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THE REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS AND THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

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Indhold

Abstract

Why does the strongest military power in history not win its wars? The revolution in military affairs (RMA) has given the United States' armed forces a decisive advantage. However, the war in Iraq painfully illustrates that this advantage in military hardware is not easily translated into political results. Utilising sociological theory about 'risk society', this paper seeks to explain why military might does not necessarily lead to victory. It is argued that the very strength of the US military means that America and its allies are increasingly undertaking missions in which they are prepared to only suffer minor causalities. This means that they are vulnerable to very low causality rates. The paper analyses the work of the Chinese colonels, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, arguing that they present one of the first a coherent accounts of how to conduct strategy in a strategic environment dominated by the RMA with a focus on accepting the risks the US and its allies will not accept. The paper concludes that the US is realising that low-risk war have become a liability and that, apart from the strategic and political commitment that makes it paramount for the US and its allies to prevail in Iraq, the US has strategic reasons for accepting causalities in Iraq in order to prove that the US is not risk-adverse.

Introduction

'The enemy we're fighting is a bit different from the one we war-gamed against, because of these paramilitary forces. We knew they were here, but we did not know how they would fight.'[1]

In March 2003 the commander of US Army forces in Iraq Lieutenant General William Wallace had to admit that things were not going to plan. The swift advance of the US and British forces provided its own problems of overextended lines of supply and a powerful sand storm was starting to blow in the desert.[2] Worst of all, however, the resistance from irregular forces proved a much greater hindrance on the advance of the General's forces than the regular Iraq army had. These irregular forces were a motley crew of members of the ruling Baath party, volunteers from other Arab countries as well as the *Fedayeen* and *Al Quts* brigades apparently set up by Saddam's sons who had been inspired by the success of the Somali 'technicals' against American special forces in Mogadishu.[3] The irregulars were gathering strength and they increasingly threatened the vulnerable flanks and logistics of the advancing Army and Marine units. The weather improved and the US forces concluded their march on Baghdad in a pace that took the breath away from military historians, but the attacks from the irregular forces, which General Wallace was honest enough to admit he had not foreseen, would prove to be but a foretaste of the insurgency campaign US and coalition forces would be subjected to when the invasion of Iraq turned into the fight for peace, stability and democracy in Iraq.[4]

The Iraq war has left people with two very different impressions of the military might of the United States. On the one hand 'embedded' television reporters were able to show how the American armour drove to Baghdad in dazzling speed supported by planes and helicopters delivering fire power no army in the world, and

[1] Jim Dwyver 'A Gulf Commander Sees a Longer Road' *The New York Times*, 28 March, 2003.

[2] 2or a description of the situation at the frontline at that time, see Rick Atkinson *In the Company of Soldiers. A Chronicle of Combat in Iraq* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), pp. 159-79.

[3] Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, jr., *The Iraq War* (Cambrdige, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 101-2.

[4] The insurgents seem to be recruited from a much broader segment of Iraqi society than the die-hard baathists that resisted the invasion and they engage in more traditional guerrilla warfare and terrorism. In strategic terms, however, insurgents and irregulars are part of the same 'asymmetrical response' to US power.

by no means the hapless Iraqi army, could withstand. On the other hand victory was not even declared when the pictures of martial effectiveness were replaced by the altogether different image of US marines standing by while Iraqi mobs went amok in the streets of Baghdad. As the insurgents' campaign of terror against Iraqi civilians and aid workers as well as the occupying forces gained pace in the months following the invasion, this image of the powerless superpower came to dominate the Western perception of the war. The feeling that against all expectations, probably including the President's own, the Commander in Chief was unable to control events in Iraqi was probably the strongest card Senator John Kerry played against President Bush in the 2004.

US election campaign

In the debate about the Iraq war, analysts and politicians are fond of contrasting the ease by which the US armed forces 'won the war' with their difficulties in 'winning the peace'. I hate to spoil a good dichotomy, but it is misguided to distinguish between the invasion and the occupation of Iraq. On the contrary, the most important lesson of the Iraq war is that today war entails conventional battles as well as unconventional ones. This means that at the time of writing (the fall of 2004) the war is but no means over and the assessment of it therefore most difficult and any conclusions preliminary at best. It also means that the Iraq war cannot be regarded as one victory (the invasion) and one at the moment undecided – but surely by no means as easy a – victory if it comes to that (the occupation). When seen together the invasion and occupation raises a question, a question which probably should trouble the US and its allies: why does the strongest military power in history not win its wars?

One answer is a history lesson: military power has rarely delivered the final, clean-cut results politicians have imaged it would. Another answer has to do with the way the US imagine the nature of its military might. Since the war against Iraq 1991 the so-called revolution in military affairs (RMA) has been the concept used by politicians, military personnel, researchers and television security experts to explain the way the use of information technologies have enabled the United States to use military force in an unprecedented effective, focused and precise manner.[5] The RMA was based on the new geopolitical re-

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[5] On development of RMA in US military, see Steven Metz, 'The Next Twist of the RMA' *Paramters*, Autumn 2000, pp. 40-53, and Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper 318, (Oxford: The International Institute of Strategic Studies, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 19-32, as well as Williamson Murray and Macgregor Knox 'Thinking About Revolutions in Warfare', pp. 1-14, Murray

alities that came into being with the collapse of Soviet power. In fact that war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq was the first example of how a US led coalition was able to operate unchallenged by any equal great power trying to balance it. The discourse on the RMA, however, is about the future rather than the past. The RMA defines the expectations of military force in terms of what transformed armed forces will be able to do in the future rather than what they are able to do at present.[6] Thus in the final analysis the RMA is about possibilities: new possibilities of wars with low causalities which makes war a more acceptable political means, the possibility of precision-strikes, the possibility of maintaining rather small armed forces while still achieving decisive military results and so on. However, for each thing the RMA makes it possible for Western armed forces in general and the US armed forces in particular to achieve new risks appear. This paper is about these risks.

