

# Iraq War Fuels Military Transformation Debate

by Carl Osgood

The sudden fall of Baghdad after a messy three-week campaign will, no doubt, add further fuel to the debate that has long been raging in military circles regarding military transformation. Were the transformational concepts, long advocated by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, instrumental to the military outcome, or were the troops on the ground forced to resort to much maligned but more traditional “kinetic methods” to defeat Iraqi forces? Rumsfeld has long reflected the utopian notion that, to fight the wars of the 21st Century, the military has to transform itself, placing much greater emphasis on special operations forces, airpower, precision-guided weapons, and information technology. With military operations in Iraq transitioning into an occupation, has the war proved out the theories that Rumsfeld has been promoting?

The drive for military transformation rests on a number of concepts, which have become buzz-phrases at Joint Forces Command and elsewhere. These phrases include “operational net assessment,” “effects-based operations” (EBO), and “rapid decisive operations” (RDO). These concepts have been attacked by Marine Lt. Gen. Paul Van Riper (ret.), who has derided them as little more than “bumper stickers and slogans.” Van Riper is a Vietnam War veteran whose last position before he retired in 1997 was as commander of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (see *EIR*, Dec. 13, 2002).

One indication of the depth of the pre-war debate on military transformation is a volume published last September by the U.S. Army War College, entitled *Transformation Concepts for National Security in the 21st Century*. The book is a collection of 12 papers written by students of the War College, and the views expressed range from Van Riper’s to the “we’ve already been doing them since time immemorial, but now we have the technology to do things with them that weren’t possible before” view. The most interesting among the papers are those critical of the notions of effects-based operations and rapid decisive operations, because they appear to have the most bearing on events that are now transpiring in Iraq.

## Chess Game or a Boxing Match?

In an essay entitled “Effects-Based Operations: The End of Dominant Maneuver?” Col. Gary Cheek identifies Air Force Maj. Gen. David Deptula as one of the key theorists for EBO. Deptula was part of “the black hole,” the planning cell that laid out the air campaign in the 1991 Gulf War, who

bragged, in a 2001 paper, how, in the first 24 hours of the air campaign, more targets were attacked in Iraq than were hit in Germany in all of 1942 and 1943. He described a targetting methodology which was designed to generate effects, rather than merely destroying targets. In other words, if an integrated air defense system could be rendered ineffective by cutting off electrical power to the radars, or by rendering the operations centers for the system unusable, the same effect is accomplished as would be by destroying the individual radars and fire units, only with a lot fewer bombs. This frees up resources for more important targets. Deptula's main point about the Gulf War is that, while EBO were contemplated against Germany in World War II, the mass required to destroy a particular target, such as a ball-bearing factory, for example, was simply too great to be able to launch simultaneous attacks against numerous critical targets. With the Iraq war, it became possible to essentially smother the entire country in what Deptula calls "parallel warfare," rather than ringing up lists of targets in sequential order.

Cheek notes that Deptula's argument goes a step further. Cheek writes, "His notion was that it is the projection of force rather than the presence of force that achieves effects. In some circumstances the projection of force can replace deployed forces and achieve the same effect." Cheek takes this to mean that technology has made ground forces less relevant. For Cheek the issue is, "Can effects-based operations, using stealth, precision, and parallel warfare, 'compel the enemy to do our will?' " In Cheek's estimate, such a notion is highly problematic. The first issue is that of intelligence, which, under the transformation concept, comes out of the operational net assessment. "Accurate intelligence," he writes, "may well be the Achilles' heel of all effects-based operations." He gives examples from past wars to demonstrate the difficulties of making accurate assessments of what is happening to the enemy under the stress of war. An EBO, he says, "is an analytical form of warfare; it anticipates events and enemy reactions, then acts, assesses, and acts again." He calls this analogous to a chess match, but "such a concept becomes increasingly difficult to implement as one transcends the levels of war from the strategic, to the operational, and finally to the tactical level."

Indeed, war at the tactical level resembles a boxing match much more than it does a chess game. Cheek points up the importance of seizing the initiative, and warns that EBO "can diminish initiative in favor of more careful analysis. . . . They may serve to paralyze operations, in a search of intellectual perfection to the detriment of the good enough." "Tactical success," he says, "will not be a product of catchy rhetoric or claims to be 'effects-based,' but only the product of detailed doctrine, hard training, and practiced battle drills."

### Coercion vs. Compulsion

A similar assessment is put forward by Lt. Col. James L. Boling, in an essay entitled "Rapid Decisive Operations: The

Emperor's New Clothes of Modern Warfare." Boling picks apart Joint Forces Command's definition of RDO. The issue is one also identified by Cheek: What is it that you are trying to do to your enemy? Cheek cites Clausewitz, who defines war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will." Cheek provides a model that pairs coercive force with compelling force. Coercive force provides the adversary a way out, but if that fails, then compelling force must be used, "ultimately imposing policy and strategic objectives on the enemy." Boling notes that compulsion occurs when a state annihilates its enemy's means to resist and can impose its will entirely through the application of force. Such victories, he says, are rare in history, however, and quick victories of annihilation are more often the result of serendipity than artful planning and execution. Coercion, rather than compulsion is the method of choice for today, however. "Coercion is not about the defeat of military forces, but about the defeat of the enemy's will," Boling writes.

