STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS: THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES OF MODERN WARFARE

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ABSTRACT

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Joint Forces Command has proposed "Rapid Decisive Operations" as an operational concept for future warfare. The paper examines Rapid Decisive Operations from theoretical and the strategic perspectives within the context of conventional, state-to-state warfare. The Joint Forces Command's concept "Whitepaper" includes ambiguous conflicting statements concerning the employment of Rapid Decisive Operations within in a coercive strategy focused on influencing adversary leadership decision-making. However, such decision-making is unpredictable due to psychological factors and the actions of chance, friction, human nature, passion, uncertainty, and politics; especially within the interactive nature of warfare. General systems and chaos theory support the unpredictability of war. Although Rapid Decisive Operations embraces these modern systems concepts, this is a self-contradictory position since these theories establish the impossibility of predictability within such systems. The paper concludes that Rapid Decisive Operations is a fundamentally flawed operational concept. The *Whitepaper*'s description of the concept fails to present a balanced, intellectually honest, critical assessment. Rapid Decisive Operations does not appear to be adequately grounded in operational realities and the critical enabler of the Operational Net Assessment adopts a self contradictory position regarding systems theory versus predictability which invalidates its promise to provide the foreknowledge necessary to support the concept. Rapid Decisive Operations is divorced from strategic context, which ignores political factors that could reduce its speed and operational advantages. Despite these flaws, Rapid Decisive Operations is still a worthy candidate operational concept, provided it is redesigned to reconcile its internal contradictions and establish solid theoretical underpinnings. If the United States is going to retain its military dominance into the twenty-first century then developing well reasoned, theoretically sound, and realistic warfighting concepts and doctrine are of the utmost importance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS: THE EMPORER'S NEW CLOTHES OF MODERN WARFARE 1

WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE 1

SECTION I – THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS 2

DEFINING AND DESCRIBING THE CONCEPT 3

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FORCE, COMPELLENCE, AND VICTORY 4

Rapid Decisive Operations – Coercion or Compellence? 5

Decisions for War and Peace – Clausewitz's Rational Calculus 6

The Will of the Enemy – The Irrational Calculus 7

Chaos and Clausewitz 7

THE OPERATIONAL NET ASSESSMENT – THE LABOR OF SISYPHUS 8

Strategic Intelligence and the Science of Guessing Wrong 9

The Systems View of the Operational Net Assessment 10

SECTION II – STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS 11

DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONTEXT 11

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT 12

THE ANTI-ACCESS THREAT – CAPABILITY AND COUNTERMEASURE 14

SECTION III – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 14

ENDNOTES 17

BIBLIOGRAPHY 23

RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS: THE EMPORER'S NEW CLOTHES OF MODERN WARFARE

WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

At the dawn of the twenty-first century the United States has emerged as the only global superpower controlling what are arguably the most powerful military forces in history. Yet even as the United States occupies this pinnacle of power, many speculate that a military preeminence based on perfected industrial age warfare will have dubious value in the new information age. Reacting to these and other concerns the United States military has embarked on an ambitious attempt to prepare for an uncertain future by inculcating and exploiting emerging technologies. This quest to maintain its qualitative military edge has triggered a comprehensive redesign of the joint force that will enhance, evolve, and ultimately transform its warfighting capabilities.[1]

Fundamentally changing the military during peacetime under conditions of reduced resources is not a new experience for America's military[2]. When the Great War ended in 1918, forward thinking military professionals began to consider the likely shape of the next major war. These officers had to envision and then vigorously promote innovative warfighting concepts that relied on embryonic technological capabilities to address speculative shortfalls in military capability within the uncertain strategic context of possible future warfare. Their pioneering efforts overcame an entrenched conservatism and austere resourcing to produce the vital operational pillars of mid twentieth century warfare – strategic bombardment, armored warfare, carrier-borne naval aviation, submarine warfare, close air support, radio and radar systems, and amphibious warfare.

Each of these war-winning innovation success stories had a common beginning as a warfighting concept that was a vision of the future "...balanced and well connected to operational realities"[3] and alert to "[changes in]...national purposes and the international security environment."[4] These initial concepts were then passed through a rigorous gauntlet of competing ideas under "...merciless institutional scrutiny."[5] Accepting this interwar innovation methodology as a touchstone for success, what is the assessment of transformation's operational concept?

This question is not simply an idle academic inquiry. Rather, the fidelity and completeness of a nation's vision of future warfare is a matter of extraordinary importance. A flawed conceptual foundation skews a nation's military strategy and creates second and third order effects on every facet of force development, deployment, and employment throughout the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. The probable consequences of ill-disciplined

conceptual thinking are severe.[6] At its worst, allowing a contentious and ill-defined warfighting "concept" to mushroom into doctrine without serious intellectual challenge and reassessment is an error likely to prove unrecoverable in crisis and fatal in war – as the French learned so painfully in the opening campaign of World War One.

The lack of rigorous professional scrutiny of the operational concept of the offensive induced the French Army to develop *"l'offense a l'outrance"* (offense to the limit) as its warfighting doctrine in 1914. This doctrine permeated the entire officer corps and embedded its tenets in Plan XVII, the only French war plan at the eve of World War One. Plan XVII sought a swift strategic victory over Germany through the psychological impact of a bold offensive stroke culminating in decisive battle. Unfortunately for the French, Plan XVII's operational concentration for an offensive into Alsace-Lorraine inadvertently enhanced the success of the German Schlieffen Plan's deep right wheel through Belgium. The result was a French military disaster in the opening battles of August 1914 that nearly forfeited Paris and lost the war.[7] The operational concepts that drive doctrine matter; and it matters where they come from.

