

# Transformation and the Illusion of Change

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**T**RANSFORMATION OF THE U.S. MILITARY is on everyone's lips in Washington DC. Presumably, transformation means change in the structure and composition of the armed forces to become something new and more effective. However, as one defense journalist noted "transformation" is a military concept much like the Christian idea of transubstantiation; "no one is exactly sure what it means, but most believers have an opinion about it."<sup>1</sup>

For the moment, to the politician, private industry, and many senior officers in the Department of Defense, transformation means new equipment. The U.S. Army's current program to equip existing brigades inside the ten division force with wheeled armored vehicles is a case in point.<sup>2</sup> However, simply re-capitalizing old single service warfighting organizations with new technology could be a hazardous affair. The French and British tried it in the 1930s and were soundly defeated in 1940 by a

German enemy that had reorganized to exploit new technology with devastating effect. American corporations that failed to transform themselves in the 1980s through reorganization for the information age market were not around for the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

Fiscal realities may change the course of transformation. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), to keep U.S. military forces in their current Cold War configuration, future administrations will have to spend \$51 billion more per year on defense than the Clinton administration is spending in fiscal year 2000.<sup>4</sup> Even with a modest increase in defense spending, these numbers make it clear that it is impossible to pay for everything the services want.<sup>5</sup>

If fiscal realities constrain military spending for transformation, then another way forward must be found. In fact, more money may not be the solution, and, fortunately, there is an alternative.

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General William Kernan, the new commander-in-chief, Joint Forces Command and NATO's Allied Forces Command, Atlantic, stated in a speech on 6 September 2000, that "transforming America's armed forces is a complex proposition that involves far more than purchasing new weapons systems."<sup>6</sup> General Kernan is right. Transformation must involve reorganization and reform to reorient military institutions, policies, doctrine, and thinking to the current strategic environment, as well as to the future. Most importantly, due to jointness—the mechanism through which the national command authorities achieve unity of effort from a diversity of service resources<sup>7</sup>—transformation means effectively combining and integrating service capabilities within new joint operational structures.

## TRANSFORMATION OR MORE OF THE SAME?

Put bluntly, the United States faces a choice between transforming its armed forces into a strategically relevant force or perpetuating the status quo at high-cost. In a recent letter to the *Washington Times*, a retired army general insisted that the Clinton administration and Congress were literally starving the services of necessary resources. According to the general, the army needs about 515,000 soldiers in its active force, but it now has about 480,000 and that is only half the story. More than 50% of today's army personnel are in the Army

National Guard and Army Reserve. In the case of the army, Defense Secretary William Cohen stayed a projected 25,000-soldier cut in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve because of the high operating tempo—fighting Western forest fires, peacekeeping in the Balkans, stabilizing the Korean Peninsula and maintaining a presence in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

If the country is to maintain the army in an organizational form that has changed little since the Second World War, the general is absolutely correct in his analysis and recommendation. More troops and money will be needed. This has been the popular remedy for defense problems since the end of the Gulf War in 1991. Victory over Iraq in 1991 did not change this policy.<sup>9</sup> It simply validated the status quo and the old Cold War force just got smaller. As a consequence, during the 1990s, the United States spent roughly \$300 billion a year on its military. Adjusted for inflation, that's about what it spent at the height of the Cold War in 1980, when U.S. forces were prepared to fight a global war against the 5 million-strong Soviet armed forces.<sup>10</sup>

At first glance, this seems incredible. In fact, it raises a host of critical questions. Can or should transformation result in a more effective force that utilizes its resources differently? Could it be that transformation is inseparable from jointness? Is the transformation of U.S. single service warfighting establishments into new *integrated, joint air, land and sea forces* capable of rap-

idly deploying and responding to crisis and conflict in a fundamentally new strategic environment dependent on the reorganization of the existing forces to fight differently? Is it possible that within a new conceptual military framework, U.S. ground, air, and sea-based forces could dramatically magnify their capabilities?

There are other profound questions which must be answered as well. Among them, has there been no change in the way war is fought since 1991? Nearly ten years have elapsed since Desert Storm. That is half the time that passed between the world wars of the twentieth century. Surely, given the pace of technology and change in the structure of the international environment, future conflict is likely to be as different from the Gulf War as the Second World War was from the Great War.

