The New Maskirovka

Countering US Rapid Decisive Operations in the 21st Century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: The New Maskirovka

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Thesis: By attacking American knowledge through deliberate, broad based misinformation (Maskirovka), future enemies can counter US attempts at RDO and achieve victory through a prolonged campaign.

Discussion: Current visions that will shape the US military over the next twenty years indicate that the future force will consist of lighter, rapidly deployable forces that will leverage precision and stealth as force multipliers. Using the new information technologies as an enabler, future joint forces will be tailored to specific contingencies and will employ the doctrinal concepts of *precision engagement, dominant maneuver, focused logistics* and *full dimensional protection* to accomplish its objectives under an overarching warfighting concept: *Rapid Decisive Operations* (RDO). The key enabler of this overarching concept is the achievement of decision superiority gained through knowledge attained in a cognitive process. This study proposes that such a warfighting construct can be effectively countered through a deliberate, long-term effort to attack the cognitive process and manipulate knowledge. Portraying western-style information operations as limited and inadequate, the analysis suggests that an effort reminiscent of Soviet style maskirovka would be necessary to be effective against a future US RDO effort. Though by no means easy to implement comprehensively, the study contends that a maskirovka effort, imbedded within an appropriate warfighting strategy, could counter the future US military with devastating success.

Conclusion: Future US forces must be flexible enough to contend with unexpected circumstances. As such, the concepts of information superiority and decision superiority should be considered useful tools for a future joint force, not the cornerstone upon which the force is designed.

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“The truth is that the greater the collection capability an opponent has, the greater the opportunity to feed him specifically designed false information.”

U. S. Army Field Manual 90-2
October 1988

INTRODUCTION

"Force, to counter opposing force," Clausewitz wrote, "equips itself with the inventions of art and science."[1] Diligently adhering to the Prussian's maxim since the Second World War, the US Military has striven to be the world's preeminent warfighting organization. Currently, its conventional capabilities are unsurpassed by any single nation. The Cold War's end however, ushered in an era of uncertainty for the American Military. Peer national militaries do not appear to exist, but potential conflicts abound. Indeed, the past decade has not found the US wanting for war and conflict in spite of its military prominence. Human nature dictates that this trend will continue. Methods and circumstances remain the mystery.

The US military will certainly be powerful and capable over the next 30 years, but it will be opposed by determined and innovative adversaries who will ask, **"What will the American military look like"** and **"How do we effectively fight such a force?"** These questions are central to this study. The character of the future US military can be fairly easily defined by examining the traditional American way of war and contemporary visions for technology and doctrine. Currently, the use of knowledge and decision superiority to execute Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO) is the cornerstone upon which future US warfighting vision rests. But current visions also define future vulnerabilities. A future US force built to exploit nearly perfect knowledge will be reliant upon attaining it to succeed rapidly. Foes will eagerly exploit this vulnerability and the pages that follow will show that *by attacking American knowledge through deliberate, broad based misinformation (Maskirovka), future enemies can counter US attempts at RDO and achieve victory through a prolonged campaign.*

OPPOSING FORCE: WHAT THE NEXT US MILITARY WILL LOOK LIKE

Enduring Issues

Arguably, the way a society's military fights wars is influenced to a high degree by the social values of the society itself. Therefore, before any theoretical discussion about the future composition and doctrine of the US military, it is important to recognize three elements of the American way of war that will not change over the next thirty years or beyond. The first such element is that Americans want operational objectives to be achieved relatively quickly. Recent events have again borne out that, to outsiders at least; Americans are somewhat fickle about the degree to which they will support their government through an armed conflict. Even with initial zealous support, however, Americans tend to tire of war after no more than a few years. A second enduring element in the American way of war will be the desire to avoid friendly casualties. The third enduring element will be the desire to avoid collateral damage and / or casualties amongst noncombatants. These social influences have been realities, to varying degrees, throughout US history. Their influence on future war will continue undiminished.

The Reform Debate

One of the recurring issues in the public debate since the end of the Cold War has been the proper size and composition of the US Armed Forces. Military reform advocates have been present throughout history. At the operational level, however, the current debate is a lively one due to two major factors: the nonexistence of an immediately apparent threat, and the emergence of stealth, precision and information technologies. In the absence of the Soviet Union, the Axis Powers, Indians on the frontier, a British Navy in its primacy, etc, the US Military does not have to be assembled to contend with a larger or immediately hostile power.