This paper aims to provide a fresh look at Rapid Decisive Operations by examining it from theoretical and the strategic perspectives. A comprehensive treatment of this admittedly broad area would quickly exceed the scope of a paper of this length. Therefore, this study concentrates on selected aspects of Rapid Decisive Operations within the context of conventional, state-to-state warfare.[8] Section One investigates the feasibility of Rapid Decisive Operations from a theoretical viewpoint using the *RDO Whitepaper's* baseline description. This is followed by Section Two which examines the strategic context of the execution of counter factually ideal Rapid Decisive Operations. Lastly, Section Three concludes by providing an assessment and recommendation for Rapid Decisive Operations.

SECTION I – THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS

United States Joint Forces Command was established in October 1999 to centralize development and experimentation of joint-force operational concepts and to explore the most critical warfighting challenges at the operational level of war.[9] As a starting point, the command distilled and grouped selected operational concepts culled from *Joint Vision 2010, Concept for Future Joint Operations, Joint Vision 2020*[10] and the April 2000 *Defense Planning Guidance*[11] and coined the term "Rapid Decisive Operations," ("RDO" in military shorthand), for these collected and fused concepts. In August 2001, the Joint Forces Command published a sixty-six page *"RDO Whitepaper Version 2.0"* to define and explain the Rapid Decisive Operations concept.

DEFINING AND DESCRIBING THE CONCEPT

Dale Carnegie once said, "If you can't write your idea on the back of my business card, you don't have a clear idea." Using this standard, the Rapid Decisive Operations concept has an identity crisis. The *RDO Whitepaper* presents a 117-word paragraph as its "definition" of Rapid Decisive Operations.[12] This is a superfluous five-fold expansion of the *Concept for Future Operations* definition of decisive operations: "Application of an overwhelming joint capability, by the proper balance of the four new operational concepts in any specific operation."[13] These twenty words just might fit on Carnegie's business card.

The *Whitepaper's* lengthy definition is accompanied by a sweeping catalog of ambiguous and conflicting statements that attempt to explain just what exactly Rapid Decisive Operations are supposed to accomplish. The authors see a place for Rapid Decisive Operations "across the range of military operations,"[14] in "striking terrorism directly or to influence or coerce a regional power, or to defeat or replace a regime."[15] However, except for perhaps the most insignificant states, defeating and replacing regimes is unlikely to be rapid and the forces designed and calibrated to execute Rapid Decisive Operations would likely prove entirely inadequate for the duration, magnitude, and character of tasks involved. How does a lightweight strike-focused Rapid Decisive Operations force execute "one massive counter-offensive to occupy an aggressor's capital and replace his regime" as envisioned by the Secretary of Defense?[16] The *Whitepaper* goes on to assert that Rapid Decisive Operations "creates the desired outcome itself or it establishes the conditions to transition to [major regional contingency] or security and stability operations."[17] But if it fails to achieve the desired outcome itself, how can it still be considered "decisive?" Later the document describes Rapid Decisive Operation's purpose as intended to "...contain, resolve, or mitigate the consequences of a [high end SSC] conflict..."[18] Again, if it's only containing or mitigating, how is it "decisive?" "If deterrence fails, Rapid Decisive Operations provide [s]..."[19] indicates that Rapid Decisive Operations is not envisioned as a deterrent, yet it claims to have utility across the spectrum of operations, of which flexible deterrent options are one. Moreover, if rapid Decisive Operations "...establishes the conditions to transition to [major regional contingency] or security and stability operations"[20] is this not essentially a flexible deterrent option? "Rapid resolution is accomplished by intense unrelenting operations or the threat thereof."[21] How exactly would one "threaten" intense unrelenting operations? "Putting what the adversary values most at risk of being threatened, rendered unusable, or destroyed altogether"[22] is an acknowledged aim of Rapid Decisive Operations. However, endangering or destroying these valued items is problematic when they are not Centers of Gravity or have protections under the Law of War.

Additionally, how would one place intangible values, such as "freedom" or "sovereignty" or "faith" at risk? "Also, RDO can, if necessary, simultaneously defeat [adversary] ability to conduct effective operations by destroying the forces [or] the source of the adversary's power."[23] It is questionable whether forces organized, equipped, trained, and deployed to optimize effects against "networks" and "systems" while minimizing their size and decrementing their sustainment are coincidentally capable of destroying forces and centers of gravity. Outright destruction may seem like a quaint obsolescent idea in the information age, but the *Whitepaper* goes on to say: "While achieving effects is our primary method of influencing the enemy, in some cases the attrition of his forces may in fact be a primary means of producing the desired effect."[24] Said another way: if the precisely-calibrated, information-centric Rapid Decisive Operation fails to work, the force can resort to the discredited legacy practice of wholesale kinetic destruction, which, since it is admittedly attrition, takes considerably longer, rendering rapid decisive operations neither rapid nor decisive.[25] In the end, the *RDO Whitepaper* casts a wide but poorly constructed net for Rapid Decisive Operations, presenting it as the fabled milk-giving, egg-laying, wool-producing pig – able to do it all.

In execution, Joint Forces Command's vision of Rapid Decisive Operations calls for the Services, acting jointly, to execute coordinated, distributed, multi-dimensional interagency (offensive) actions under conditions of America's choosing within the first hours of a crisis, focused against targets designed to achieve specific effects against the enemy's "critical capabilities."[26]

> ... RDO provides the capability to rapidly and decisively coerce, compel, or defeat an adversary in order to accomplish our strategic objectives without a lengthy campaign or extensive build-up of forces.[27] [RDO] coerces ... the adversary not to use military force by disrupting the coherence of his efforts in such a way that he becomes convinced that he cannot achieve his objectives and that he will ultimately lose what he values most.[28] The adversary, suffering from the loss of coherence and unable to achieve his objectives, chooses to cease actions that are against US interests or has his capabilities defeated.[29] [And in a disturbing echo of 1914] The rapid unfolding of operations and the actual and perceived loss of coherent capability will combine to break the will of the adversary.[30]

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FORCE, COMPELLENCE, AND VICTORY

