



Force Structure and Force XXI

In considering what type of future force structure the United States needs, two potential models emerge — an evolutionary force and revolution in military affairs (RMA) force.

The evolutionary force assumes that future wars will be fought in essentially the same manner as we have fought our most recent ones and that it is critical to maintain large segments of the active force structure at a high level of combat readiness. While technological innovations and threat will alter the configuration of our forces, there will be no radical changes in their size, structure or operations. This model sees an evolutionary but not radical change to our forces

Designing our forces around the RMA concept reflects a decision to employ the latest and most innovative technologies and to modify our force structure to better use these technologies. This concept assumes that there is a low likelihood of military conflict for the foreseeable future and that time will be available to do the radical kind of restructuring necessary to design an RMA force. Obviously, the RMA force is a more radical approach to force structuring; this is because the traditional methods of estimating force requirements will not be used. RMA forcing works on the concept that these forces will not fight the way our forces traditionally have and will instead employ the most lethal forms of technology to achieve decisive victory.

The RMA force uses the operational concept of attacking the critical nodes in an opposing force. When these nodes are attacked and destroyed, the effectiveness of the opposing force is eroded far more than by randomly destroying units. This operational concept obviously assumes that the RMA force will

have dominant battlefield knowledge and the precision weapons to destroy the identified critical nodes.

An RMA force employed against nodal targets could generate the combat potential of a conventional, evolutionary force several times its size. The obvious cost-savings would be significant, the requirement to have large standing forces (particularly ground forces) would not exist, as nodal RMA forces would be sized against the size of the opposing military force's critical nodes.

The weakness of this argument is that nodal targets are primarily fixed. To date, there has not been enough data developed to show what real effect destroying nodal targets will have on an opposing force. Historically, the same form of argumentation was used in Vietnam — destroy critical centers in North Vietnam and their ability and desire to prosecute the war would end. It did not. Nor did this happen during Operation Desert Storm. Even though coalition forces went after the key command and control centers in Iraq, it took the ground campaign to conclude the conflict.

Precision attacks against nodal centers of gravity also will not work in every type of scenario, simply for the reason that some likely uses of American forces are in environments where there are no nodal centers of any significance to an opponent's ability to maintain a military campaign. In Haiti or Bosnia, having only a force capable of launching precision attacks against opponents' strategic centers of gravity would have severely restricted U.S. ability to determine or influence the course of events. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their possible use by nongovernmental terrorist forces would also make the effectiveness of precision weapons questionable. Likewise, the period required to shift our force structure to an RMA force,

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combined with the possibility that sudden technological developments would make our weapons obsolete, could increase rather than lower potential threat.

While the necessity for the United States to have a capability to employ highly precise and highly effective weapons against potential opponents' command and logistic centers is critical, it is also critical that the United States maintain an ability to use a complete, or full spectrum, balanced force for potential conflicts. Maintaining a balance in our future force structure, and with it a capable and trained ground component, is the prudent course to take.

The point to be made here is that the U.S. Army, while concurrently embarking on its program to field an RMA force, will of necessity have to continue to be prepared to answer the nation's security needs across the full spectrum of possible operational scenarios — from a variety of operations other than war to full combat operations. The Army's ongoing Force XXI process involves efforts to transform the Army into a

21st century force. The process involves experimentation and demonstrations of a wide range of capabilities — many related to domination of the information-age battlefield through equipment digitization — to determine changes needed in organization, equipment, training, leadership development, doctrine and soldiers. The goal is to field a product-improved Army XXI by the year 2010. This force will lay the foundation for the Army beyond — the “Army After Next.”

In summary, the Army should not merely be expected to evolve its capabilities over the next decade plus in an incremental approach to capturing technology; a more visionary approach is needed. Nor can the Army devote its scarce resources toward achieving an RMA capability without regard to other operational responsibilities. Rather, the Army's program to exploit the power of information technology through its Force XXI process must be allowed to mature so as to achieve the capability to overwhelmingly defeat a future peer competitor while continuing to maintain its capability to conduct operations across the spectrum of operational possibilities.

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