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Review: Strategy and the Revolution in Military Affairs: From Theory to Policy

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The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

—William Shakespeare
Henry VI, Part 2

Strategy and the Revolution in Military Affairs: From Theory to Policy by Steven Metz and James Kievit. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013-5050, 27 June 1995, 38 pages, free.

Strategy and the Revolution in Military Affairs could just as easily have been entitled *What Every Officer Should Know about the RMA*. Since its two authors are well-respected military analysts, yet not proponents of any one revolution in military affairs (RMA) theory, they have been able to address this subject matter objectively. As a result, this succinctly written report represents the best synthesis of open-source literature on the RMA published to date.

The body of the report is divided into five sections covering the context within which the RMA is set, the orthodoxy surrounding it, theoretical insights gained from the generation of hypotheses, policy implications of pursuing the current "minor" RMA, and policy options for the future. In regard to the context of the RMA, it can be found to originate in Soviet concepts of a developing military technical revolution (MTR) back in the 1970s and 1980s. In America, a small band of RMA analysts emerged, for the most part in response to the stunning, one-sided victory that took place during the Gulf War. They have focused on defining and describing military revolutions so that the one envisioned as now taking place could be put in its proper historical context.

At a minimum, there is consensus that standoff precision strikes; advanced command, control, and intelligence (C²I); information warfare; and nonlethality are thought to characterize the current RMA. If American forces can harness these new technologies and concepts, they will provide us with many politico-military advantages as proven by the Gulf War. Less consensus exists con-

cerning the significance of the second stage of this RMA, based on advances in robotics, cyber defense, internetworked structures, and other forms of emerging technologies.

Because this is still a relatively new field of research, disagreement exists among these analysts concerning what constitutes a military revolution beyond a "discontinuous rise in military capability and effectiveness." What is needed is a mature theory to work from. Toward the building of this theory, hypotheses surrounding the configurations of military revolutions need to be developed, as does further identification of historical trends in combat effectiveness, military revolution processes, and the patterns they take.

With regard to the policy implications of pursuing the "minor" RMA now taking place, we must ask ourselves about its current utility to our armed forces and the nation they represent. Any cost-benefit analysis must take into consideration increased combat effectiveness against future opponents, likely countermeasures that will develop, our possible overreliance on military power to the exclusion of other forms of national policy, and the potential alienation of friends and allies due to our ever-growing military strength. To this analysis, we must also factor in the political ramifications of a new RMA-based force structure, an alteration in our deterrence capability, and a gradual US slide into strategic inferiority unless we pursue the RMA.

In conclusion, the report discusses policy options concerning future RMA-based paths available. We have three choices, each of which will greatly affect our security posture in the next century. The first is to continue on the path we are now on, aimed primarily at conventionally armed regional aggressors. The second is to put a brake on the RMA to consolidate our military advantages. And the third is to take the revolution in a new direction. It is imperative that we make the right choice and that it be as well informed a decision as possible.

One of the most important attributes of this report is its acknowledgment that both "major" and "minor" RMAs may exist—a position this RMA analyst has long advocated. Further, the discussion of what used to be called low intensity conflict as the

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potential dominant threat in the twenty-first century is highly significant. The authors recognize that a bandwidth problem may exist. If so, this means the United States is focusing on the wrong type of opponent—in general, a conventional, armor-heavy one like the Warsaw Pact or Iraq. The suggestion of a new, autonomous RMA organization—much like RAND of the 1950s—is a provocative and vital concept. Given the constraints imposed by our conventional military institutions, creativity in military thinking really needs to be actively fostered by such a group.

This report has two detractors. References to Marine Corps RMA contributions are, for the most part, absent. By this I specifically refer to the literature generated as an outcome of the "Fourth Generation Debate." Additionally, the Russian perception of "Sixth Generation Warfare," as expressed by Gen-Maj V. Slipchenko, has not been included. Still, these omissions in no way undermine the significant contribution this report represents.

As the authors rightfully suggest, it is now time that we examine currently held RMA assumptions with a set of hypotheses and link them to their potential policy implications. Without the development of a mature theory, the concern is that we will not understand how American force structure, doctrine, and grand strategy should be properly adapted if a "major" RMA is indeed taking place. Because of the national security implications of the policy recommendations made within this report, it is a must read for all military officers.

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The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory edited by Col Phillip S. Meilinger. Air University Press, 170 West Selfridge Street, Maxwell AFB, Alabama 36112-6610, 1997, 680 pages, \$39.00.

The *Paths of Heaven* is an excellent introduction to basic airpower thinking as it has evolved from the early theories of Giulio Douhet (*The Command of the Air*) right through those of Col John Warden (*The Air Campaign*). The book is arranged chronologically, starting with Douhet and ending with a thought-provoking article by Dr. I. B. Holley Jr. that challenges future airpower theorists to learn from their predecessors and

outdo them, both in objectivity and rigorous analysis.

The book provides a good sampling of prominent airpower thinkers from various nations and includes pieces on the usual icons (Douhet, Billy Mitchell, Hugh Trenchard, John Slessor, Alexander de Seversky, the Air Corps Tactical School staff, John Boyd, and Warden). One of the book's greatest strengths, though, is the editor's willingness to draw on a diverse group of contributors. Colonel Meilinger includes articles on airpower as conceived and applied by the US Navy, Continental Europeans during the interwar years (1919–39), the former Soviet Union, and NATO. The articles show how divergent trends in airpower development either helped or hindered the organizations and nations involved, as well as provided a historical context for understanding the actions of those actors. There are also chapters on areas with which most US airmen of any service are familiar (nuclear conflict, low intensity conflict, and interservice integration [US AirLand Battle doctrine]) but perhaps understand less well than they would like to admit. I presume much when I attempt to criticize such an undertaking, but the book has some shortcomings—the most glaring of these being the chapter on space power.

Instead of discussing what little doctrine exists relative to space and the need for reasoned, balanced thinking in this area, the contributing author takes the opportunity to argue a thesis for dividing airpower from space power and creating a fourth service. Whatever the merits of the argument, I would say that it is misplaced in this book. Although the discussion is very timely and the essay well reasoned, it is an attempt at persuasion—not a discussion of doctrine. As such, it belongs in the pages of *Airpower Journal*—not in a book about the evolution of airpower theory.

However, an aspect of airpower thought missing altogether is the increasingly important one known as "operations other than war." This area is difficult to grasp and understand, but it is making up a larger and larger part of airpower's everyday commitments around the world. A discussion of what meager doctrine exists and the way it has been applied, for better or worse, would round out the offerings contained herein. Further, the absence of a bibliography—perhaps one focusing on the seminal thinkers (and the availability of their works) addressed in this volume—is a small matter but would provide a ready guide for people interested in reading the original authors.