Military doctrine is a cultural, historical, and technological blend of theory, practicality, and reality. Any rational military doctrine must be derived from and thoroughly embrace military theory.[31] Without a firm theoretical and historical underpinning, doctrine becomes a castle built on the sand of wistful speculation rather than on the bedrock of exhaustive observation and

rigorous analysis. Even in the present era of revolutionary digital high technology, it would be intellectually dishonest to discount historical example as an essential ingredient in theory. Colin Gray has noted: "...the relevance of historical example does not decline arithmetically, geometrically, or indeed at all, with time."[32] He believes that there is a timelessness to war and victory; "...an essential unity to all strategic experience in all periods of history because nothing vital to the nature and function of war and strategy changes..."[33] Yet sound military theory provides not so much a retrospective "how to" formula, but a forward thinking and intellectually reasoned examination of "how war works." "The chief utility of a general theory of war and strategy lies in its ability not to point out lessons, but to isolate things that need thinking about. Theory provides insights and questions, not answers."[34] This suggests that if Rapid Decisive Operations is to properly perform its role in experimentation or aspire to candidacy for promotion to doctrinal status, then it too must demonstrate a sound theoretical base firmly grounded in history.

Rapid Decisive Operations – Coercion or Compellence?

Despite innumerable critics pronouncing its demise, *On War* remains the acknowledged theoretical and doctrinal foundation of every modern army. Advances in technology may have eclipsed some portions of *On War*, but its fundamental conclusions about the nature and conduct of war at the national level are eternal. *On War* provides a concept for the application of force that supports arguments in favor of Rapid Decisive Operations.

The fundamental purpose of any national military organization is to achieve the state's political objectives through the use or threat of armed force. More often than not, international politics is about seeking revisions in the domestic or international behavior of other states. There are two fundamental methods to achieve political objectives through military force – compellence and coercion.

A state's overall capacity to wage war is the product of a dynamic interaction between its means and its will.[35] Compellence occurs when a state annihilates its adversary's means to resist and can impose its will entirely through the application of force without the consent or acquiescence of the vanquished. Victories of compelling annihilation are spectacular and decisive, but difficult to achieve and historically rare. Achieving quick decisive victory has more often turned out to be a serendipitous fluke, rather than the result of artful deliberate planning for such an outcome. Napoleon's unexpectedly crushing defeat of the Prussians at Jena-Auerstadt in 1806 and Scipio Africanus' obliteration of the Carthaginian threat at the Battle of Zama in 202 BC are examples of such victories.

On the other hand, coercion is the modern plan and method of choice. Coercive strategies achieve victory when, although a state retains the means to fight, it lacks the will to continue its resistance and so accepts its adversary's objectives either in tacit agreement or through a formally negotiated settlement. Coercion is not about the defeat of military forces, but about the defeat of the enemy's will. Virtually every armed conflict since World War Two has ended in this manner, including everything in scale and intensity from the Korean War to NATO operations in Kosovo.

Decisions for War and Peace – Clausewitz's Rational Calculus

State warfare represents the tangible expression of the choice by national leaders to initiate or continue combat in pursuit of political objectives. Their choice is the end result of deliberate, but complex, collective mental processes that weigh the cost of victory against the value of the political objective sought.[36] Modern commentators, especially in the discipline of political science, often refer to this evaluation and decision as the "rational calculus."

On War offers two possible conclusions from the rational calculus that could precipitate an enemy decision not to fight. First, national leaders may conclude that the probability of victory is so low that the human and materiel cost of fighting is not worth the likely end result. Alternatively, the state's leaders may determine that, although achievable, the cost of victory is greater than the value of the political objective. Therefore, the proper intent of coercion is to so strongly influence the enemy's perceptions of cost and likelihood of victory that his rational calculus drives him to abandon his will to fight. Rapid Decisive Operations attain coercive victory over an adversary when " ... he becomes convinced that he cannot achieve his objectives and that he will ultimately lose what he values most[37] [and through rational calculus he] ... chooses to cease actions that are against US interests..."[38]

Unfortunately, getting the enemy to do your will clearly requires at least the grudging acceptance of the enemy's national leadership. Babe Ruth once commented, "It's hard to beat a man who won't quit." If a nation at war refuses to accept the changes in its affairs desired by its adversary, the war cannot truly end and the adversary's will is thwarted. Many of America's recent adversaries have demonstrated a strategic vision that equates victory with extending the duration of conflict by simply avoiding or refusing to acknowledge defeat.[39] However, when faced with either the improbability or unacceptable cost of victory an adversary state *should* choose peace.[40]

The Will of the Enemy – The Irrational Calculus

The key word is this discussion is "should" because in practice even when an adversary strategic reassessment points to peace as the rational course of action, states do not always choose it. The improbable Finnish decision to resist "overwhelming" Soviet aggression in 1939 and the Melian's mulish insistence on defense against Athens in 416 BC are classic cases of an "irrational calculus."[41] History indicates that the international environment and the internal workings of foreign governments are unpredictable, largely because the rational calculus is never a purely scientific and dispassionate "equation." Not only are such calculations largely guesswork on the adversary's part, but they are influenced internally by the psychological profile and ideology of the national leadership and externally by real or perceived actions, intentions, and capabilities of other states, especially the enemy.

Clausewitz believed that the actions of chance, friction, human nature, passion, uncertainty, and politics skewed rational decision and especially when combined with the inherently interactive nature of warfare made any conflict unpredictable.[42] Modern technology has not diluted the strength of Clausewitz's argument. Writing for the National Defense University in 1996, Barry D. Watts concluded that no technology could ever succeed in eliminating friction in war and that this friction was the foundation of war's persistent unpredictability.[43] This is affirmed in US Air Force Lieutenant General Jay W. Kelly's summary assessment of the air operations against Bosnia in 1995.