If these are the right questions, it is time to devote attention to the construction of a new joint view of warfare and military operations. In the few successful peacetime military transformations that history can document, concepts for change in military affairs developed in minds prepared to recognize the potentialities of change in settings that already contained its essential elements. More importantly, the military professionals who changed war were much less interested in the instruments themselves and much more interested in what could be done with these elements in combination.<sup>11</sup>

In Russia, the experience of war

with Germany between 1914 and 1918 combined with the subsequent civil war to influence profoundly the thinking of Russian military professionals like Marshal M. N. Tukhacheevskii. Unlike the British, French, and U.S. generals who viewed warfare through the lens of the western front in the First World War, Marshal Tukhacheevskii's experience with the fluid and dynamic nature of mobile warfare on the steppes of Russia and Central Asia led him to grasp the potential of emerging automotive, aviation, and communication technologies in a new context. This context suggested new organizations for combat, manned by men trained, educated, and equipped for an entirely new type of warfare that Tukhacheevskii would not live to see, but would rescue Russia from defeat at Hitler's hands. The important point is that the creative process inside the Red Army during the inter-war period began with a redefinition of warfare in conceptual terms that eventually produced both deep operations theory and the force development program to implement it.<sup>12</sup>

In Western Europe, the first exposition of a new concept for warfare came from an Englishman, Major General J.F.C. Fuller. He argued that the fighting power of an army lies in its organization and set forth the idea of armies and air forces organized to break the enemy's resistance with a minimum of fighting. These ideas coincided with the German Army's experience during the First World War and supported

the German idea of using mechanization and air power in combination to restore mobility to the battlefield and strike a paralyzing blow. Colonel General Heinz Guderian, then a newly promoted general officer, articulated the concept in 1937:

The aim of the attacking forces is to turn a tactical advantage into a strategic one. This is achieved by means of the indirect approach. The enemy's capacity to resist is destroyed not by the direct killing or capture of his troops, but indirectly, by the rendering inoperative of his power of command.<sup>13</sup>

This concept drove force development, modernization, education, training and the German organization for combat. The rest is history.

As mentioned earlier, during the inter-war period the French and British armed forces did not arrive at similar conclusions about future war. Of all the armies, however, the situation inside the inter-war French Army was by far the worst. None of the events between 1918 and 1940—including the Russian Civil War, the Spanish Civil War, the Japanese invasion of China, the Russian war with Finland, or the Nazi victory over Poland—changed the thinking of French generals. Most importantly, dissenting opinions from the ranks that chal-

lenged the conventional wisdom of the General Staff, such as those of then Colonel Charles DeGaulle, were crushed. Like George Patton in the U.S. Army, Heinz Guderian was never popular with the generals in the German Army, but his concepts and ideas were still tolerated and, in many cases, accepted.<sup>14</sup> This was not true for the French generals.

As General Andre Beaufre noted after the war, the chilling effect of this policy in the French General Officer Corps was profound. "Everyone got the message, and a profound silence reigned until the awakening of 1940."<sup>15</sup> In other words, when senior military leaders avoid the painful, but necessary intellectual process of thinking through and overcoming unexamined assumptions, opinions, and prejudices about themselves and their enemies, defeat becomes a certainty.<sup>16</sup>

## WHO TRANSFORMS WHAT?

A joint operational framework that allows the national command authorities and the warfighting commanders-in-chief (CINCS) to employ the right set of service arms in the right way against an opponent is needed. Without new joint operational concepts for employment and a "plug and play" joint operational architecture in the unified commands, the way the United States fights will not be transformed. And without transforming concepts to integrate U.S. military capabilities in all of the services at some point in the future, the

military Goliath may fail in action against a more agile David.<sup>17</sup>

Potentially, Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) could influence future Pentagon acquisition decisions, as well as shape the types of forces required to conduct joint military operations, since its mandate ensuring joint requirements is so broad. The recent initiative to establish a core Joint Task Force is an important development, since it addresses many of the problems re-discovered during the U.S.-led air campaign against Yugoslavia.<sup>18</sup> Another bright possibility is the program for "joint experimentation." With the support of a newly elected president, JFCOM could become the authoritative voice on transformation in the context of both force development and joint experimentation. By turning to the JFCOM CINC for a report card on the services' programs, the president could empower JFCOM to decisively influence joint task force development, as well as the direction of experimentation in the services.