The proper role of the US in the post Cold War era is a debate in itself. But the numerous contingencies over the past twelve years suggest an enduring strategy of global engagement.[2] The services seem to understand this well and each addresses it in their service visions. The army and air force are seeking to become more expeditionary-minded. The army is striving to build a balanced; deployable force based upon smaller maneuver elements able to get to contingencies quickly with appropriate forces.[3] The air force continues to refine its Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) concept, maintains a global reach capability and is beginning to take an effects based approach to warfare in order to leverage the benefits of technology[4]. The navy and Marine Corps look to maintain their expeditionary nature, but are looking for new ways to fight in the littorals and influence events further inland.[5] Generally, it is safe to say that the services anticipate having to engage in a myriad of missions across the spectrum of conflict. All of the services want capabilities they can employ rapidly. Furthermore, the services want to be able to project this capability globally. This factor, as well as fiscal and political realities that demand minimal force structure, points toward a military with small combat elements operating on extended lines of communication.

The requirement to mitigate the demands of high operational tempo and small force structure has led the US to explore the second factor in the reform debate: technology. Technological advances have affected every aspect of the military, but the emergence of the stealth, precision and information technologies have superceded all others. Stealth and precision can be, and are, considered force multipliers in current service vision.[6] Arguably, a smaller force that can remain undetected and attack with complete accuracy can gain parity or be more effective than a force that relies on mass to compensate for both attrition and inaccuracy. Information technology serves as an enabler to both stealth and precision as it

provides the medium for gathering and disseminating precision intelligence as well as exercising C2.

The tremendous strides in information technology over the last ten to fifteen years have led some reform advocates to suggest that a revolutionary change in warfare is underway. While the impact of the so-called information age is debatable, it is certainly safe to say that new information technology relates to all forms of warfighting. More importantly perhaps, it relates to joint warfighting: something that the US military has placed great emphasis on since the late 1980s and most certainly will over the next thirty years. The American concept of joint warfare seeks to integrate the effects of individual service components in order to achieve a synergistic warfighting effect. The whole, in other words, is greater than the sum of its parts. Outlined in *Joint Vision 2020*, the 'Precision Engagement Concept' (PEC), coupled with the principle of 'Dominant Maneuver' perhaps best defines the vision of combat in future joint warfare.

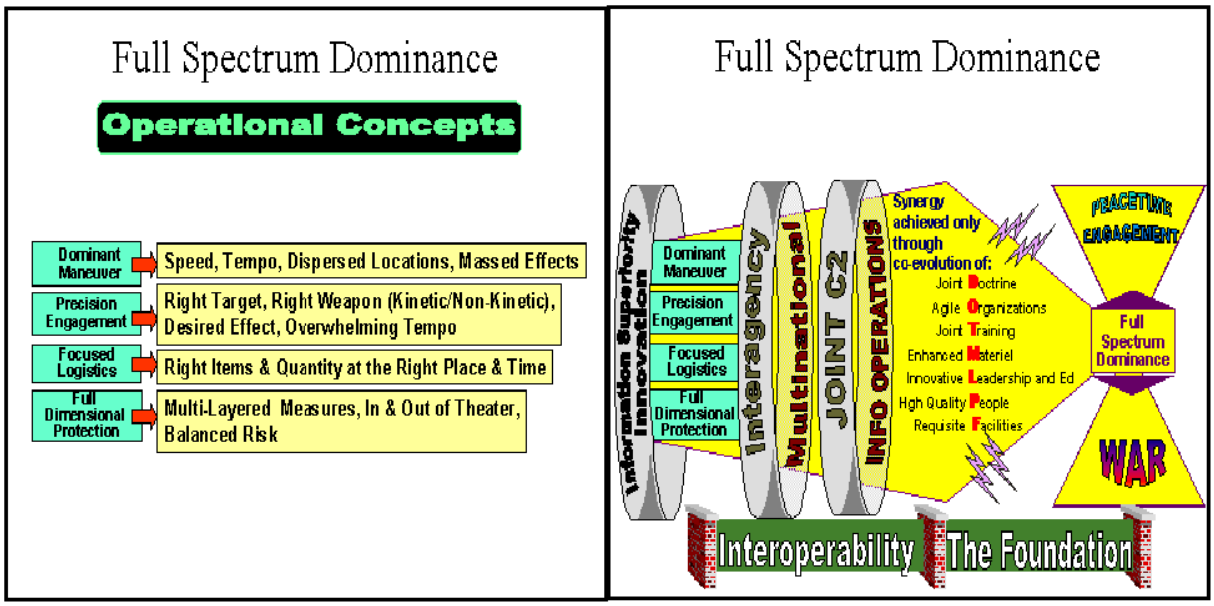

Figure 1: Full Spectrum Dominance Concepts and Construct[7]