> For all the capabilities of modern information technology, the scale, pace, human factors [of] leadership, culture, and conceptualization, and other non-technical elements of [Operation] Deliberate Force ensured that Clausewitz's trilogy of fog, friction, and chance remained important in its ultimate outcome.[44]

Chaos and Clausewitz

General systems theory and chaos theory, from which the transformation catch phrases "system-of-systems" and "complex adaptive system" are derived, support Clausewitz's view of the unpredictability of war. Although Rapid Decisive Operations advocates enthusiastically endorse these modern systems concepts, this is a self-contradictory position since general systems and chaos theories state emphatically that the predictability within such systems is impossible.[45] Accepting systems theory requires abandoning linearity and its neatly ordered predictability. One cannot have it both ways. Commenting on Clausewitz and nonlinear theory, Alan Beyerchern observed:

> In a profoundly unconfused way [Clausewitz] understands that seeking exact analytical solutions does not fit the nonlinear reality of the problems posed by

> war, and hence that our ability to predict the course of any outcome of any given conflict is severely limited.[46]

But is it? RDO advocates might assert that the power of knowledge that is broadly and speedily disseminated and then acted on by self synchronizing autonomous military units can tame war's chaos and unpredictability by eliminating, or anticipating and averting, its friction and chance.[47] The term "knowledge" rather than its sub-component "information" is important. Information is factual data, or at least it's what is accepted as factual. Knowledge is the enlightened understanding that comes with an individual's correct contextual association of information with objective reality.[48] How does information become knowledge in support of Rapid Decisive Operations? Enter the Operational Net Assessment, upon which Rapid Decisive Operations' seductive promise of rapid decisive victory rests.

THE OPERATIONAL NET ASSESSMENT – THE LABOR OF SISYPHUS[49]

The planning and execution of Rapid Decisive Operations requires detailed knowledge of the multi-disciplinary cause and effect linkages that describe the causal relationships that ultimately join attaining military objectives to the psychological effects their accomplishment has on the opposing national leadership. For Rapid Decisive Operations, such knowledge is resident in the Operational Net Assessment (ONA).

> The ONA is a critical enabler for achieving RDO. It is a process that uses a coherent knowledge base to link national objectives and power to apply integrated diplomatic, information, military, and economic options that influence [an] adversary's perceptions, decision making, and elements of national will ... It produces an operational support tool that provides the JFC visibility of effects-to-task linkages based on a system-of-systems analysis of a potential adversary's political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information elements of national power....Analysis includes key links and nodes within systems and proposes methods that will influence, neutralize, or destroy them to achieve a desired effect. The ONA is prepared pre-crisis and is continually updated during crisis response.[50]

Other than occasional ill-fated heroes of ancient Greek tragedies, omniscience is rarely a trait attributed to mortals, yet The *Whitepaper's* discussion of the Operational Net Assessment suggests that future United States planners and decision-makers will know even more about the enemy than he knows about himself. Confidence in the Operational Net Assessment is predicated on a fundamental faith in the ability to see with absolute clarity what the enemy thinks, how he thinks, why he thinks that way, and the criteria, timing, and intent of the future decisions he will make. Embedded in this is the foreknowledge that identifies with precision which of the endless series of branches of the action-reaction-counteraction cycle will

precipitate an adversary decision to abandon his desires and accept the political will of the United States.[51] This is akin to the "mind control" genre of B-Movie science fiction plots – and just as believable.

Strategic Intelligence and the Science of Guessing Wrong

The past is littered with examples of nations that failed miserably in their efforts to understand and predict the actions and intentions of their enemies despite their best efforts to do just that. The Germans failed to predict the allied invasion of Normandy in 1944 and for some time afterward persisted in their belief that the "actual" invasion would occur at the *Pas de Calais.* Stalin refused to acknowledge the indicators of the impending German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The Egyptian assault across the Suez and the Syrian attack into the Golan Heights in 1973 surprised the Israelis, just as the Japanese carrier strike at Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive in 1968 surprised the Americans. And the list goes on. While the preceding examples are from nations already at war or anticipating warfare, true "bolts from the blue" are found in the cases of the Argentinean attack of the Falklands in 1982, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the series of terrorist attacks against the United States from Beirut in 1983 through the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001.

These colossal strategic military surprises demonstrate a pattern of failure that is the result of parochial bureaucratic influences within competitive parallel intelligence communities and the personal agendas and idiosyncrasies of senior intelligence officers and decision-makers.[52] These chronic problems are generally immune from techo-informational solutions and argue against the drafting of a document with the attributes of an Operational Net Assessment. In fact, the growth in data collection enabled by the information age has exacerbated these problems by creating its own kind of "needle in the haystack" dilemma of trying to find the important among the dross.[53] "The blend of inefficiency, internal feuding and underestimation of potential adversaries produces a consistent result… the big intelligence organizations can always be relied on for one thing – to get it wrong.[54] Does the information revolution really change anything in intelligence at the top? The answer is still probably not."[55]

Another intelligence issue that undermines Operational Net Assessment is the fundamental inability of anyone to really know in the requisite detail any other nation, leader, or people. This is especially true for states whose benign aspect, lack of international power, or distance from American strategic interests have traditionally relegated them to military and academic obscurity. Operational Net Assessments developed from a narrow range of inputs, some perhaps tainted by parochial interests and agendas, may frustrate the intent to be

"prepared pre-crisis"[56] and "continually updated during crisis response"[57] by limiting the depth or skewing the analysis of non-quantifiable social, cultural, and political aspects of an adversary. In his comprehensive analysis of great power national intelligence estimates before the two world wars, Earnest R. May concluded "... attempts by one government to see things from the standpoint of another government were invariably failures."[58] Williamson Murray and Allan Millett observed in their work on net assessments "If it is difficult to calculate one's own strength, then how much more difficult it is to calculate the strengths of others whose culture, language, and nationality are so different?"[59]