One way to approach the new security challenges and risks which the RMA produces it to turn to the literature on 'risk society'.[7] This body of literature deals with the way the consequences of modern society, including the development of new technologies, create new challenges (eg., pollution) which in turns transforms the conditions for doing policy. A central concept in the risk literature is what Ulrich Beck terms the 'boomerang effect'. 'Risks display a social *boomerang effect* in their diffusion,' Beck argues.[8] Beck's example is that pollution may give asthma to the daughter of the company president as well as to the son of a worker. '*Perpetrator and victim*,' Beck argues, 'sooner or later become *identical*.'[9]

The difference between risk society and modernity proper is the fact that in risk society the risks of action are inherent in decision-making. In other words, one

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and Knox (eds.) *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300-2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-5.

[6] The Pentagon has begun to refer to the RMA as 'military transformation'. One reason for this shift in vocabulary is that the Defence Department wants to emphasise that creating more agile armed forces is about more than technological innovation. In the words of Rumsfeld's Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR), 'transformation has intellectual, social and technological dimensions.' *Quardennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001 (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 2001), p. 29.

[7] For an introduction to the 'risk society' literature in sociology, see Deborah Lupton *Risk* (London: Routledge, 1999). I have previously argued for ways to use the concepts of risk society, including the 'boomerang effect', in the study of international security, see Reflexive Security: NATO and International Risk Society' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30 (2001), 286-88.

[8] Ulrich Beck *Risk Society*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 37.

[9] Beck, *Risk Society*, 38.

acts knowing the risks of doing so. One cannot do much without risking more. This point is especially important to make in relation to the RMA because one should assume that new weapons and strategies simply give more capabilities for acting. These new capabilities carry their own risks, however. The risk literature terms the risks that arise from new or greater than average capabilities for 'risk-compensation'. An example of risk-compensation is how using seat-belts apparently make driving more risky. When drivers are confident that they will be safe in an accident because of the seat-belt, they tend to drive in a more risky fashion.[10] In effect, the RMA has given the West in general and the United States in particular a strategic seat-belt and, as the risk literature would expect, they have used military force more for the last 15 years. If the United States is able to fight more wars because the risks are lower, then the best way to counter US armed force is to be willing to take the risks the Americans will not take themselves, thereby making the strategic environment much more risky than the US armed forces expects. The risk literature will identify this kind of behaviour as 'risk-taking', and risk-taking is in fact well-known within the strategic literature as well.[11] This paper on RMA will deal with risk-compensation and risk-taking in order to show what happens when RMA are introduced into the strategic equation. We turn to risk-compensation first.

[10] John Adams *Risk* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.113-34.

[11] T. C. Schelling 'The Retarded Science of International Strategy' *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, IV: 2 (1960), pp. 128-9.

The RMA Calculus of War

From the First World War to Vietnam 1 per 15 soldiers died or were wounded in action when the United States went to war. If one translates these numbers to the Iraq war of 2003 the United States should have lost 16,000 troops.[12] On 12 April 2003, when the major population centres, including Baghdad, were under US control, the American armed forces had lost 108 dead, 399 were wounded and 14 were captured. This meant that 1 per 480 soldiers involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom had died, and while every death was a tragedy beyond statistics, it meant that one day of combat in Iraq carried the price of five lives while one day of combat during the Second World War had carried the price of 211 persons and a day of fighting in Vietnam carried the price of 18 lives. While it is no doubt true that any casualty weighs heavy on the mind of the leaders who commits soldiers to combat, the prospect that 1 per 15 will die each day one wages war must weigh a lot heavier than the prospect that 1 per 480 will die. Carl Conetta calls it 'a new calculus of war'.[13]

The risk literature identifies such a calculus as a case of 'risk compensation'. The risk compensation calculus says that if the level of acceptable risk is constant then the reduction in the risk of doing something may actually mean an increase in the particular activity. For example, studies of race drivers show that they have more road accidents than the average motorist. One would expect the opposite: that since the race drivers were so much better at driving a car that they would have far fewer accidents than the average driver, but John Adams argues that precisely because the race drivers are better at driving they take more chances, drive faster etc. and therefore they end up in more accidents. In other words, the race drivers compensate for their ability to reduce risk by taking more risks.[14] The 'RMA calculus of war' is a similar case of risk compensation. The risks of waging war are falling and this leads to more wars.

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[12] Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Instant Lessons of the Iraq War*, Executive Summary, Fourth Working Draft, April 23, 2003, p. 17-18. The number is based on the assumption that ca. 250,000 troops were involved. See also [http://lunaville.org/warcasualties/Summary.aspx] (14 May 2004).

