, nothing new in this fallacy. Military innovators throughout history have heralded their wonder-weapons as keys to fewer casualties, even as harbingers of peace itself. Alfred Nobel and Richard Gatling are cases in point.

Some in the Clinton administration are predisposed toward the many tactical myths emanating from the victory in the desert; in addition, they have a peculiar notion of what the military is built to do. It is not crass partisanship to argue that some people believe the U.S. military exists principally not to deter or kill the enemies of the Republic but to perform the missions that are more sensibly the province of the Red Cross and UNICEF—in other words, it is an olive-drab Peace Corps. In the last six years, the XVIII Airborne Corps and any number of Marine expeditionary units have routinely confronted cases of mass starvation, political murder, and authoritarian and tribal excess.[9]

The military's current strategic plan centers on an expeditionary role for the Navy and Marine Corps, and it advocates turning U.S.

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technical superiority into "full-spectrum dominance."[10] The Joint Chiefs' *Joint Vision 2010* maintains that the United States must have full-spectrum dominance over any aggressor or combination thereof.[11] Such a doctrine envisions a military that can "overawe" America's adversaries with machines, thereby rendering traditional fighting obsolete.[12]

In current parlance, full-spectrum dominance means sending cruise missiles into Sudan, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Kosovo at little apparent cost in American lives and treasure. Coupled with "operations other than war" in such places as Haiti, Liberia, Somalia, and Rwanda, these practices are not grounded in real-world military experience, and in the long run they deprive the defense establishment of training and resources needed to advance the RMA. Worshiping at the high-tech totem also gives short shrift to the Marine rifleman and the destroyer sailor. Low-value sideshows in theaters where there is little danger to American interests lull both the nation's leaders and its citizens into a false sense of security. Moreover, the sheer number of overseas adventures can produce overextension and civic exhaustion.

In one sense, the Gulf War left the Navy in an awkward position. While the Army and Marine Corps had in that war validated their maneuver-warfare doctrines developed in the 1970s and 1980s, and

Air Force weapons had dazzled worldwide television audiences, the Navy seemed adrift in a high-tech world that it should, in theory, dominate. Admiral William Owens, then vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, bemoaned the Navy's plight:

> We left [Iraq] knowing that the world had changed dramatically but that our doctrine had failed to keep pace. Little in Desert Storm supported the Maritime Strategy's assumptions and implications. No opposing naval forces challenged us. No waves of enemy aircraft ever attacked the carriers. No submarines threatened the flow of men and material across the oceans. The fleet was never forced to fight the open-ocean battles the Navy had been preparing for during the preceding twenty years. Instead, the deadly skirmishing of littoral warfare dominated.[13]

However, there actually appears to be little cause for concern. In the Gulf War, the Navy transported ground forces over the sea to fight the enemy. Despite all the hyperbole about revolutions in information systems and high-tech weaponry, the old pattern of naval warfare has remained constant. Granted, there was no blue-water threat in the Gulf, but the Navy's precision fire (cruise missiles, airpower, and gunfire support from the sea), along with impressive logistics, would have been familiar in essence to commanders at Iwo Jima and at Inchon. The Navy delivered ordnance and men to a place of its choosing, to the detriment of the enemy.

Still, let us assume, *arguendo*, that the Gulf War was a turning point and that a revolution in warfare is under way. What is driving it? Does it apply to the future of the Navy?

Admiral Owens is a firm believer in the revolution, arguing that the explosion in information technologies and the application of its instruments constitute an RMA. As Cohen notes, Owens also believes that the United States is the only nation with sufficient economic and political sophistication to exploit these changes.[14] Owens is not primarily interested in creating new technology but in exploiting current technology, by building an integrated web of systems that can "look, shoot, and communicate" across service lines.[15] He looks at war in the new century as a matter of protecting, gathering, evaluating, and managing information faster and more efficiently than any potential adversary.

There is nothing new in seeking to manage intelligence and combat information more efficiently. However, Owens envisions a military that will merge the individual services into one joint defense organization.[16] His solution builds upon the reforms begun by the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act. Goldwater-Nichols gradually transferred authority from individual service chiefs, where it had resided for most of the century, to the theater commanders in chief. What Owens does not focus on, however, is the implication of such a new joint defense organization—the need to rethink how the United States should finance and build its weapons. If the Navy is to respond to multilevel threats, the civilian bureaucracy can no longer think of funding platforms and sailors as single systems designed solely for the Navy or Marine Corps.[17]

Owens also argues that his information-based military necessitates the creation of an officer corps whose primary professional training is in science and technology.[18] Because of America's technical and economic predominance, Owens recognizes no current external threat to the United States, but he is most concerned about resistance to change from within the U.S. military establishment.