The Systems View of the Operational Net Assessment

The Operational Net Assessment's contribution to Rapid Decisive Operations is entirely dependent on a systemic view of the adversary that it claims it can capture in its most minute and continuously updated detail.[60] However, there is absolutely no indication that this is an achievable goal; particularly since the tenets of general system theory invalidate the Operational Net Assessment's promise of absolute predictability. Yet even if a belligerent could achieve 100 percent accuracy in his pre-conflict estimates, simply taking action against the enemy would invalidate these predictions through the workings of the complex adaptive system of systems which describes the aggressor, the defending enemy, and the international environment in which each exists. Under the stress of armed conflict the adversary may adopt forms of decision-making and behavior unanticipated under pre-crisis conditions because outside pressure or intervention in complex political-military situations alters both the situation and its dynamics.[61]

Operational Net Assessment advocates might argue that although it may fall short of its desired predictive power, the Operational Net Assessment may still have significant utility. A truncated Operational Net Assessment might provide a sufficiently accurate view of the adversary's system of systems to enable identification of the key nodes and critical vulnerabilities whose degradation would yield disproportionate systemic or psychological results. However, experience indicates that modern national systems are too diverse, complex, and adaptive to yield to analytic assessment regardless of how persistent, well-resourced, or dedicated the analysis.

World War Two's strategic bombing concepts evolved from their crude First World War outlines into more solidified doctrinal precepts in the 1920s. In a train of thought familiar today, a 1926 text at the United States Air Service Field Officer's School observed that industries consisted of a "complex system of interlocking factories" and that "...it is necessary to destroy

certain elements of the industry only, in order to cripple the whole."[62] Although systemic bombing for industrial incapacitation possessed an undeniable simplicity and elegance, the "industrial bottleneck" turned out to be an elusive target for the allies in World War II.

Together the British and Americans dropped hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs on Germany and struck every important target within the German society and economy that a formidable and dedicated intelligence apparatus could identify. Oil, steel, cities, aircraft production, shipyards, industrial centers, ball bearings, and transportation all received the attention of Bomber Command and the 8th and 15th Air Forces. Although significantly curtailed by allied bombing, German war production actually peaked at the height of the bomber offensive in 1944 and the German Army continued to resist house-by-house amid the ashes of Berlin. "By February 1945 the Americans targeted just about everything they could think of, hoping to hit upon some means of affecting enemy behavior, either directly or indirectly."[63] Despite the tremendous pressure from three years of virtually unrestricted aerial bombardment the German society, military forces, government, and economy proved a frustratingly adaptive, durable, and enigmatic system of systems.

During the Kosovo air operation in 1999, NATO planners searched in vain for the key pressure point for limited strikes with low collateral damage that would coerce Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic into abiding by his previous commitments to curb ethnic cleansing in Serbia and resume negotiations.[64] Many were hopeful of a quick three-day operation that would demonstrate allied resolve and capability while threatening the Milosevic regime through key target destruction. Yet with every modern intelligence and operational capability available it still took a surprising ten weeks of ever intensifying bombing, including wide scale attacks in Belgrade itself, before NATO reached its objectives.

SECTION II – STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS

The description and explanation of Rapid Decisive Operations presented by the *RDO Whitepaper* do not establish a strategic context for the execution of Rapid Decisive Operations. A comprehensive assessment of the suitability of Rapid Decisive Operations as an operational concept requires the consideration of the circumstances and environment that influence the conduct of such operations.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONTEXT

The trend in United States foreign policy is a search for consensus followed by incrementalism and the employment of every other mean of persuasion short of armed conflict.[65]

> Politicians, by virtue of their craft, perceive or fear wide ramifications of action, prefer to fudge rather than focus, and like to keep their options open as long as possible by making the least decision as late as feasible.[66]

This assessment is echoed by the Rand Corporation's *Report on the Army Transformation Wargame 2000* which decried the wargame's portrayal of proactive and timely Presidential decisions as "...unlikely ... in advance of hostilities, even in the face of unambiguous warning."[67] This indicates that although a rapid operational capability may exist, delays in executive decision making may forfeit the optimum window of opportunity for its employment. Conversely, if the ultimate promise of Rapid Decisive Operations is realized, the low operational risk involved in its execution may prompt hasty military action in dubious enterprises similar to the Clinton administration's conduct of missile-only strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998.[68]

Additionally, the overarching need to gain and maintain domestic support may dictate compromises on military action that influence timing, the nature and size of forces employed, and specific operational matters such as targeting and rules of engagement. Presidential approval of individual targeting recommendations remains a feature of American armed intervention as seen in operations Desert Storm in 1991, Desert Fox in 1998, and in Kosovo in 1999.[69]

Although a slow pace in decision making enables the open policy debate common to democratic policy making, it may inadvertently dilute the credibility of political warnings and military deterrent efforts. In the ramp up to operations in Kosovo, Milosevic misinterpreted the delay required to gain support for intervention as timidity and lack of resolution that hardened his policy position and increased the pace and aggressiveness of his actions.[70]

The United States has not faced a well-led evenly matched conventional military opponent since 1950. In the future, America may not have the gratuitous advantage of fighting ill-equipped nations that are "leadership impaired."[71] Efforts to build political consensus for military operations may provide more competent future adversaries time to begin aggressive information operations, gain extra-national support, muddy the regional political waters, and take action to reduce their vulnerabilities and prepare for combat. Combined, these actions would likely increase operational risk, lessen the psychological impact of Rapid Decisive Operations, and increase the duration of operations by requiring additional time to achieve similar effects against a now alerted and prepared adversary.[72]

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT

The *RDO Whitepaper* correctly observes that "Multinational operations ... will be a key strategic feature of future operations."[73] Coalitions are a political and military necessity for the

international legitimacy, regional access, and host nation support they bring. Unfortunately, building a coalition within the complex and dynamically interactive international system is typically a difficult and time-consuming process.