[13] Carl Conetta, *The 'New Warfare and the New American Calculus of War*, Project on Defense Alternatives, Brief Memo No. 26, 30 September 2002 [http://www.comw.org/] (13 May 2004).

[14] Adams, *Risk*, pp. 54-5.

President Bush was speaking of this RMA-calculus of war in April 2003 when he addressed workers at the Boeing plant in St. Louis where F-18s are made:

> 'More than ever before, the precision of our technology is protecting the lives of our soldiers, and the lives of innocent civilians. The overwhelming majority of the munitions dropped in the Iraqi campaign were precision-guided. In this new era of warfare, we can target a regime, not a nation.'[15]

The President speaks of the way civilians are protected by the precision of RMA-weapons and how US troops using these weapons are even less at risk. He does not mention the enemy army, in this case the Iraqi army, and with good reason. The Iraqi army has been so unfortunate to be subject to attack from far more advanced US forces twice in 12 years. Each time the Iraqi army tried to engage the US forces in open battle and each time the Iraqi forces suffered heavy losses. Carl Conetta estimates that 9,200 Iraqi combatants were killed during the war of 2003. It is difficult to say whether the number is correct, but if it is, this would mean that 85 Iraqi soldiers were killed for each American killed.[16] While the Iraqi wars were perceived as wars of manoeuvre with swift results and low casualties from a US point of view, the Iraqi side had every reason to perceive them as wars of attrition in which the Iraqi army had 383 deaths per day. That is 172 more people dead per day than the 211 deaths per day the United States suffered during the Second World War.

Martin Shaw describes this discrepancy in the new calculus of war as 'risk-transfer militarism'.[17] Now, one could argue transferring risk to the enemy is what successful military strategy has always been about, but Shaw's point is that the United States and its allies presents the new wars as risk-free when in fact the risks for Western soldiers are reduced at the expense of the soldiers and civilians of the countries attacked. The US President does not mention the Iraqi military causalities and US military briefers prefer to refer to civilians accidentally killed

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[15] George W. Bush *President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Boeing Integrated Defence Systems Headquarters, St. Louis Missouri, 16 April 2003 [http://whitehouse.gov] (22 April 2004), §20.

[16] Carl Conetta, *The Wages of War: Iraqi Combatant and Noncombatant Fatalities in the 2003 Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Commonwealth Institute, 2003). However, this number is far higher than Iraqi claims of 3 April 2003 cited by Cordesman to 1,252 killed and 5,100 injured, Cordesman, *Instant Lessons*, p. 20.

[17] Martin Shaw *Risk Transfer Militarism and Legitimacy of War after Iraq* [http://www.theglobalsite. ac.uk/press/402shaw.htm] (31 October, 2004).

by American forces as 'collateral damage'. Furthermore, the US armed forces do not produce statistics on how big this 'collateral damage' is. In a report for the Project of Defence Alternatives Carl Conetta writes about the 'disappearing dead' arguing that, a part form the 9,200 Iraqi soldiers and irregulars killed during the war, 3,700 Iraqi civilians died during 'major combat operations'.[18]

Shaw and Conetta challenge the view that the RMA can produce 'clean wars', but their argument actually shows that far from making civilian deaths disappear the RMA is placing civilian casualties at the centre of attention. As Anthony Gordesman argues, 'one irony behind the increased lethality of modern weapons and tactics is that they can be used to defeat the enemy with far fewer secondary costs.' Because the US air force can pinpoint a target precisely use the Global Positioning System (GPS) the planes can drop a 500 lb bomb instead of a 2,000 lb bomb and still be certain to destroy the target.[19] The improved accuracy means that there is no longer any need to destroy a town in order to save it. At this point risk compensation sets in. Compared with the total wars of the twentieth century and even compared with guerrilla wars like Vietnam (1965-75) or Afghanistan (1979-89), it is almost improbably safe for civilians in the new RMA wars. Of course, the level of safety does vary greatly from time to time and from place to place. While conventional battles and air raids on 'leadership targets' can leave civilians next door unharmed, more traditional fights, like the US reinvasion of Fallujah in November 2004, place civilians at considerable greater risk.

While civilians may neither be targeted nor regarded as regrettable but necessary 'secondary' targets, they are still at risk. A race driver driving fast through a village may not hit anyone, but the fact that he drives fast still makes it dangerous for children to play by the road. The fact that the RMA allows more wars to be fought put more civilians at risk, and inevitably some of these risks are realised in the killing of innocent civilians. This does not mean that one multiple the risk to civilians with the number of wars being fought because the RMA calculus of War, but the Iraq war of 2003 shows that even a campaign that resulted in extremely low levels of collateral damage

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[18] Carl Conetta, *The Wages of War: Iraqi Combatant and Noncombatant Fatalities in the 2003 Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Commonwealth Institute, 2003). However, this number is far higher than Iraqi claims of 3 April 2003 cited by Cordesman to 1,252 killed and 5,103 injured, Cordesman, *Instant Lessons*, p. 20.

[19] Cordesman, *Instant Lessons*, p. 20.

can create such upheavals in the society invaded that a significant number of civilians are victims of the subsequent unrest.

