# The American Strategic Revolution

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In Afghanistan, and now more visibly in Iraq, we are witnessing the latest stages of a strategic revolution. This revolution is not merely the strategic effects gained by using precision-guided munitions. Rather, in both cases, the unparalleled ability of the United States to project and sustain joint military power has been displayed graphically to a degree unprecedented in military history.

Never before has any country or coalition successfully projected naval and air power into Afghanistan or Central Asia. Indeed, many of the foreign commentaries directly after September 11, 2001, could not begin to conceive of such an operation being successful or being mounted at all. Therefore, we must acknowledge that the revolution in military affairs (RMA), at least in its current incarnation, is as much about maneuver as it is about firepower and precision strike. This conclusion will undoubtedly shape future decisions about weapons acquisitions and force structures, but cannot be taken to mean that the Iraqi war or future wars will be cakewalks. However, it does mean that the synergistic effects of combining precision strike with what the armed forces call dominant maneuver have transformed the nature of contemporary warfare greatly. This

transformation apparently is beyond both the cognitive and material capabilities of most other major militaries or potential threats to our security.

We must also remember that this achievement is possible only through the synchronization first of joint forces: naval, air, land, space, and computer, and, second, through the level of interoperability that we have been able to create with our allies. Although those levels of interoperability vary with the war and the ally, the Northern Alliance being obviously a very different ally than the British military, in both cases the coalitions' achievement in maneuver have been revolutionary. U.S. joint forces remain capable of providing both logistical and aerial support to our ground forces in Afghanistan. In Iraq the ground forces covered unprecedented distances since operations began. In neither case have we surmounted the "fog of war," nor should such an outcome be reasonably expected, prophecies to the contrary notwithstanding. Unexpected events and "fog" are inherent in all warfare because all war is about the strategic interaction of two thinking and willing enemies. Therefore all strategy is not only interactive, it is inherently dynamic, fluid, and subject to unforeseen or unexpected decisions by commanders and leaders. The unexpected must be expected, and we should not become *excessively* disoriented should that occur.

Even taking the unforeseen into account, these two wars open a window upon future war and demonstrate that joint operations, performed at an unprecedented level of proficiency, are leading to ever higher levels of achievement with respect to both precision strike and forces' maneuverability. These revolutionary achievements, in turn, will trigger, or perhaps raise, the existing debate within the U.S. armed forces to a higher level. Undoubtedly a major post-war debate within the U.S. armed forces will take place over the capabilities, structure, and missions of all of the services.

As the Army prepares for this debate, it will be presented the opportunity to explain better its *strategic utility*. Assessments of required force structure and end strength cannot remain confined to the need for boots on the ground to hold ground, but must now relate to the unprecedented capability of maneuver forces supported by precision-strike from all the services. Consequently the role of armor on the battlefield will be reexamined. Clearly the need for heavy armor and for land-based artillery remains essential, perhaps even more in austere and rough terrain than was previously thought to be the case. Likewise, critical arguments about the role of helicopters and the appropriate tactics for using them will undergo searching examination. Evidently the only “retreat” or abortive operation was one in which sustained and coordinated

ground fire drove away Apache helicopters. In other wars, too, helicopters have failed to realize their potential. In Chechnya since 1999, Moscow has lost 50 helicopters, a fact that goes to the heart of the debate over the need to devise appropriate tactics for effective maximization of their capabilities.

Equally, if not more importantly, those assessments must also relate to the need for sufficient forces to fight urban battles and to maintain order in transitional situations as we move to peace operations after the end of hostilities. Already there are congressional calls that the United States is under-manned in Iraq with regard to current stability operations. Therefore, the post-conflict situation in Iraq, which alone provides the strategic justification to the world for what we have done, must also be examined carefully regarding lessons for future force packages and service missions.

But the need to rethink the role of heavy armor and organic artillery, helicopters, and post-conflict structures and missions must take place within a context that assimilates the most basic strategic lesson of Iraq, i.e., the importance of joint synchronization of firepower and maneuver, which alone offers maximum operational gains. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the Marine Corps and the Army have demonstrated a revolutionary capability for maneuver, provided that they are closely integrated in joint operations with the Navy and Air Force.

This new capability should become the basis for military planning because both of these operations have demonstrated that precision strike capabilities, notwithstanding the revolutionary and enormous progress they have made, cannot by themselves deliver *strategic* outcomes. As the United States wages these wars, we must continue to remember that the synergies of joint and combined operations invariably produce the most beneficial outcomes. The revolutionary achievements of our land forces confirm this, a fact we must not lose sight of as we move toward possible future warfare.