It is on the issue of the will of the enemy that things get dicey for RDO, in Boling's view. "If a nation at war refuses to accept the changes in its affairs desired by its adversary, the war cannot truly end and the adversary's will is thwarted." Here, he takes a shot at operational net assessment, on which RDO depends. Boling writes that Joint Forces Command's RDO Whitepaper's "discussion of the operational net assessment suggests that future United States planners and decision makers will know even more about the enemy than he knows about himself. Confidence in the Operational Net Assessment is predicated on a fundamental faith in the ability to see with clarity what the enemy thinks, how he thinks, why he thinks that way, and the criteria, timing, and intent of the future decisions he will make." He calls ONA, "the labor of Sisyphus."

This problem does not seem to bother the transformation gurus, however. In an article on Air Force transformation in the Fall 2001 issue of *Aerospace Power Journal*, General Deptula writes, "In the post-Cold War environment, the United States is interested in controlling aberrant behavior and shaping hot spots, not annexing territory. This requires a different military campaign mind-set—one that focuses on coercing the target nation through coordinated military and diplomatic means. In a coercive campaign, effects-based employment of appropriate elements of national power can modify an opponent's behavior to comply with U.S. strategic objectives."

### The Return of Attrition Warfare

So, what if the enemy doesn't change his behavior the way the ONA predicts, and the way EBO and RDO are supposed to accomplish? Boling writes that the RDO Whitepaper says, "While achieving effects is our primary method of influencing the enemy, in some cases the attrition of his forces may in fact be a primary means of producing the desired effect." Said another way, by Boling, "if the precisely calibrated, informa-

tion-centric RDO fails to work, the force can resort to the discredited legacy practice of wholesale kinetic destruction, which, since it is admittedly attrition, takes considerably longer, rendering RDO neither rapid nor decisive.” Indeed, that seems to have been the case in southern Iraq, days before U.S. troops entered Baghdad. The April 1 *Washington Post* quoted a Special Forces officer telling a senior Army commander in southern Iraq, “Sir, we don’t want a war of attrition, but we are in one.” The commander agreed.

In a footnote, Boling favorably refers to an article, “Three Cheers for Attrition Warfare,” in the March-April 2002 issue of *Armor* magazine, by Lt. Col. Steven J. Eden, a tank battalion commander at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Eden takes exception to the notion that old-fashioned forms of warfare, what the transformation crowd calls “kinetic,” are obsolete. He argues for applying attrition warfare successfully, which is how the United States beat Germany in World War II, and Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War. He specifically says that does not mean there is no place for maneuver warfare, but he gives many examples of famous generals who used it, almost exclusively, and lost, including Napoleon, Rommel, and von Manstein. Of current trends in military strategy and force transformation, he warns that “our conventional warfighting ability is inevitably eroded as we spend more of our resources on bargain-basement units”—special forces, light infantry, and the like.

Eden also criticizes what the transformation outlook has done to the debate. Under a paragraph headed “Alvin Toffler,” Eden writes, “Soldiers are so sensitive to charges that they are always preparing for the last war that they now consciously seek to prepare for the next one. This is admirable, in theory, but in practice, they are lousy at it. . . . The operative assumption is that technology is going to make the next war radically different from the last, but it’s a postulate based on a mixture of pop psychology, bad history, and wishful thinking.” He concludes that the tank, because of its mobility and firepower, is the most valuable thing on the battlefield, and we will need it in the future, “because the next big war will be won by attrition not maneuver.”

Paralleling both Boling and Eden, Cheek writes that the problem with the EBO approach is that it leaves the decision with the enemy—“he may decide to capitulate, or may decide to prolong the conflict to the last man.” The only way to compel the enemy is through close combat that leaves him “no choice but capitulation.” “Strategic policymakers,”



*Do myriads of precision weapons and advanced communications in the air, mean that the troops on the ground are far less necessary and numerous? Traditional military officers don't think so.*

Cheek writes, “must recognize that it is essential to end successful warfighting in conjunction *with* strategic attack, *with* operational fires, and *with* tactical fires. The assertion that effects-based operations and ‘control warfare’ have ushered in a new era in warfare defies history, theory, and misreads the changes technology offers.” Airpower by itself, Cheek writes, lacks the compelling force that ensures decisions in conflict. Perhaps that should be the real lesson of the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

Missing from the debate is the proper definition of when a nation should or should not go to war. As Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche has noted, the only legitimate reason for a nation to go to war is to create the basis for durable peace. In the case of the United States, that legitimacy flows from the efficient commitment to the General Welfare, as that is defined in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, a commitment that has its origins in the 15th-Century Italian Renaissance. Competent military strategy can flow only from that commitment.

Secretary Rumsfeld, however, seems concerned with none of this. According to an April 14 report in the *New York Times*, Rumsfeld has sent up to Capitol Hill proposed legislation that would give him greater authority over personnel policy, including over appointments at the level of the four-star ranks, leading some officers to charge that he is weeding out the high command to preserve like-minded officers. Such an approach would be coherent with the policy adopted by the Bush Administration, which is one of perpetual wars of civilizations, which are to be fought under the utopian conceptions of military transformation.