However, the original formation of U.S. Atlantic Command, now JFCOM, should have resulted in actions that produced jointness, but it did not.<sup>19</sup> The services still build program objective memoranda (POM) and there are no dollars of substance allocated outside of the services.<sup>20</sup> The service chiefs still see themselves as negotiating roles and missions for their respective services.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, ten years after the Gulf War, the U.S. armed forces do not even have a common radio for the services

over which data critical to joint operations can pass. The joint operational architecture essential to the effectiveness of joint command, control, communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance that can exchange data and voice messages does not exist.<sup>22</sup>

There are reasons for such apparent oversights. Goldwater-Nichols legislation did not confront the difficult questions of how the armed forces are commanded and controlled. In other words, who is in charge? And, who has both the authority and the financial strength to make decisions? How these questions are answered in future legislation will shape the destiny of single service warfighting establishments and determine the course of transformation within the U.S. armed forces. With the current institutions of national defense approaching block obsolescence, new legislation on the scale of the 1947 National Security Act will be needed in the near future to answer these questions in the context of defense reform and reorganization. Otherwise, this condition will not change and the cost of maintaining the atrophying force structure will rise as CBO predicts.

Until then, the most important aspect of transformation and jointness inside the armed forces is change in the way senior officers think about conflict. Without the consensual support of the officers who must implement joint operations, a coherent view of warfare that cuts across service lines will not emerge. Intellectually, this implies the

need for an integrative concept of multi-service command and control on the operational level that induces military leaders to interpret information and military activity in ways that result in the exploitation of capabilities across service lines. JCOM ought to play a significant role in addressing this need.

## CONCLUSIONS

Transforming U.S. single service warfighting establishments into new *integrated, joint air, land, and sea forces* capable of rapidly deploying and responding to crisis and conflict in a fundamentally new strategic environment has no chance of occurring without the reorganization of the existing forces to fight differently first. So-called transformation programs that occur without significant joint influence and careful congressional oversight will not change the single-service warfighting establishments inside the U.S. armed forces.

The conduct of military operations against Yugoslavia in 1999 demonstrated the current American way of war. As in the past, the application of a single arm—air and missile power—allowed the Serb adversary to adapt to the single threat, hunker down, and wait out the bombardment. Having failed to attack and destroy the army and the police—the organs of power, as Lenin referred to them—the regime in Belgrade survived the war. At the same time, assumptions about the omniscient quality of U.S. surveillance

technology in connection with concepts such as “dominant battlespace knowledge” and “information dominance” turned out to be fallacious. In spite of NATO’s enormous technological superiority in every category, allied “battlespace awareness” was manipulated by the Yugoslav armed forces more often than expected. Strikes on decoy targets indicated that the Serbs let NATO daytime reconnaissance flights see real targets and then replaced them at night, or that U.S. target analysts misinterpreted the information furnished to them.<sup>23</sup>

In the absence of a joint operational framework that integrates air and missile power with ground combat forces, the hoped for defeat of future adversaries will be both expensive and long in coming—if it comes at all. Inevitably, the participants in future conflicts and crises in Eurasia, the Near East, and Africa will seek the capability to strike early to out-pace the U.S. response and to deny access decisively with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This means that U.S. military strategists must assume future adversaries will possess not only some form of WMD, but also a limited supply of precision-guided munitions, modern air defense technology, as well as access to electronic intelligence and satellite imagery provided by third powers. In this future setting, exclusive reliance on standoff attack will fail.

None of this means that the American way of war cannot change. The services contain advocates for change in military affairs. However, the dead-

lock between those in the services who seek change and those who seek to retain things as they are will not be broken without intervention from a superior force. In the early 1900s, reform and reorganization of the U.S. Army and Navy necessitated the intervention of President Theodore Roosevelt. His intervention resulted in the creation of a U.S. Navy with global capabilities and transformed a constabulary army spread across the West into a regular army of six combat divisions. These actions established the United States as a great power. Later in the 1930s, without the intervention of Congress to mandate the selection of officers who were rated aviators for command of the navy's carriers, battleship admirals and battleship thinking would have persisted well into the early 1940s with potentially disastrous results in action against the Japanese.