Regional states have different perceptions of threats, different national objectives, different visions of the endstate, different motives, and a broad spectrum of conditionally based contributions to provide or withhold. Simply obtaining agreement that "something must be done" is often a significant diplomatic accomplishment.

Just as the time required to build domestic consensus plays into the hands of the adversary, so too does the time required to develop a regional coalition. Building a coalition quickly enough to support Rapid Decisive Operations may require concessions and compromises that would degrade operational effectiveness, extend the duration of operations, and increase operational risk. Even after its formation, the inherent friction of coalition operations may alter desired operational practices through concerns over image, interoperability, and rules of engagement. The cumulative effect of these constraints and restraints may decrement the speed or decisiveness of operations.

From a regional perspective there is such a thing as "too fast." America could execute Rapid Decisive Operations unilaterally to avoid the delays associated with building a robust coalition. However, this would deny international legitimacy for United States actions, encourage adverse international reaction to "irresponsible, provocative, and destabilizing" American intervention, seriously degrade U.S.-regional relationships, and severely complicate post-hostility operations. Unlike conventional operations, Rapid Decisive Operations leave no luxury of time between initiation of decisive operations and the need for post-hostility consensus. The likelihood of the regional spillover effect of unintended consequences that may flow from Rapid Decisive Operations complicates coalition building for post-hostility operations. The Operational Net Assessment's focus on adversary states may degrade its understanding of regional dynamics, non-state actors, and trans-national issues. Refugees, ethno-religious autonomy, economic disruption, consequence management, and balance of power are regional concerns that endure beyond the execution of Rapid Decisive Operations and whose lasting effects may resonate in regional political relationships for decades, including denial of future access.

Regional access is absolutely critical to Rapid Decisive Operations.[74] Rapid Decisive Operations must originate from somewhere. Unless this "somewhere" is United States territory or a naval vessel in international waters, the forces involved must obtain overflight rights for

deployment and also permission to occupy and use a regional basing location that provides sufficient operational reach to attack adversary targets.

The *Whitepaper* downplays regional basing needs and coalition support by assuming short duration operations with extremely small supply requirements and then couching its presentation of deployment and logistics concepts in language that implies forced entry forces and their sustainment flow directly to an area of operations in the adversary's territory.[75] Yet it simultaneously highlights the advantages of intermediate staging bases,[76] forward presence, intra-theater lift, build-up of forces and sustainment and prepositioned equipment and supplies[77] – all of which require regional overflight and basing.

THE ANTI-ACCESS THREAT – CAPABILITY AND COUNTERMEASURE

The *Whitepaper's* description of deployment and sustainment offers a blurred and contradictory vision of an adversary who is:

> ...expected to employ anti-access or area denial capabilities such as long-range [surface to] surface missiles, undersea minefields and salvoes [*sic*] of anti-ship missiles; robust, widely distributed surveillance and targeting against air and sea forces; unconventional forces; integrated air defense systems; long-range strike aircraft; and WME.[78]

Perhaps too conveniently, a home station-to-combat deployment "...landing fully combat-ready..."[79] negates adversary anti-access capabilities that, if allowed to interfere with operations, would require too much time to defeat. Conversely, the *Whitepaper* states "Increased anti-access threat ... may preclude rapid direct insertion of forces into the objective area..."[80] and "Dimensional superiority... localized in time and space... is a necessary condition for maintaining friendly access."[81] What exactly is the concept – direct deployment, indirect deployment, or transient dimensional superiority? Moreover, what adversary who possesses these formidable anti-access capabilities is still a suitable target for Rapid Decisive Operations to accomplish effect-based strategic tasks in "high-end SSCs" from simple strike operations through regime change?

SECTION III – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper began by presenting the historically successful interwar innovation experience as a touchstone to assess rapid decisive operations as an operational concept. This same brief historical example provided the evaluation criteria of balance, connection to operational realities, sensitivity to changes in national purposes and the international security environment, and submission to merciless institutional scrutiny. Measured against these criteria the only

reasonable conclusion is that Rapid Decisive Operations is a fundamentally flawed operational concept.

The *RDO* Whitepaper's description of Rapid Decisive Operations is unbalanced. It is a one-sided narcissistic "glossy sales brochure" of the concept's hoped for capabilities permeated with deterministic absolutism and over simplified mirror imaging. Its hollow theoretical foundation avoids historical precedent and treats *On War* and systems theory as a buffet line of ideas, selecting and incorporating only those that support Rapid Decisive Operations. The *Whitepaper's* unsupported characterization of Rapid Decisive Operations as an appropriate operational method across the spectrum of operations, from deterrence through counter-terrorism to regime change, is just shy of ludicrous. The document's dogmatic tone and disingenuous explanatory method fail to present a balanced, intellectually honest, critical assessment of Rapid Decisive Operations and thereby call the entire concept into question.

Rapid Decisive Operations does not appear to be adequately grounded in operational realities; rather, it appears to be a "faith-based" concept. The Operational Net Assessment is <u>the</u> critical enabler of Rapid Decisive Operations. However, its self contradictory position regarding systems theory versus predictability invalidates its specious promise to provide the omniscience and predictive foreknowledge of adversary decision making and societal adaptation necessary to support Rapid Decisive Operations. The gulf of the unknown that exists between knowing a lot and knowing everything is vast and without the predictive power of the Operational Net Assessment, Rapid Decisive Operations will not perform as described.

The *RDO Whitepaper* appears insensitive to the international security environment. It presents Rapid Decisive Operations as a unilateral capability whose execution is divorced from strategic context. This technique gilds the concept with an unwarranted patina of feasibility by ignoring the potential imposition of delays and operational restrictions whose cumulative effect would reduce whatever inherent advantage rapidity may impart and attenuate the operation's desired decisiveness. Rapid Decisive Operations executed without regard for specific regional factors and concerns may preclude effective coalition development, deny key regional support to operations, and seriously damage future American international influence and prestige.