Because hitting civilians are a risk not a deliberate act, each case in which civilians are hit are a problem for the narrative the United States and its allies want to tell about their wars. The irony is that the problem would not occur, or at least not occur in this way, if the United States and its allies targeted civilians deliberately like they did during the Second World War. Thus the fact that the RMA enables armed forces to avoid civilian casualties to a degree unheard of in historical terms has a 'boomerang effect' because it focuses attention on the civilians that are killed anyway.

In spite of the way civilian causalities highjack the political agenda, war has become a true means of policy, as Clausewitz imagined it, to the United States because the RMA enables the American armed forces to fight at very low risks for themselves and with a very high probability of winning. Perhaps the greatest risk of war used to be that its outcome could not be predicted and thus a government did not know whether the use of military force would blow up in its face. But in the case of the invasion of Iraq, Anthony Gordesman notes that 'the Coalition had so great a superiority in every area that Iraq's capabilities were trivial in comparison.'[20] The United States could not fail to prevail. Another reason why the United States can go to war with few concerns for the outcome is the fact that the balance of power is so much in the United States' favour that one military victory does not trigger another military challenge. By invading Iraq the United States did not end up in the position of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914 who launched an operation against Serbia in which they were set to prevail but by doing so provoked a European war the Empire was bound to loose.

However, the RMA does not only make it easier for the United States to project military power, as RMA technology becomes more readily available and more countries invest in the logistics to project military power, it has become easier for *everyone* to use military power. The British troops fighting along side the Americans in Operation Iraqi Freedom had a even lower casualty-ratio than their American brothers in arms: 1 per 1,451 British

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[20] Cordesman, *Instant Lessons*, p. 12.

soldier died in the war.[21] Such low levels of casualties make it easier for any British Prime Minister to commit his forces to battle, but in the particular case it also made it easier for Tony Blair to go against public opinion and many of his own backbenchers and take part in the war. However terrible the death of 31 British soldiers were, the impact was still smaller than it would have been if thousands of British troops had died.

The RMA is also making it easier for small countries to project military power. Previously, friction would have prevented small powers like Denmark and Norway to project military power half way around the world. In 2003, Danish and Norwegian F-16s using precision-munitions provided close air-support for US Special Forces operating in Afghanistan. Thus a Danish white-paper on defence published in August 2003 concluded that 'the rapid innovations in military technology is of crucial importance because it makes it less costly and less risky to use military force'.[22]

It is less risky to use military force, but that does not result in a care-free attitude to casualties. As in the case of civilian casualties, the technological ability to limit causalities highlights the deaths that actually do occur. The lower combat casualties mean that a much higher percentage of casualties than previously are the result of mistakes made by the armed forces themselves. During the war against Iraq in 1991 23 percent of the US soldiers that died in the Gulf War were killed in friendly fire.[23] Friendly fire and other causes of death, which the armed forces bring on themselves, are boomerang effects of the RMA. The increased effectiveness and precision of the RMA-forces means that one of the greatest risks in combat is no longer the enemy but one's own comrades. Friendly fire is a particular sensitive problem for the US' coalition partners as they from time to time find themselves at the wrong end of US guns. The integration of forces that is at the heart of the RMA makes it increasingly difficult to coordinate with allied forces at the same time as it becomes increasingly easy to shoot them. Of course there are technological fixes to 'blue-on-blue' causalities, but such fixes

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[21] For statistics on British and other allied casualties in Iraq see [http://lunaville.org/warcasualties/Summary.aspx] (14 May 2004). The figure is based on the assumption that 45,000 British troops took part in the combat phase of the Iraq war, see [http://www.operations.mod.uk/telic/index.htm] (14 May 2004). On the British war, see Keegan *The Iraq War*, pp. 165-82.

[22] Translated from Danish by the author, *The Security Policy Conditions for Danish Defence*, August 2003, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [www.um.dk] (30 September, 2003), p. 37.

[23] Cordesman, *Instant Lessons*, p. 18.

will have to work against the trend of ever faster target acquisition systems and the beginning automatization of firing systems and platforms. Even if the factors that make automatic, but accidental, kills more likely are overcome, such systems will probably reflect the development of even better force-protection technology, and as such the percentage of friendly fire incidents may stay the same because the enemy is able kill even fewer soldiers.

Friendly fire incidents show how the deaths of individual soldiers have become a story in its own right. When 221 soldiers die per day, the story of the individual death becomes lost in the crowd. The individual stories are told because they are believed to be emblematic of the fate of all. When so few soldiers die the 24-hour media has plenty of time to tell each individual story and in that case each individual death must have merit. If not, generals and politicians will be seen as having squandered the life of their soldiers – and in that case it does not matter whether it only was one solider who died and not 2,000 thousand. So the boomerang effect of low casualty rate is a correspondingly increased focus on the casualties wars still bring.

The RMA makes it easier to fight wars, but harder to justify the death and destruction that war still brings. Perhaps the greatest boomerang effect of the RMA is that it gives a false sense of security in the belief that wars are relatively cost free. While this is undoubtedly much easier to start a war, it is still very difficult to end it. I began this section by describing how during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 US forces only lost 108 soldiers, but till 28 June 2004 when the US formally handed the authority of the Iraqi government over to the Iraqis 715 more US soldiers and marines had died.[24] In September 2004 the number of dead US service men and women crossed the psychologically important threshold of 1,000.[25] It still leaves the Untied States with a casualty-rate far below that of Vietnam, but it shows that Western forces are weakest when they are challenged in unconventional combat where their technology does not give them a decisive advantage. Such counter-strategies are the next example of a RMA-boomerang effect.