Another group of theorists believes that a revolution is on the way but is only in its early stages.[19] They see innovation rather than radicalization as the key to the future. They are more concerned with keeping technologies like stealth and miniaturization on the production line and out of the hands of potential enemies. Unlike Owens, they do see the emergence of a new superpower as a threat. The future threat is China, but they also fear other nations or alliances (a coalition of militant Islamic powers, a revanchist Russia, or a narco-criminal empire) that will seek regional hegemony and thereby force a fight with the United States within their spheres of influence. Terrorist activity in various forms could also threaten the United States and allied nations, particularly given increasing access to weapons of mass destruction. These theorists also see the increase in unconventional military operations, such as peacekeeping and nation building, as obstacles to the development of new technologies, since they drain resources and money away from more relevant military endeavors. The arsenal ship, advanced composite hulls, drone vehicles, information superiority, and sea-based strategic or theater missile defense are examples of innovations that require long lead-times for research and development. These systems are

threatened by the costs associated with the proliferation of operations other than war (OOTW) and increasing constraints on the federal budget.

One common thread among both schools of thought is that they require a highly educated and well motivated soldiery to master the new machines of war. Sophisticated weaponry needs a continuous supply of technical experts to maintain its base. That not only requires continued political and budgetary support from the national government but high educational standards at the secondary and collegiate levels. Those are matters beyond the military's control but ones nonetheless that must be addressed by the national leadership. Obviously, if the military continues to augment its ranks with educationally marginal recruits to meet staffing shortfalls, its ability to field and operate the weapons of the new century will be problematic.

Admiral Owens's jeremiad that the maritime strategy of the 1970s and 1980s is passé is correct but misplaced. The future will require a

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balanced U.S. fleet that can claim the littoral while stifling any attempts by any future enemy to contest control of the high seas. There are no immediate threats to America's control of the sea. Many weapons of the so-called RMA—computer-guided munitions, long-range sensors, and supercomputers—are already in the inventory and light-years ahead of those of potential adversaries. However, that is not to say that threats are not proliferating. While the new members of the nuclear club (China, India, and Pakistan) are in no position to offer substantive global strategic threats to American interests, each could be in a position to challenge American power in individual theaters.

What must not be lost sight of in the search for technical panaceas is the existing conventional threat. The greatest damage to the U.S. Navy in the Gulf War came from weapons that were of World War I vintage—mines. The USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58), the USS *Princeton* (CG 59), and the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10) were victims of weapons that would have been familiar to Jellicoe and Beatty, even Farragut

and Porter. Sophisticated weapons proved their worth in the Gulf War and Kosovo, but they are expensive and sometimes fragile, and more often than not they require ideal conditions to work.

The Navy also will be required to adjust its force to fit into a shrinking discretionary federal budget. There will be a decreasing awareness on the part of the public and civilian leadership of the need for a large defense establishment. The halcyon days of the six-hundred-ship navy are gone. Utility will be the key to future weapons procurement. It is probable that expensive breakthrough technologies will have to be assimilated at the expense of traditional naval communities and forces in being.

For the next thirty years, it should be possible to suspend the notion of a superpower confrontation of the *Doctor Strangelove* variety. In that era, warfare in all likelihood will revert to the experiences of Korea and Vietnam—high casualties inflicted by an aggressive opponent, fighting on ground of his choice. "Ground of choice" is not just a figure of speech. Recent history shows that access to facilities ashore is not guaranteed. The United States lost bases in the Philippines, is always on a short tether in the Middle East, and cannot count on Japan when it comes to deploying ships of the nuclear fleet. Accordingly, naval operations from forward-deployed staging areas, with a paucity of prepositioned equipment, might become the norm, however burdensome.

The Marine Corps is already preparing to fight in hostile, highly populated, urban environments. If the British experience in Northern Ireland is any indication, a dramatic change will be required in the Corps' doctrine, toward a revised canon focused on counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, and intelligence gathering. This is not a new problem for the Marine Corps, which cut its teeth in the early part of the twentieth century chasing insurgents through the streets and mountains of Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. The young "Chesty" Puller first gained notoriety tracking the Nicaraguan bandit César Augusto Sandino.

In general, the United States will require more dispersed forces with enhanced mobility. Sealift and airlift commands should be given a seat at the Pentagon table equal to that of their combat-arms counterparts. Sealift is not a glamorous subject that turns the heads of congressional committees, but we ignore it at our peril. The ability to dominate the space and information spectrum will be negated if

U.S. forces cannot sail or land where they wish to for want of the basic tools of the naval trade.

In the rush to unleash the high-tech military, one easily forgets that in Korea and Vietnam the United States enjoyed an exponential technical superiority over its "third-world" foes but still suffered more than a hundred thousand deaths.[20] Retired Marine Corps general Paul Van Riper has noted that United States forces had "information dominance in Somalia" but still had no idea how to find, much less fight, a technically primitive army.[21] Van Riper's assessment is correct. America had "full-spectrum dominance" on the streets and in the alleys of Mogadishu; unfortunately, Mohammed Aideed's ragged tribesmen had little use for the Internet or vulnerability to laser-guided munitions.

