



A De-evolution in Military Affairs

By Mark Stout

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The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), a concept birthed directly into adolescence in the success of the post 1991 Gulf War-era, is dead, and unlike Mark Twain's legendary obituary, reports of its demise are not greatly exaggerated. Instead, out of necessity, defense leaders are looking at something completely different--a de-evolution in military affairs (DMA), which will move the Defense Department more toward equipping the man, and away from manning the equipment.

While the RMA envisioned a fusion of computational power, knowledge, bandwidth, and precision effects-delivery to achieve previously unimagined battlefield effectiveness, the DMA looks at missions like counterinsurgency and foreign military assistance to enhance U.S. national security. While the basic RMA recipe brings to mind sanitized, remote-controlled warfare delivered from the American homeland, the DMA envisions the indirect approaches associated with governance, security, stabilization, and development, along with a large dose of irregular warfare capability.

9/11 pointed out American vulnerabilities, and the post-9/11 consequences, including the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, have demonstrated the challenges associated with today's security environment. Although the elements of the RMA are always desirable and often essential, the overall approach has not provided the framework for winning our current wars. The RMA's final fall was due in large part to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and the threats he sees to U.S. national security.

The DMA is most typified by Secretary Gates' now famous insistence that we fight and win the war we're in. Ironically, many of the tools most used in the current conflict, including UAVs, sensors, software, space-based communications and navigation, and battlespace awareness systems, are associated with the RMA. As such, the RMA's downfall has not been an insidious conspiracy to keep the U.S. military from achieving radical new defense technologies or innovation, but the now-obvious realization that a continuum of threats exists and that the defense investment strategy, including people, for those threats must be more wisely addressed. Traditional defense acquisitions, including research and development investments, while useful, have not been sufficient. Given the tasks of regime change and nation building, cutting edge technologies--by themselves--have not provided the commensurate returns or breakout successes expected.

In his recently-released writings, *A Balanced Strategy, Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age*, posted at *Foreign Affairs*, Secretary Gates has restated and summarized many of his previous public thoughts regarding the nation's security. At minimum, these ideas warrant significant consideration based on his positional authority. Beyond that, their implementation will create a number of interesting implications for the defense community. Three particular areas are worthy of further exploration.

First is the issue of the military culture. In that area, two fundamental issues immediately come to mind: promotions and incentive pay. If military members are in positions in which they're rewarded with (or at minimum, competitive for) promotions, and if they are adequately incentivized by things like language or foreign military assistance pay, the services will--over time--have little trouble fulfilling their requirements. If however, those essential elements are missing, the military institutions will continue to fall short of having the skills most needed. The DMA highlights defense-wide educational and training needs in negotiating, informal diplomacy, cultural knowledge, and language proficiency. These skills are developed over long periods, and the current military culture seems unlikely to support the maturation and nurturing of the nontraditional careers of those like T.E. Lawrence or John Boyd. Today, could a captain with aspirations of someday serving as a senior officer afford to invest three years in a doctorate in Afghan studies with a three-year follow-on tour to that area? Or would that officer's career be better off pursuing the much more conventional career path feeding the defense machine?

Second, the Secretary is often pointed to as a leading proponent of soft power, and he notes the imbalance between the military and civilian elements of the U.S. national security apparatus. While he highlights the fact foreign affairs spending has doubled since President Bush took office, Secretary Gates calls for creating a national soft-power capability that far exceeds simple straight-line funding improvements. Although out of his job-jar, supporting Secretary Gates' position should drive the State Department toward something analogous to (or exactly like) their own version of a military academy. Even if the U.S. Foreign Service Academy only has a flag football team, as long as they enhance our national security, it won't matter at all. The State Department needs skills similar to those identified above: negotiating, diplomacy, cultural knowledge, and language. Those skills can be grown more effectively.

Finally, the thorniest issue: the leviathan defense funding, requirements, procurement, acquisition, and contracting systems. These system's generally glacial responsiveness, inherent inflexibility, and byzantine rules keep products from reaching warfighters when needed. If the American citizenry had to follow the same rules as DoD, the country would come to a full-dead-stop. Changing this system will take more than defense leadership: it will require Congressional concurrence, and probably contractor buy-in. Moving away from the one-size-fits-all/something-for-everyone seen in RMA-like ideas will help the defense community avoid not-ready-for-prime-time weapons systems while moving toward the DMA's timely, capable, and beneficial ideas that will yield better returns for U.S. national security. While breakout weapons systems are still needed and will be developed, they won't be pursued with the same vigor or level of effort.

Just as words have meanings, ideas have consequences. The direction Secretary Gates has provided will guide DoD for the next several years, and perhaps beyond. While the world consistently unfolds in ways we don't expect, for today--at least--the DMA is alive and the RMA is dead.

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