Perhaps Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's great generalization that no military service should or can undertake to reform itself is valid.<sup>24</sup> Change must be directed from outside the U.S. military in order to transform it and achieve true jointness. Otherwise, future Americans may suddenly discover in the years ahead that their countrymen in uniform are manning a kind of expensive high-tech "Maginot line" that will inevitably be outflanked.<sup>25</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Editorial, "Joint Approach," *Defense News*, 11 September 2000.
2. "The Objective Force is organized around a common divisional design, allowing interchangeable full spectrum capability. Division and Corps level headquarters set the conditions for and integrate all elements of the joint / multinational / interagency force, directing and supporting the operations of its maneuver and fighting units through inter-netted linkages to joint C4ISR and joint effects." The honorable Louis Caldera, Secretary of the Army and General Eric Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff, *United States Army Transformation Campaign Plan*, 1 August 2000, 5.
3. Michael Hammer and James Champy, *Reengineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993), 25.
4. John M. Donnelly, "Keeping Today's Military Power Requires \$51 Billion More A Year Estimate, From CBO, Due Out Today," *Defense Week special issue*, 14 September 2000. Instead of \$53 billion annually for procurement spending, \$90 billion is needed if existing equipment is to be replaced.
5. Sandra I. Erwin, "Current Weapon Procurement Plan Unaffordable, Says Jones," *National Defense*, September 2000, 14.
6. Jim Garamone, "Army General Takes Over Joint Forces/NATO Commands," *American Forces Press Service*, 6 September 2000.
7. In this essay, "jointness" is defined as more than just teamwork between the services. Because all U.S. military operations are conducted under the authority of the commander-in-chief of the one of the unified combatant commanders, jointness refers to all matters and issues pertaining to the cooperation, integration, and interoperability of service component forces on the strategic, opera-

- tional and tactical levels in military operations.
8. Ted Stroup, "Starving the U.S. Military," *Washington Times*, 24 September 2000.
  9. Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 430-431.
  10. David Wood, "Experts See Military's Fundamental Problems Being Lost In Campaign Rhetoric," *Seattle Times*, 23 August 2000.
  11. Elting Morrison, *Men, Machines and Modern Times* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966), 37.
  12. Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 169.
  13. Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933-1945, Its Political and Military Failure* (Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1978), 146.
  14. Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 196.
  15. Williamson Murray, "Armored Warfare," in Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34.
  16. Barry Strauss and Josiah Ober, *The Anatomy of Error: Ancient Military Disasters and Their Lessons for Modern Strategists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 246.
  17. For a more in-depth treatment of the importance of joint operational architecture to transformation and jointness, see Douglas A. Macgregor, "A New Joint Operational Architecture" *Strategic Review* (Fall 2000):
  18. Robert Holzer, "Stability At Top Is Critical To JFC's Pentagon Clout; Also calls for a Standing JTF Headquarters," *Defense News*, 4 September 2000.
  19. See comments and recommendations in *U.S. Atlantic Command: Challenging Role in the Evolution of Joint Military Capabilities*, General Accounting Office Report to Congressional Committees (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 1999), 60-72.
  20. USSOCOM does surprisingly well with its joint procurement for what is arguably the only standing joint requirement with independent resource authority.
  21. Hunter Keeter, "Jones: Cross-Service Meetings Yield Success," *Defense Daily*, 17 August 2000.
  22. The Battle Management/Command, Control, Communication, Computer, and Intelligence (BMC4i) discussion in the draft TAMD MNS states that BMC4i must include all of these characteristics. This Operational Requirements Document supports both the force protection and command and control mission areas. It addresses the need established in the Theater Missile Defense Mission Need Statement (JROCM-064-91 dated 18 November 1991) and the (Draft) Mission Need Statement for Joint Theater Air and Missile Defense.
  23. This passage is drawn from Douglas A. Macgregor, "A New Joint Operational Architecture: The Key to Transformation," *Strategic Review* (Fall 2000): 31. Also, for a more complete treatment of the issue, see Timothy L. Thomas "Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority," *Parameters* (Spring 2000): 13-29.
  24. Morrison, *Men, Machines and Modern Times*, 38.
  25. Barnaby J. Feder, "Military Spends Billions To Ensure U.S. Battlefield Supremacy," *New York Times*, 18 September 2000.