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[24] [http://lunaville.org/warcasualties/Summary.aspx] (14 May 2004).
[25] [http://icasualties.org/oif/USChart.aspx] (18 November 2004).

Risk Strategies: Who Dares Wins

War used to be risky business. A government never knew what it actually would achieve by fighting a war and what the costs of winning would add up to in the end. The strategic promise of the RMA is to reduce the risk of war and pre-empt or manage the risks that remain, thus making war a true continuation of policy. This rational calculus of strategy is based on the assumption that strategic actors seek to minimise risk. If the United States can lower its own risks when waging a campaign, while increasing the risks of its opponents, then it has achieved a unrivalled strategic pre-eminence. However, research on strategy as well as research on risk suggests that while minimising risk is the strategy most modern people regard as most rational, taking risks may prove even more rewarding. John Adams argues that 'excessive prudence is a problem rarely contemplated in the risk and safety literature'.[26] Adams points out that reducing risks are of course a good idea, but at some point new risk-reducing measures are actually just making it harder for people to do their job because the risk the measures are trying to reduce are inherent in the job itself. Adams believes that the risk literature overlook the fact that a lot of people like their jobs or enjoy their sports *because* they are risky.[27]

From the berserks to the brinkmanship of US Secretary of State John Forester Dulles risk-taker strategies have been an important part of the strategic landscape, but they have more scope today because Western strategy in general and US strategy in particular are based on minimising risks. With so many wars based on the RMA Calculus of Risk a risk-taker strategy can much more easily undermine Western resolve than in the case of wars that are waged by necessity. Thus risk-taker strategies are the antithesis the perfect Clausewitzian war, and as such central for the understanding of the strategic practice the RMA will produce.

Few have described risk-taker strategies better than Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui of China's People's Liberation Army. Their work on 'Unrestricted Warfare' serves the same intellectual purpose as *On War* did to Clausewitz. From the point of view of the elites in the Third World the United States' victory in

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[26] Adams, *Risk*, p. 55.
[27] Adams, *Risk*, pp. 65-6.

the Gulf War of 1990-1 send a message, as clear as the one Napoleon sent the European *ancient regimes* at Jena: either you adapt to the new ways of politics and economics which gave us this victory, or you will be dominated in the new age at hand.[28] After Jena Clausewitz set out to define the new maxims of war Napoleon understood so well in order to be able to beat him. The Chinese colonels told the *International Herald Tribune* that they began their studies in order to overcome the sense of powerlessness and humiliation they felt when US carrier groups were able to face down the Chinese during their 1996 'military exercises' around Taiwan. After that experience the colonels realised that China had to rethink its strategy if the country was to be able to get its way in face of US military power.[29]

The Chinese colonels' main point is that the most powerful weapons in the US arsenal may not be the RMA platforms, but the framework within which the US is able to deploy the new weapons. As a status quo power, the United States is, for example, able control the international economy via the IMF or the rules of trade set in WTO. Within these dimensions, the colonels argue, non-state actors work to increase the power of the West in ways that may follow the invisible hand of the markets but gives very visible advantages to the West. In their book Qiao Liand and Wang Xiangsui thus return to the case of the financier George Soros again and again. Mr. Soros' ability to raid a nation's currency and thus undermine its financial standing is seen by the colonels, obviously schooled in materialism, as an attack on society's base structure. From a strategic point of view they do not see any difference between George Soros and Osama bin-Laden. The terrorist makes 'the Western world shake in its boots'[30] because al-Qaida attacks Western societies on dimensions where their military superiority is to little avail, while the banker attacks the equally defenceless economies of the non-Western world. 'Who is to say that George Soros is not a financial terrorist?,' ask the Chinese colonels.[31]

The colonels clearly identify the American concept of using full-spectrum dominance to manage the battle-space, but they want to off-set the US superiority in

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[28] Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999). English translation by FBIS [www.c4i.org] (12 June 2002), p. 4.

[29] John Promfret 'China Looks Beyond Old Rules' *International Herald Tribune*, August 9, 1999.

[30] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 47.

[31] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 48.

battle by broadening the scope of the battle-space. What the Americans naturally regard as the underlying conditions for international order (e.g., global financial markets) thus becomes a battleground for the Chinese colonels: 'there is no domain in which warfare cannot use, and there is almost no domain which does not have warfare's offensive pattern'.[32] They term this a 'grand warfare method' based on 'ten thousand methods combined as one'.[33] Where the US strategic planners would regard the conflict of the market place as a civilian type of conflict in with people like Mr. Soros engage in healthy competition with no direct strategic implication, the Chinese colonels regard any conflict as something which can be harnessed as a part of an overall strategy. Where is no dimension of human intercourse that cannot be militarised? The 'combination warfare' which the colonels propose is thus based on the idea that China can argument its relatively weak military capabilities by moving the war into other spheres.