In general terms, PEC refers to the application of the right force or weapon, in the proper proportion, to the right place in the battlespace, at the right time. Dominant Maneuver proposes the use of speed and tempo with dispersed forces for massed effects.[8] PEC and Dominant Maneuver are to be developed in conjunction with 'Focused Logistics' and 'Full Dimensional Protection'. Once enabled by information and innovation, the implementation of these concepts will theoretically facilitate the state of 'Full Spectrum Dominance' from whence the future US Military will operate.[9]

It is from this construct that visionaries have proposed and experimented with the philosophy of 'Rapid Decisive Operations' (RDO): a style of warfare envisioned to achieve rapid victory by attacking the coherence of an enemy's ability to fight. RDO specifically,

> "…describes how a joint force commander can determine and employ the right balance of land, sea, aerospace, and information-based capabilities in an intense, focused, non-linear campaign to rapidly defeat an adversary's strategic and operational centers of gravity."[10]

Given the joint commander's need for situational awareness when implementing such a style of warfare, it is easy to see that information technology is becoming central to the American style of warfighting. Tailoring a force for a mission specific to time and space requires a solid base of knowledge about the enemy, as well as a detailed understanding of both the friendly and enemy situations in real-time. In fact, RDO operations would be predicated upon a comprehensive, interagency 'Operational Net Assessment,' "…a continuously updated system of systems analysis of the adversary's total war-making capabilities, to include political, military, economic, social, and infrastructure elements."[11] The operational net assessment would be further enhanced and updated during operations by leveraging the power of sensors and information systems, giving the joint commander unprecedented awareness of the battlespace. The 'common operational picture' (COP) has

become the term associated with such a real-time visualization of the battlespace across the elements of the joint force. The COP relates also to what many consider to be the ultimate contribution of information technology: 'information superiority'. The concept of information superiority can best be understood by recalling Boyd's OODA decision cycle.[12] In theory, there is a process by which two belligerent forces make tactical or operational decisions. If one of these forces is able to make faster and more informed decisions than his opponent, he has a decided advantage. The condition in which a force has gained the ability to achieve a decisive edge in situational awareness and has denied it, in turn, to the opposition is a fair definition of information superiority. Closely related to information superiority within RDO is the concept of 'decision superiority' or,

"The ability of the commander, based upon information superiority and situational understanding, to make effective decisions more rapidly than the adversary, thereby allowing him to dramatically increase the pace, coherence, and effectiveness of operations."[13]

The RDO concept envisions the attainment of decision superiority through a cognitive process in which information is transformed into knowledge and understanding (Figure 2).[14]

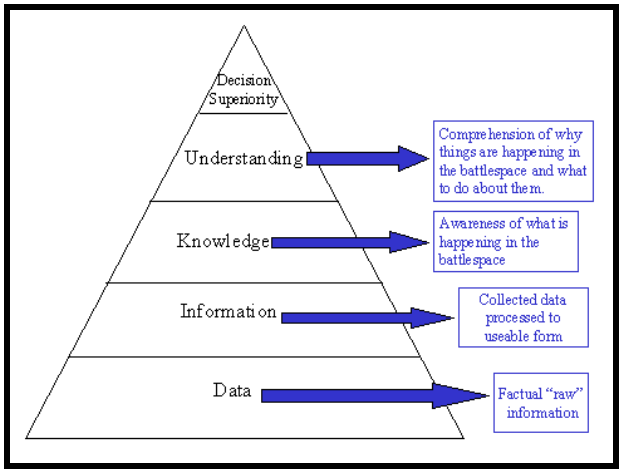

Figure 2: The Cognitive Hierarchy

Neither the concept of information superiority, nor the quest for decision superiority is new to warfighting. However, a force *designed and built* to achieve and exploit these

conditions as a warfighting cornerstone does represent a change in military thinking. Many reformers would like to see this change implemented rapidly and thoroughly; others advocate a more evolutionary approach. Contemporary writings and joint experimentation suggest rather strongly however, that the US will field such a force over the next thirty years. If so, a good case might be made that the operational center of gravity for a future US force will lie in its ability to attain and exploit information superiority.

When all of the factors discussed above are taken together, one might conclude that in thirty years the ideal US military will:

- Consist of lighter, deployable ground forces able to move to a contingency or battle rapidly with the assets and force structure appropriate to the mission at hand. Air forces will be designed to attack enemy systems in parallel, leveraging stealth and precision technologies. Naval forces will be designed to project power well inland from the littorals using stealth, precision and appropriately tailored Marine forces.