It is folly to believe that computers, fiber optics, lasers, and composite materials have rendered all military experience and logic obsolete. Clausewitz was correct in noting that there is an inevitable fog of war, which planners cannot dispose of antiseptically. Robert McNamara attempted to fight the Vietnam War with scientists and statisticians rather than with soldiers grounded in the historical experiences of the craft. The result of his folly was fifty-six thousand dead and an ignominious retreat for the American colossus.

This is not to say that technological advancement is not an integral part of war. It is. That was true when the arrowhead replaced the club. However, warfare still comes down to a human being who must train with, staff, and ultimately decide how to use that new weapon. More importantly, for that soldier to be effective, society must be prepared to see that soldier fall in action.[22] No amount of technology can make war civilized or replace the soldier as the focus of combat. As a former Army Chief of Staff, Gordon Sullivan, remarked, "Death and destruction will remain the coins of war's realm. And the value of these coins will not diminish, regardless of how much technology is available to the information-age army."[23]

As we head into a new millennium, the Navy must be ready to reclaim its heritage. It will have to control the expeditionary littoral and deep water. Technical revolutions cannot change that reality. Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan would agree.

Notes

1. Theodor W. Galdi, *Revolution in Military Affairs?* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress, December 1995), p. 4.

2. Ibid., p.5.

3. Ibid.

4. See *Report on the Revolution in Military Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, March 1999).

5. Edward Rhodes, "'. . . From the Sea' and Back Again: Naval Power in the Second American Century," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1999, pp. 13–54.

6. Ibid., p. 22.

7. Lost in the high-tech ballyhoo of the 1991 Gulf War was the fact that it took highly trained armored, infantry, and airmobile units, plus forty-year-old B-52s, to sweep the Iraqis out of Kuwait. In some respects, the greatest damage inflicted on the Ba'athist regime came from a blitzkrieg taken right out of the pages of Heinz Guderian and General Patton, not from a script written by George Lucas or Gene Rodenberry. DESERT STORM was a low-tech victory.

8. Eliot Cohen, "American Views of the Revolution in Military Affairs," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 28, p. 7.

9. One of the more infamous and disquieting statements made by a public official in recent years about the role of the military has been attributed to Madeline Albright. While serving as ambassador to the United Nations she reportedly told then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, "What's the point of having this superb military you are always talking about, if we can't use it?"

10. Andrew Bacevich, "Policing Utopia: The Military Imperatives of Globalization," *National Interest*, Summer 1999, pp. 5–13.

11. In one sense, there is little to distinguish this idea from the strategy pursued by the Royal Navy from the defeat of the Spanish Armada to the end of World War II. The Admiralty's policy was to produce a naval force stronger than the combination of Britain's two closest naval rivals. Nelson validated that doctrine off Cape Trafalgar, where he crushed the combined French and Spanish fleets in 1805.

12. Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 576.

13. William A. Owens, *High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995), p. 4.

14. Cohen, p. 2.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. Owens's argument actually lays the foundation for *basic reform* in the Pentagon structure. Although he has not made this direct case, eliminating the individual service departments as they now exist could facilitate the joint service organization he foresees. The Army, Navy, and Air Force Departments are anachronisms, left over from the immediate postwar defense reorganization. These bureaucracies foster parochialism and creare expensive redundancies that impede progress in the new "joint" environment. The elimination of the service departments would mark a dramatic break from the old order and expedite the broad implementation of the new technologies across service boundaries, including mission and equipment sharing and increased interoperability of forces. Such reforms will not only demand new thinking from the services but boldness from Congress and the White House.

17. See "Technology for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, 2000–2035," *Report of the National Academy of Sciences* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print Office, 1997).

18. This is quite a contrast to the doctrine championed by retired vice admiral James Stockdale. One of the most decorated sailors of this century, Admiral Stockdale has long argued that technical proficiency can never replace the classical study of military art as the foundation for a naval officer's education.

19. Cohen, p. 14.

20. A detailed discussion of Navy–Marine Corps doctrine for OOTW and operational maneuver from the sea is found in *The Navy and Marine Corps in Regional Conflict in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1996).

21. See Michael O'Hanlon's speech, "Beware the RMA'nia," National Defense University, 9 September 1998, for reference to Van Riper's remarks. O'Hanlon also notes that America also had dominant information and situational awareness over Iraq and still could not find Saddam Hussein's chemical and biological weapons.

22. Andrew P. Erdmann, "The U.S. Presumption of Quick Costless Wars," *Orbis*, Summer 1993. Erdmann notes that the presumption has been since the 1980s that the United States must end future conflicts quickly and at minimum cost. Such a presumption necessarily means that military action must be short and efficient. U.S. history does not support this kind of expectation. The U.S. Civil War, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam were protracted, bloody conflicts. Even in Vietnam it was not the public will that cracked but the political and military will. Our retreat from Somalia was not due to the public's revulsion of seeing casualties on television but to their sense that the political leadership had no clear policy in Africa and that lives were being wasted.

23. Harry G. Summers, *The New World Strategy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 222–3.