Moving war into other social spheres was of course a defining characteristic of total war as we knew it in the twentieth century, but 'combination warfare' is not total in the sense that all of society is mobilised in an effort to generate the capabilities (military or otherwise) the state needs to win a war. The colonels operate in a post-sovereign framework where the economy is part of transnational structures that makes it both difficult and unnecessary for it to be mobilised the way the British or the German economy was mobilised toward national ends during the Second World War. The Chinese colonels believe that today it is a matter of influencing other societies by manipulating the transnational structures. The demise of total war does not mean the end of large-scale conflict, Qiao Liand and Wang Xiangsui argues, but is a result of changing societal circumstances that redefines the meaning of 'total'. 'Even in the so-called postmodern, post-industrial age, warfare will not be totally dismantled. It has only re-invaded human society in a more complex, more extensive, more concealed, and more subtle manner.'[34]

The Chinese colonels' 'subtle manner' of war is about turning the conditions for Western military action against the West. In other words, causes become effects and effects causes. The colonels want to devise a strategy that ensures that US strategy does not create full-spectrum dominance but instead produce

[32] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 189.

[33] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, pp. 117-19.

[34] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 6.

boomerang effects that will adversely influence first the American military's dominating position and then the political will to fight a given conflict. Qiao Liand and Wang Xiangsui suggest doing this in three ways: by turning the RMA Calculus of War into a boomerang effect, by targeting civilians and by turning US international dominance into a weakness.

If the RMA Calculus of War makes it more probable that the US government will be willing to risk using military force, then the US' adversaries should aim at increasing the risks of the conflict. This strategy places the ordinary American soldier in centre of attention, the Chinese colonels' note:

'These common American soldiers who should be on the battlefield have now become the most costly security in war, like precious china bowls that people are afraid to break. All of the opponents who have engaged in battle with the American military have probably mastered the secret of success – if you have no way of defeating this force, you should kill its rank and file soldiers.'[35]

What the colonels advocate is for opponents of the United States to take the risks of attrition. They have to accept that an RMA force can inflict enormous casualties on their side, but at the same time they must realise that if they are prepared to risk the life of thousands of troops while the United States is reluctant to risk the life of a few soldiers then they are able to turn the odds in their advantage. This was what happened in 1993 in Somalia when local warlords were able to mobilise the people of Mogadishu to launch themselves against American forces. The American Rangers and Delta-Force operatives were able to inflict terrible loses on these untrained fighters, but still 18 Americans ended up dead and 70 were wounded.[36] Such casualties were not part of the calculus for an operation of little perceived strategic importance and the US troops were withdrawn. The United States did not appreciate at the time that the attack was probably coordinated by al-Qaida and thus formed an important part in a developing doctrine for how to increase the risks for US forces operating in the region.[37] The fact that the US would only accept relatively low risks in Somalia

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[35] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 93

[36] For the now famous description of the battle, see Mark Bowden *Black Hawk Down. A Story of Modern War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

[37] Richard Clark *Against All Enemies. Inside America's War on Terror* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 87-8

sent an invitation to anyone who wanted the 'Yankees to go home' to kill US troops.

In January 2001, Osama bin Laden recited a poem on how an al-Qaida suicide squad rammed the USS Cole with a dinghy filled with explosives killing 17 US sailors. The poem not only shows the al-Qaida leader's fascination with the technology of his opponent (a fascination he shares with the Chinese colonels), but also his belief in the hubristic nature the power of the RMA:

> A destroyer, even the brave might fear,
> She inspires horror in the harbour and the open sea,
> She goes into the waves flanked by arrogance, haughtiness and false might,
> To her doom she progresses slowly, clothed in a huge illusion,
> Awaiting her is a dinghy, bobbing in the waves.[38]

Bin-Laden's strategy is to prove that full-spectrum dominance is 'a huge illusion'; and this strategy was successfully employed by Iraqi insurgents following the US invasion in 2003. They soon realised that the best targets for undermining the US project for creating a new Iraq after Saddam Hussein's regime was to target the most risk adverse elements of the reconstruction effort. Thus by bombing the UN headquarters and targeting aid workers and foreign civilian contractors the insurgents were able to prevent the British and American occupation forces from creating a civilian infrastructure that could deliver on the promise of a better life after Saddam. In the absence of a large civilian element of the occupation the insurgents were able to force the occupation forces to be very much in the forefront and the continued terror bombings forced them to be offensive as well. The result was a further alienation of the Iraqi people towards the British and American forces in the spring of 2004. As the occupation grew more unpopular, the occupying powers were increasingly isolated because they were not able to internationalise Iraqi governance. The Americans and British had to run the risks of occupying Iraq mostly on their own, and the risks kept mounting.