Although the Rapid Decisive Operations concept is being tested by Joint Forces Command, this falls short of the criteria's comprehensive, repetitive, rigorous, and independent "institutional scrutiny." The *Whitepaper's* consistent deprecation of "legacy" planning and operational methods and of kinetic annihilation-focused conventional combat automatically excludes the concept's greatest potential challenger from consideration. No intellectual

examination of alternative concepts is possible without a sound contending idea, which the *RDO Whitepaper* does not provide.

Despite these serious flaws, Rapid Decisive Operations is still a worthy candidate operational concept. But to continue to vie successfully for consideration as a warfighting paradigm it must be redesigned to reconcile its internal contradictions and establish solid theoretical underpinnings, realistically reappraise its aspirations to sweeping capabilities, refine and align its characterization of supporting deployment and sustainment concepts, embrace the strategic context of its execution, and honestly reevaluate the capabilities and criticality of the Operational Net Assessment. If this reassessment and redesign is not conducted and the concept is allowed to mutate unchanged into doctrine, then the fate of the Republic and the lives of its servants are in jeopardy.

Perhaps one might excuse loose definitions, broad assertions of capabilities, and a degree of incoherence in a document that is intended as an exploratory effort rather than doctrine. However, the *Whitepaper* claims to provide commanders with "a way to ... determine and employ the right force in a focused, non-linear campaign to achieve desired political/military outcomes.[82] This doctrinal resemblance is more striking when the *Whitepaper* stands as the only documentation of "...an evolving concept for conducting ... missions,"[83] and a "...concept for future joint operations."[84]

If the United States is going to retain its military dominance into the twenty-first century then developing well reasoned, theoretically sound, and realistic warfighting concepts and doctrine is of the utmost importance. Colonel David Fastabend, co-author of Army *Field Manual 100-5, Operations*, in 1997, has excoriated the lack of mental rigor in current warfighting concepts and sounds a clear warning of the grim consequences of ill-disciplined near-doctrinal thinking.

> The term operational concept has been hijacked and colloquialized. At the joint level, pseudoconcepts occupy the place of something far more important – a real visualization of the future of joint combat. ... If we do not offer a simple, clear picture of how we will fight, our concept will be supplanted by simpler, narrower images that are easy to sell but impossible to execute.[85]

WORD COUNT 6,473

ENDNOTES

[1] David S. Alberts, John J. Garstka, and Frederick P. Stein, Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority (Washington, D.C.: DoD C4ISR Cooperative Research Program (CCRP) 1999), Chapter 4. The authors provide an outstanding summary of the military and commercial implications of the Information Age, although focused on C4ISR issues. See also Sam J. Tangredi, "The Future Security Environment, 2001-2025: Toward a Consensus View," and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Modernizing and Transforming U.S. Forces: Alternative Paths to the Force of Tomorrow." in QDR 2001: Strategy-Driven Choices for America's Security, ed. Michele A, Flournoy (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2001) for excellent insights (albeit pre-September 11th 2001) into twenty-first century security challenges and transformation respectively.

[2] This brief synopsis of interwar innovation is drawn from Barry Watts and Williamson Murray, "Military Innovation in Peacetime," in Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, ed, Military Innovation in the Interwar Period (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially 406-415.

[3] Ibid., 407. See also James S. Corum, The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992) and Robert M. Citino, The Evolution of Blitzkrieg Tactics, Contributions in Military Studies Series (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

[4] Watts and Murray, 406.

[5] Ibid., 411. See also Maj Bruce H. McClintock, "Transformation Trinity: Vision, Culture, Assessment," Joint Force Quarterly, Autumn 2000, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2000). The author provides a supporting commentary on the elements of successful innovation and highlights the requirement for "...military culture [that] allows advocates of the vision to develop competing theories that are openly assessed." (31). See also Mark A. Johnstone, Stephen A. Ferrando, and Ropbert W. Critchlow, "Joint Experimentation: A Necessity for Future War," Joint Force Quarterly, Autumn/Winter 1998-99, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2001), 15-24 for observations on historically successful innovation and options for future U.S. joint experimentation.

[6] Williamson Murray, ed., Army Transformation: A View from the U.S. Army War College (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 18.

[7] Barry Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 14-15. See also Jack Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), especially Chapters one through three.

[8] United States Joint Forces Command, A Concept for Rapid Decisive Operations: RDO Whitepaper Version 2.0, (Norfolk: United States Joint Forces Command, 2001). Although the Whitepaper claims that Rapid Decisive Operations are effective acroos the spectrum of operations including counter-terrorism and regime replacement, the document is clearly focused on conventional state-to-state warfare. This paper retains the same orientation.

[9] Thomas M. Cooke, "Reassessing Joint Experimentation," Joint Force Quarterly, Spring/Summer 2001, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2001) 103.

[10] Ibid. A quick synopsis of JV 2010's joint operational concepts in execution, as well as the putative intellectual beginning of Rapid Decisive Operations can be found in David B. Haight, Operation JUST CAUSE: Foreshadowing Example of Joint Vision 2010 Concepts in Practice, Research Paper (Newport: U.S, Naval War College, 13 February 1998). Transition from JV 2010 to JV 2020 is also addressed by MajGen Pete Osman, "JV 2020," briefing; available from dtic,mil/jv2020.

[11] United States Joint Forces Command, i. See also Maj Gen Tim Peppe, "Joint Experimentation Program," briefing slides, 25 April 2000; available from http://www.vcds.dnd.ca/dgsp/dda/presentation/07-Peppe-1_e.ppt.; Internet; accessed 14 January 2002.

[12] Ibid, 11.

[13] United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Concept for Future Joint Operations: Expanding Joint Vision 2010 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997), 83.

[14] United States Joint Forces Command, iii and 8.

[15] Ibid, iii.

[16] Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of defense, text of speech to students of United States National Defense University, February 2002; available from http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2002/s20020131-secdef2.html; Internet; accessed 10 February 2002.

