Keeper File

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Marshall at the Revolution

Washington's smashing victory in the 1991 Gulf War increased predictions of a coming "Revolution in Military Affairs," or RMA. Some held that a combination of information technology and precision strike, wedded to sound operational concepts, would cause a basic shift in how wars are fought. In early 1994, Secretary of Defense William J. Perry established a steering group to coordinate all RMA work in the Pentagon. It was led by legendary defense thinker Andrew W. Marshall, DOD's director of net assessment. In a 3,300-word memo, Marshall affirmed his belief in RMA. He also warned that the US was not paying enough attention to truly major threats 20 to 30 years in the future.

"RMA Update"

Andrew W. Marshall
Director of Net Assessment
Memorandum for the Record
May 2, 1994
Washington, D.C.

Find the full text on the *Air Force* Magazine's website www.airforce-magazine.com "Keeper File"

At the first meeting of the RMA Steering Group, Bill Perry talked about what he saw as a military technical revolution in the 70s and 80s. He mentioned that in the 70s the Carter Administration made a conscious choice in allocating resources among the four broad categories of force size, rate of procurement, readiness, and R&D.

The choice was to maintain force size, reduce procurement, reduce readiness (resulting in a hollow force), but maintain R&D. The bet was that at some time in the future, budgets would go up and the fruits of the R&D effort could be used to procure new lines of equipment that would lead to a very effective military. That bet paid off. But in the current period, the choices among those four categories have been to reduce force size, limit procurement, maintain readiness, and maintain R&D. The question he raised was whether this was a good bet on the future. ...

In my judgment three elements form the broad context for US strategic choices. The first is the transition still going on from the geopolitical structure that existed during most of the Cold War to a new structure of several major powers of which the US will very likely be the strongest. ... The second major trend is the spread of technology, weaponry, and skills out in the world, which may create a number of regional powers. These powers will take some advantage of available technologies, using them in ways that change the character of power projection for the United States and in fact for all of the larger powers. The third aspect is the prospect of a revolution in military affairs that may occur over the next 20 to 30 years, superimposed on a changed geopolitical situation. This remains a hypothesis or conjecture but one that seems plausible given the rapid pace of change in a number of technology areas. Since we are at the beginning of this revolutionary period, we cannot foresee its character and outcome; therefore the planning context is very uncertain. ...

We will want to pursue revolutionary military improvements to maintain an adequate margin of capability both over the smaller regional powers and in the long term against potential major competitors. ...

What then are the implications of this general situation for the issue that Perry raised? I would say that since we are currently in a rather favorable strategic position, with no immediate large-scale threat, we have time to think things through. I would further reduce force size (and even readiness in some part of the force) if I had to, in order to free up resources to focus on longer term goals and the intellectual problems the prospective RMA poses. ...

I would focus more on long-term goals than we are currently doing. We are not paying much attention to the potential emergence of really major competitors 20 to 30 years from now. The Defense Guidance focuses on two MRCs [major regional conflicts], near term, and moderate sized opponents who do not use nuclear weapons or display any special technical capability. ... The next 10 to 20 years ought to be seen as a period of experimentation with new concepts of operation and new organizational arrangements, searching for these and testing and experimenting with them. ... We will need to look at production of new equipment to fully explore what the technologies, weapons, and concepts and organizations can do. ...

The prospective revolution in military affairs provides both an opportunity and a challenge because other countries will try to exploit the technologies in ways that create unforeseen dangers and problems for us. The lesson of the 20s and 30s that is most compelling to me is that in the first few years of the war, the countries or military establishments that do well are those [that] have made the appropriate effort to develop concepts of operation, made the organizational changes, and did the training and doctrine development. Our challenge is to be the leader in this even more than in the development of technology or of new weapon systems. In fact the design of new systems needs to be tailored to the concepts of operation that are seen as being the most efficient and effective. ■