What happened in Iraq shows how targeting civilians can have a boomerang effect on the political and military standing of the United States or other Western powers when they have deployed forces overseas. Targeting civilians in acts of

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[38] Qouted in Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda. Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 49.

terrorism in Western countries themselves is another way of creating boomerang effects. Following the attacks on a suburban rail service in Madrid on 11 March 2003 the Spanish electorate kicked out the government that had led them to war against Iraq in the US coalition and thus apparently put them at risk for al-Qaida terrorism. The new government wasted no time in announcing the withdrawal of the Spanish troops in Iraq. While different governments and different electorates may act differently when faced with the effects of their actions, the Spanish example serves to show that creating costs back home for foreign military adventures can radically change the risk calculus of war. Where the RMA is making it easier to deploy military force, even for minor powers, it has also become more dangerous to do so. The Chinese colonels conclude:

'Precisely in the same way that modern technology is changing weapons and the battlefield, it is also at the same time blurring the concept of who the war participants are. From now on, soldiers no longer have a monopoly of war.'[39]

According to the colonels, the third way for risk-takers to create a boomerang effect is to take war beyond the military sphere where the RMA will ensure US victory. Not only should strategists seek to combine different capabilities, Qiao Liand and Wang Xiangsui argue strategists should also seek to combine different types of international agents in networks that will give US military intervention boomerang effects on other areas.

'The national strategy for ensuring the realization of national strategy targets, what is generally called grand strategy, also necessitates carrying out adjustments which go beyond military strategies and even political strategies.'[40]

The Chinese colonels thus point out that by taking risks, which the United States is not willing to take and which the RMA allows it not to take, one might effectively counter the power of the RMA. This realisation place the Chinese colonels among the first real theorists of the RMA because they are able to focus on the strategic consequences of using RMA weapons and strategies rather than just focusing on the possibilities the RMA creates for strategists. Furthermore their focus on 'combination' makes them able to link international order and

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[39] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 48.

[40] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 118.

military power in ways most Western strategists do not, because they all too often regard the international order as natural rather than as an asset for strategy. However, Qiao Liand and Wang Xiangsui ultimately fail to become 'the Clausewitz' of the RMA' because they do not take the American response to their counterstrategies into account.

The Chinese colonels' distain for American culture means that they basically do not think the Americans are smart enough to realise the limits of their technological powers. This is clearly not the case. The Defence Review of 1997 notes that 'U.S. dominance in the conventional military arena may encourage adversaries to use such asymmetric means to attack our forces and interests overseas and Americans at home'.[41] By studying the colonels' counterstrategies as boomerang effects one is able to understand how the American awareness of all the possibilities for counter its RMA-power constitute an integral part of the US understanding of the RMA. In other words, the boomerang effect is part of RMA rather than its negation.

The focus on 'cyber-warfare' (the use of hackers and computer-viruses to penetrate the control systems of critical infrastructure) reflects the fact that Western vulnerabilities are as much in focus as the new strategic opportunities. The United States' military constructs strategic information warfare as a threat rather than a strategic opportunity.[42] The 2001 American defence review argues that 'the increasing dependence of societies and military forces on advanced information networks creates new vulnerabilities.'[43] Though one can hardly expect a official document to praise new opportunities for offensive strategic warfare, the focus on 'cyber-war' does not stem from a wish to wage 'cyber-war', but from the realisation that it is advanced late-modern societies, like the United States, that are most vulnerable to cyber-warfare than most of its possible adversaries.[44]

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[41] *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 1997), Section two.

[42] The United States is reported for the first time to be developing a paradigm for offensive information war in OPLAN 3600. As this contingency plan neither seem to involve the strategic use of information weapons nor challenge the belief that the United States is more vulnerable to information warfare than most prospective enemies, the construction of information warfare as a threat rather than an opportunity remains. In fact, OPLAN 3600 seems to be a means to strike back following an information attack rather than a plan for first use of information warfare. See, 'United States: Vulnerable to Cyber Attack', *Stratfor*, 31 March 2001, [http://www.stratfor.com/europe/commentary/0103302345].

[43] *Quardennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001 (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 2001), p. 31.

[44] Freedman, *Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, p. 57.

'Cyberattacks,' Steven Metz notes, 'might erode the traditional advantage large and rich states hold in armed conflict.'[45]

The asymmetrical answers to the RMA power of the US armed forces also constitute a boomerang effect in relation to how relevant the military capabilities supported by the RMA in fact are. What the RMA really does is to place traditional platforms, like tanks and helicopters, in an information grid that makes them much more powerful and agile than anyone had expected when they were designed to counter a Soviet attack on Western Europe. Still, these weapons are designed for battles with large-scale conventional forces. Faced with insurgents in Iraq, the US military has to prove that the RMA also provides a technological fix to guerrilla warfare. Otherwise, the success of RMA forces will in fact have moved the real military contest from an armoured battle to traditional infantry fighting – in which case the US will need a much bigger army.

Although the Americans are painfully aware of the boomerang effects, they cannot act in ways that produce no boomerang effects. The boomerang effects become part of the RMA Calculus of Warfare and this make a very different calculus from the means-end rational way of thinking of war we know from Clausewitz. For this reason you cannot simply conclude that the RMA has made wars so easy for the West that it can simply transfer the risk of waging it to others. As most policies in risk society, war has become its own contradiction.[46] Yes, it is easier to wage it, but it is also a lot more risky to do so. And no, the increased risk of waging war does not mean that less wars are fought, because the way the Western governments perceive the security environment they do not dare to risk not intervening in failed or dangerous states or wage war in other ways.

[45] Steven Metz, *Armed Conflict in the 21st Century: The Information Revolution and Post-Modern Warfare* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000), p. xviii

[46] To many it would come as no surprise that wars do create more problems than they solve: What is new is that these problems are not only pointed out by 'peaceniks' but an integrated part of the political and military strategists perception of campaign.

