

The Pentagon's Virtual World Of 'Military Transformation'

by Carl Osgood

In 1776, the fledgling American republic, still fighting for its independence from the British Empire, faced a seemingly impossible military situation. Among other problems, it had no navy capable of protecting its thousands of miles of coastline from the Royal Navy, then the most powerful fleet afloat. Robert Morris, the "Financier of the Revolution," in a Feb. 1, 1777 letter to naval hero John Paul Jones, noted this problem. "It has long been clear to me," Morris wrote, "that our infant fleet cannot protect our coasts; and the only effectual relief it can afford us is to attack the enemy's defenseless places and thereby oblige them to station more of their ships in their own countries, or to keep them employed in following ours, and either way we are relieved so far as they do it." Thus did Morris establish the principle that being too weak to defend, it was necessary to attack!*

John Paul Jones set out to prove the principle, and did so with great success, as did other heroic privateers in the service of the Revolution.

Almost 170 years later, Gen. Douglas MacArthur would prove it again when, after having been ordered out of the Philippines by President Franklin Roosevelt, he concluded that the only way to defend Australia from a Japanese invasion was to discard the British-authored Brisbane Line plan, which contemplated leaving two-thirds of the continent to the Japanese, and instead, defend Australia from 1,000 miles forward in New Guinea. MacArthur's situation in July 1942 was only marginally different from that described by Morris in 1777. MacArthur had too few forces with which to defend Australia, and the forces he did have were poorly equipped and under-supplied. So, he did the only thing he could do: Go on the offensive!

Now, fast forward to 2007. What if Morris, or MacArthur, or George Washington, or any of the other successful American military leaders of the past had the Information Age tools that are available to military commanders today? Today, the situation could be modelled in a computer-run virtual environment, which would include satellite and laser radar mapping of the terrain, the ability to track and record, in real time, movements of people whether on foot, in vehicles, on water, or by air, and profiles of the major

population groups and their leaders. Scenarios could be run through this environment to generate possible courses of action. Those courses of action could then be presented to the commander as a "menu of choices" for deciding what to do next. "We can anticipate the best outcome, the worst outcome, the most likely outcome, and provide the decision-maker a broader, analytical underpinning for his decision than a legacy staff, a manual approach, is able to create," said Dave Ozolek, the director of the Joint Futures Lab at U.S. Joint Forces Command in Suffolk, Va., in an Aug. 7 interview. The Joint Futures Lab is where the modelling and simulation experiments to create this capability are performed, using a supercomputer installation specifically funded for this purpose by Congress.

But the algorithms used in the virtual environment are not the same thing as human cognitive activity. Could the computer even digest a concept such as, "When you are too weak to defend, it is necessary to attack"? Indeed, what possible courses of action might the computer come up with, if the situation that MacArthur faced in July 1942 were run through the simulation? Or that of George Washington on Dec. 24, 1776, after having been driven out of New York by the British, and forced to retreat all the way across New Jersey into Pennsylvania? Would the computer come up with Washington's plan to re-cross the ice-choked Delaware River, and attack the Hessians at Trenton and the British at Princeton, thereby keeping alive the cause of the Revolution just at the point that the British thought they had the war won?

Aside from the exclusion of that quality of creative thinking (for which gobs of information is not a substitute), there is another crucial difference. Morris, Washington, and MacArthur were dedicated to the principles of a republic committed to promoting the welfare of its citizens and the establishment of those principles as a beacon for the world. The Bush-Cheney Administration is committed to an imperial principle of domination of the world, as reflected in its own strategic policy documents. Cheney, as Secretary of Defense in the George H.W. Bush Administration, had overseen the production of a policy that, in the words of Nicholas Lemann, in an April 1, 2002 *New Yorker* article, "envisioned a future in which the United States could, and should,

* Holloway H. Frost, *We Build a Navy* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1929).

prevent any other nation or alliance from becoming a great power.”

