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RMA in der Zukunft: Nukleare versus konventionelle Strategie

Mit der Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) bauen die USA ihre Machtposition im globalen Gefüge konsequent weiter aus. Der Autor argumentiert, dass, ungleich der nuklearen RMA in den 50er-Jahren, der Ausbau der amerikanischen Machtposition zu einem strategischen Vorteil für die ganze westliche Welt in der konventionellen Kriegführung führen könnte. Andererseits könne diese unipolare Superiorität auch der Nährboden für neue Gefahren sein.

Lawrence D. Freedman*

During the 1990s the «Revolution in Military Affairs» (RMA) came to refer to the strategic consequences of the marriage of systems that collect, process and communicate information with those that apply military force with speed and precision. Advocates of this revolution believe that if this marriage can be consummated then it will reinforce established tendencies towards the creation of an American military capability far superior to that of any other country or even group of countries. While enemy commanders are still attempting to mobilize their resources and develop their plans, they will be rudely interrupted by decisive and lethal blows inflicted by American forces for whom time and space are no longer serious constraints. The most revolutionary aspect would be to change the role of armies who would be able to call on distant firepower that could still be accurately and almost instantaneously delivered, so allowing the troops to move in a smaller and lighter units. This opens up the possibility of fighting wars with scant risk to American troops, let alone the home population and territory. The idea was born as a result of the experience of the 1991 Gulf War. Then an inferior opponent made the mistake of attempting to defeat the United States in a conventional battle. The belief was that building further on the new technologies it would be possible to extend even further the gap between the United States and all others.

The U.S. as the sole power

In terms of conventional war this is undoubtedly the case. There is no reason now to doubt that modern weapons have a high probability of hitting targets when sent in the right direction at the right time or that there have been significant developments in precision guided munitions, stealth weapons, sensor technology and defense

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suppression techniques, although the marginal difference these developments make may not always be that great. To the extent, then, that a revolution is under way, it is rather particular. Only the United States has the economic resources and the military infrastructure to begin to follow this path. Allies and enemies alike risk being left on the fringes of this revolutionary process. This leads to a large, though obvious conclusion: that the United States is designing a game that only it can play in a league in which it is the sole participant.

RMA in the 50s leads to RMA in the 90s

The term «revolution in military affairs» was also used in the 1950s by Soviet strategists to describe the impact of thermonuclear weapons on warfare. The basic observation was that weapons of such devastating power rendered conventional weapons irrelevant. There was no point in fighting old-fashioned tank and artillery battles on the ground when cities could be destroyed in seconds. The obvious problem was that a nuclear power would hold back from inflicting such a devastating attack if it was likely that his own cities would be attacked in retaliation. Thus for nuclear weapons to be usable in warfare some way had to be found to achieve a decisive strategic advantage, either through pre-emption, or developing forms of defence against missiles or aircraft carrying the weapons, or possibly by developing new coercive tactics that would push nuclear exchanges into areas that would be, at least in the first instance, less catastrophic. One possibility, for example, was to use them as a way of bringing extra firepower to a conventional battlefield.

All of these possibilities were explored: none provided the sort of breakthrough that would lead any political leader to initiate nuclear war. Instead nuclear strategy settled down into reinforcing mutual deterrence, relying on a residual uncertainty that if matters got out of hand in any direct conflict between the superpowers there could be escalation into nuclear exchanges. By the end of the cold war, the great powers were drifting back to plans for conventional warfare, at least as a means of reducing dependence upon nuclear deterrence. Many of the new RMA technologies arose out of this shift.

Old nuclear RMA and new conventional RMA: coexistence!

It may now be that western conventional superiority has a deterrent function all of its own. Following from the nuclear RMA, the conventional RMA may extend the range of wars that are now unlikely to take place. Another possibility is, that the ability of western countries to dominate a conventional battlefield increases the incentives for adversaries to look for more irregular forms of warfare, including nuclear use. It is already the case that Russia, which has seen its conventional position diminished dramatically over the past decade, no longer promises not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, while President Bush has made clear his anxiety that the so-called «rogue states» will acquire nuclear capabilities in order to compensate for conventional weakness. The worst nightmare remains that of a terrorist organisation gaining access to a crude nuclear device, perhaps taking advantage of lax security connected with the old Soviet arsenal. The US has even recently started to talk about retaining a degree of nuclear flexibility as a means of dealing with threats such as these, even though there are very few targets that can not be attacked successfully using the sort of capabilities that come under the RMA. In effect the old nuclear RMA and the new conventional RMA are now co-existing side by side, and even feeding off one another.

Gelesen

in Proceedings vom Februar 2002, Seite 96: «Space-Based Weapons Are Wrong»

Spacebased assets are our eyes, ears, and ability to exercise effective command and control.

However, the relative clarity that space provides is only one part of the equation. The other, far more important part is knowing what we are seeing and then being able to act on it in a manner and at a time that makes the difference in the battle. This is where other countries cannot match us in the foreseeable future. The U.S. investment in space pays off daily – even if it is insufficient – and it will yield greater dividends as newer tasking, processing, and exploitation and dissemination capabilities come on line.

But space-based assets are only one part of the command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence array.

Before spending countless dollars to further militarize space with weapons, the United States should endeavor to «negotiate the need away» through international treaties. If diplomatic solutions are not possible, the United States would be free to proceed with development of space-based weapons.