Conclusions

The RMA challenges the Clausewitzian understanding of war which has dominated the West's, and much of the rest of the world's understanding of how wars are fought and won. Instead of seeking decisive battles by overwhelming force, as Clausewitz prescribed, strategists of the RMA are focusing on how to manage war by achieving 'full-spectrum dominance'. Perhaps it should be no surprise that two Chinese colonels are among the most informed observers of this transformation of strategy. Their thinking is clearly informed by the classical Chinese thinking on war, as formulated by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* 2,500 years ago. A way of thinking that departs radically from the means-end rational strategy Clausewitz thought in terms of:

'Clausewitz' way of thought goes back at least to Aristotle and is based on the distinction between means and ends. By contrast, it is a fundamental characteristic of Chinese thought that such a distinction is absent – to Lao Tzu and his follows, admitting its existence would constitute a departure from *Tao*. Accordingly, the Chinese texts regard war not as an instrument for the attainment of this end or that but as the product of stern necessity, something which must be confronted and coped with and managed and brought to an end.'[47]

Qiao Liand and Wang Xiangsui describe the 'Tao of Risk Society'. To the Chinese colonels' strategy is a way of reflecting on the necessities of war rather than a means-end schema which wars are to fit.[48] In other words, they find that 'measures are inseparable from objectives'.[49] From this point of view war is process that involves a number different dimensions (political, social, economical, psychological as well as military) rather a decisive battle. This was the way Sun Tzu regarded war. Where Clausewitz used water as a metaphor for what comes in the way of 'real' war, Sun Tzu uses water as a metaphor for war itself. 'An army may be likened to water,' *The Art of War* states, 'for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness.'[50] Sun Tzu rejects the direct approach (Cheng) in favour of the

[47] Creveld, Martin van *The Art of War. War and Military Thought* (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 118-119.

[48] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 212.

[49] Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 210.

[50] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, VI, p. 27

indirect approach (Ch'i).[51] Instead of offering battle, Sun Tzu argues that one should avoid battle unless one is absolutely certain to win. Otherwise one should focus on depriving the enemy the possibility for carrying out its strategy.

One example of the way which means and ends are compressed in a process of conflict is the way civilian casualties, or collateral damage, has become a major focus in the Western public's perception of war. In order to shape the perceptions of the campaign one of the most important strategic tasks is to frame the use of military force in a narrative that provides the war with a beginning and a end that justifies every element of the strategic process in between. Thus in spite of fighting a campaign that sparkled in the records of military history, British and American briefers had constant difficulties in presenting the Iraq war of 2003 as a success because the story of the war began with a threat of weapons of mass-destruction, which no one were subsequently able to find, and ended, not with the liberation of the Iraqi people as expected in the spin-doctor' script, but with looting and insurgent activities.[52]

The way in which defining problems and the means to deal with them becomes the real political battleground is a cornerstone of the risk literature. In risk society the political process is about choosing which risk to act upon, and which to ignore, and how to deal with the new risks that arise as a consequence of your actions. The RMA has made these choices easy in the sense that the new technology has allowed for very low casualty rates among the high-tech forces. However, the low casualty levels have themselves highlighted the casualties that inevitably occur. Thus since the end of the Cold War the United States have fought a number of conflicts it would probably not have fought if the stakes had been higher. For that reason opponents prepare to take the risks, which the US would not take, could comparatively easily increase the risks of a operation to the point where the United States did not believe that the operation were worth the trouble. The engagement of Somalia is a case in point. This has led people to argue that the RMA is really making it too easy to commit troops and too difficult to actually use them.[53] After more than ten years of 'RMA-operations'

[51] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, V, p. 11. Liddell Hart thus believed Sun Tzu to be an early exponent of his own 'indirect approach', B. H. Liddell Hart, 'Foreword', Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

[52] On the contrast between the dazzling effectiveness of the campaign and the media reaction to its end, see Keegan, *The Iraq War*, pp. 204-19.

[53] Jeremy Black *War in the New Century* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 97.

a boomerang effect of low casualties are beginning to show, however. President Bush highlighted this in June 2004 as a reason for staying committed in Iraq: 'The terrorist movement feeds on the appearance of inevitability. It claims to rise on the currents of history, using past America withdrawals from Somalia and Beirut to sustain this myth and to gain new followers.'[54] In the President's analysis, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut and after the 'Black Hawk Down'-episode in Mogadishu had weakened the ability of US military power to deter its enemies in Iraq and elsewhere because the United States at these instances had shown that the US was in fact not willing to accept the risks of low intensity conflict and had withdrawn its troops. America's enemies were prepared to die and had little respect for the risk-aversiveness of the US armed forces. Thus the boomerang effect of the ability to achieve low causalities might be the need to show the willingness to accept continuous causalities. In Iraq, the United States have sought to reassert its resolve to wage war at the cruel price of 2 dead soldiers a day.[55]

[54] George W. Bush, *Remarks by the President at the United States Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony*, Falcon Stadium, United States Air Force Academy, June 2 2004 (Washington, D.C.: The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2004), §29.

[55] The precise number of fallen servicemen seems to be 2.13, as of 31 October 2004 [http://icasualties.org/oif/] (31 October, 2004).

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