That policy outlook caused an uproar inside the Pentagon and the national security institutions at the time, and was rejected by the cooler heads inside the administration, including then-National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. But, the policy’s authors, who included Paul Wolfowitz and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, brought it with them when they came back into government with Cheney in the George W. Bush Administration in 2001. The pre-emptive war policy enunciated in the September 2002 National Security Strategy, is a reflection of that fact. So, this is the strategic outlook that the designers of the virtual worlds being developed at the Joint Futures Lab are actually in the service of.

Better Decision-Making?

Ozolek and his colleagues argue that the modelling and simulations that they are working on will provide commanders with much better analysis to back up their decision-making by making it possible to anticipate unintended consequences. “What we’re trying to do,” he said, “is highlight if you do this, there’s this X percent chance that this really bad thing could happen; there’s this Y percent chance that this really good thing could happen; the highest probability is that the following conditions will emerge from this. Frame a course of action, and then the commander can decide what risk he is willing to take, where does he want to reinforce things, what course of action will give him overall the most positive strategic outcome.”

Had this capability been available to then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and L. Paul Bremer, the man Rumsfeld installed in Baghdad to run Iraq in May 2003, would Bremer still have disbanded the Iraqi Army? If we take Ozolek at his word, then the scenario could have been run through the virtual environment, and the resulting analysis should have said, among other things, that sending 400,000 armed men home with no jobs, no paychecks, and no future, was a really bad idea and could help plant the seeds of a future insurgency. What the analysis would ignore is the *intention* behind the decision, which should be obvious when looked at in combination with Bremer’s de-Ba’athification order and the order to shut down and privatize state-run factories.

As *Washington Post* reporter Tom Ricks wrote in his book *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, stability was the *target* of Cheney and the neo-con war party, not their goal. The instability fostered by Bremer’s orders, which could have been foreseen by any person knowledgeable about Iraq, without a computer simulation, not only helped spread chaos and years of bloodshed; it also opened up the opportunities for profit by military contractors ranging from Halliburton to Blackwater to Britain’s Aegis Defense Systems, this privatization of war being another key feature of the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs.

The Pre-Emptive War Doctrine

Rumsfeld’s and Bremer’s decisions in Baghdad take us back to the broader *intention* underlying their policy. That intention can be seen spelled out in British intelligence operative Prof. Bernard Lewis’s 1970s “Arc of Crisis” and Prof. Samuel Huntington’s early-1990s “Clash of Civilizations” policies. The Arc of Crisis policy, to use radical Islam as a weapon against the Soviet Union, was implemented in Afghanistan, first by Jimmy Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and then by the Reagan Administration. When the anti-Soviet Afghan mujahideen of the 1980s turned out to be the terrorists of the 1990s, this phenomenon was regarded as an “unintended consequence” of the U.S.-backed guerilla war, by the same officials who were instrumental in implementing that policy. What many did not understand was that, in fact, it was just another chapter in Great Britain’s 200-year-old “Great Game,” of divide and conquer in Central and Southwest Asia, in which both Lewis and Brzezinski are thoroughly schooled.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided the opening that should have been used to implement Franklin Roosevelt’s long-delayed post-World War II plans to rebuild the world according to what he termed “20th-Century American methods,” as opposed to 19th-Century British imperial methods. Instead, Huntington came along with his “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, which claimed that conflict among civilizations, such as between the Christian West and the Muslim East, was our unavoidable future. This became the basis on which the Cheney war party promised to subdue the world using “shock and awe” methods, to “protect” us from cave-dwelling terrorists and any country that might have the potential to challenge our status as “the world’s only superpower.” Though not necessarily expressed in these terms, this outlook permeates and dominates American strategic thinking, as indicated by recent repeated statements from senior Army leaders that we are now living “in an age of persistent conflict.”

Alexander Hamilton, writing in *Federalist No. 8*, in 1789, seemed to anticipate where such an outlook would lead, when he wrote, “The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free.”

The methods being developed at U.S. Joint Forces Command, being, as they are, based on behavior modification in the military, political, economic, and other realms, rather than on a moral commitment to defend the general welfare, seem to be facilitating our way down the road Hamilton warned of. To that degree, they are the opposite of the kind of creative thinking typified by Washington, MacArthur, and Franklin Roosevelt.