[17] United States Joint Forces Command, v.

[18] ibid., 1.

[19] Ibid., 11.

[20] Ibid., v.

[21] Ibid., 12.

[22] Ibid., 35.

[23] Ibid., 12.

[24] Ibid.

[25] LTC Steven J. Eden, "Three Cheers for Attrition Warfare," ARMOR (March-April 2002), 29-31. LTC Eden provides an exceptionally insightful commentary on the modern merits of "old style" kinetic warfare. See also Richard Hart Sinnreich, "The Limits of Lightness," Washington Post, 26 September 2000, p. 27. See also "Intervening in Short-Warning Conflicts," Rand Research Brief; Available from http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB7110/; Internet;

Accessed 14 January 2002. this Rand product states " In many plausible military interventions along the ill-defined spectrum of small-Scale to large-scale conflicts, long-range precision fire alone would not be sufficient, and the JTFs would need ground-maneuver forces..." [Emphasis added].

[26] United States Joint Forces Command, 16. These sentiments are ably addressed from an Air Force perspective in David A. Ochmanek, et al., To Find and Not to Yield: How Advances in Information and Firepower can Transform Theater Warfare (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1998).

[27] United States Joint Forces Command, v.

[28] Ibid., 12.

[29] Ibid., 11.

[30] Ibid., 16.

[31] Dr. James J. Schneider, How War Works: The Origins, Nature, and Purposes of Military Theory," School of Advanced Military Studies Course One Syllabus AY 96-97 (Ft. Leavenworth, USACGSC, 1996), 10. This paper was written in June 1995 and later included in the AY 96-97 syllabus.

[32] Colin S. Gray, Modern Strategy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

[33] Ibid., 1. Gray's observations on the eternal nature of war are also reflected in George and Meredith Friedman, The Future of War: Power, Technology and American World Dominance in the Twenty-First Century (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), xi.

[34] Major General Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 141.

[35] Ibid, 92.

[36] Ibid, 77.

[37] United States Joint Forces Command, 12.

[38] Ibid., 11.

[39] MG Robert H Scales,.Jr., "Adaptive Enemies: Achieving Victory by Avoiding Defeat," Joint Force Quarterly, Autumn/Winter 1999-2000, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2000), 13.

[40] Clausewitz, 80-81.

[41] Robert B. Strassler, ed., The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 351-357.

[42] Clausewitz, 139.

[43] Barry D Watts, Clausewitzian Friction and Future War - McNair Papers #52 (Washington, D.C: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1996), 108.

[44] Col Robert C Owen, ed, Deliberate Force: A Case Study in Effective Air Campaigning (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 2000), xii.

[45] Col Robert Schmidle, "Dominant Maneuver Operational Concept," briefing slides and commentary, Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 23 October 2001.

[46] Alan Beyerchern, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War," International Security, Volume 17, Number 3, (1992), 61. This notion of the non-linear unpredictability of war is strongly supported by Watt's Clausewitzian Friction and Future War. Indeed, Watt's draws heavily from Beyerchern's work. Watt's Chapter 10 is especially significant.

[47] United States Joint Forces Command, 35.

[48] Ibid., 20.

[49] Sisyphus is a mythological character from Albert Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus. "The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of the mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor."

[50] United States Joint Forces Command, 20-21.

[51] Ibid. This is a synthesis of the characteristics attributed to Operational Net Assessment.

[52] COL John Hughes-Wilson, Military Intelligence Blunders (New York: Carrol & Graff Publishers, Inc., 1999), 353-355. See also Williamson Murray and Allan R, Millett, Calculations: Net assessments and the Coming of World War II (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 3.

[53] Scales, 13.

[54] Hughes-Wilson, 355.

[55] Ibid., 358.

[56] United States Joint Forces Command, 20-21.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ernest R. May, ed., Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessments Before the Two World Wars (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 538.

[59] Williamson Murray and Allan R, Millett, Calculations: Net assessments and the Coming of World War II (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 4. This notion of chronic inability to understand other national leaders is echoed throughout Richard E. Neustadt and Earnest R. May, Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

[60] United States Joint Forces Command, 20.

[61] GEN Wesley K. Clark, Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Conflict (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 167.

[62] Dr. Tami Davis Biddle, "Spaatz, Harris, and Tedder," Formal Lecture, U.S. Army War College Military History Institute, 16 January 2002. Quotation is taken directly from lecture notes presented by Dr Biddle and used with permission.

[63] Ibid. See also Tami Davis Biddle, Rhetoric and reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic bombing, 1914-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 253-254.

[64] Clark, 423.

[65] Clark, 419-420. Concerning Afghanistan, it can be argued that even as late as his address to a joint session of congress in late September 2001, President Bush provided an opportunity for Taliban submission to the will of the United States that would have avoided war.

[66] Colin S. Gray, "Why Strategy is Difficult," Joint Force Quarterly, Summer 1999, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1999), 11.

[67] Walter Perry, et al., A Report on the Army Transformation Wargame 2000 (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), 19.

[68] Gen John A. Shaud (Ret), "From JUST CAUSE to Kosovo and Beyond," Air Force Association Symposium; Available from http://www.afa.org/library/reports/ausa.html; Internet; accessed 14 January 2002.

[69] Clark, 178.

[70] Clark, 421.

[71] Scales, 12-14.

[72] Clark, 178.

[73] United States Joint Forces Command, 34.

[74] Ibid., 39.

[75] Ibid., 38-43.

[76] Ibid., 41, 42, 43.

[77] Ibid., 42.

[78] Ibid., 39.

[79] Ibid., 42.

[80] Ibid., 43.

[81] Ibid., 39.

[82] Ibid., Preface.

[83] Ibid., iii.

[84] Ibid., v.

[85] COL David A. Fastabend, "That Elusive Operational Concept," (Unpublished Journal Article, June 2001), 8.

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