- Be more 'joint' and 'interagency' in nature. Enabled by information superiority and fully networked, tailored joint forces will move against the enemy quickly, employing the right assets to accomplish the mission. Though smaller than at present, the future joint force will be more integrated; thereby creating a synergistic effect that will serve as a force multiplier.

- Seek to achieve its objectives quickly. The future US military, like todays, will seek rapid victory using stealth and precision to do so with minimal collateral damage or friendly casualties. It will attempt to do so by attaining decision superiority and using RDO.

Such a military will be unlike any the world has ever seen. Armed with the requisite knowledge of its enemy, the agility, synergy and decisive potential inherent in such a force will make challenging it a daunting prospect. That enemies will challenge it, however, is a certainty.

COUNTERING OPPOSING FORCE: HOW THE FUTURE ENEMY WILL FIGHT

The Enemy's Planning Problem

One can only speculate on the precise nature of a future US enemy. Events recent to this writing have affirmed that nation-states are not the only entities with which the US might grapple. For the purposes of this discussion, however, we will loosely define the enemy as a nation or a power who controls an armed force, territory and a civil population. He may or may not have an armed force comparable in size to that of the US, but the US joint force sent to engage him will most definitely be smaller than the sum of his armed force plus his civil population. His equipment may be somewhat advanced and may have some precision capability, but will likely be qualitatively inferior to US equipment in terms of information technology and stealth.

The dilemma that the future enemy faces is simple to define if not to solve. He must engage and defeat a force with an incredible ability to gather and process information and disseminate it in real time. This force will then move rapidly across great distances to deliver munitions or troops wherever warranted. The force thinks faster, moves faster, is difficult to detect and rarely misses what it engages. By many measures, the future American enemy will be facing a superior force, but one whose vulnerabilities are real.

American Vulnerabilities

The weaknesses of the future US Military can be derived by examining the interrelated, enduring characteristics previously discussed, and by analyzing the manner by which that force will fight. First, future US Military missions and objectives will need to be satisfied quickly. Prolonged conflict may cause political ramifications that jeopardize the American mission. Second, the future US warfighting methodology will seek to minimize

American casualties. Losses disproportionate to the cause of conflict erode the support of the American public. A third vulnerability is inherent in the American desire to avoid collateral damage. Unnecessary noncombatant deaths undermine international support and legitimacy: important factors in US Military operations.

Underpinning all of the aforementioned vulnerabilities however, is the most critical of all: the RDO force will be reliant upon quality information and knowledge in order to function effectively. Admittedly,

> "RDO's key enabler is knowledge. Knowledge is a product of information superiority and enables situational understanding. The possession of superior knowledge will enable radical changes in future joint operations. The primary means for developing knowledge about an adversary is the operational net assessment…"[15]

It is not difficult to ascertain that if a military's center of gravity lay within its ability to attain information and use knowledge, then the disruption of this process or the denial of quality information could have catastrophic results. Having identified this vulnerability, the American adversary's next challenge is how to attack it.

Attacking Information

There are a number of ways that future American opponents might take advantage of American reliance on information. Attempting to disrupt communications or physically destroy nodes to deny information is certainly one example. Alternatively, gaining access to the COP through captured equipment or hacking networked systems would do much to compromise the US disposition and somewhat level the playing field. One can reasonably assume that a future opponent will attempt to employ both of these methods at some point in a future conflict. A more feasible, and perhaps more reliable, option is to attack the US information itself through other Information Operations (IO).[16] Countering an opponent with a voracious appetite for information with an aggressive program of information denial or

misinformation presents itself as a simple argument. But American commanders will certainly recognize this reliance as well and will strive to protect it accordingly. Hence, using offensive IO to neutralize US information superiority during combat operations might not be so easy a task. Attacking US information might only be effective then, if done outside the American IO paradigm. One possible method might be found by examining some of the practices of a long-standing American rival.

Attacking Knowledge

The old Soviet term *maskirovka* has no single definition in US military parlance. It is generally translated as "camouflage," "concealment," or "deception," but the concept implies much more than any one of these terms or their sum.[17] In the simplest terms, maskirovka was "defined as a set of processes designed to mislead, confuse, and interfere with accurate data collection regarding all areas of Soviet plans, objectives, and strengths or weaknesses."[18] Not limited to the domain of the military, maskirovka represented an inclusive effort by all levels of government as well as Soviet society and industry. Furthermore, many of the processes inherent in maskirovka, which would be classified as 'offensive IO' by current US doctrine,

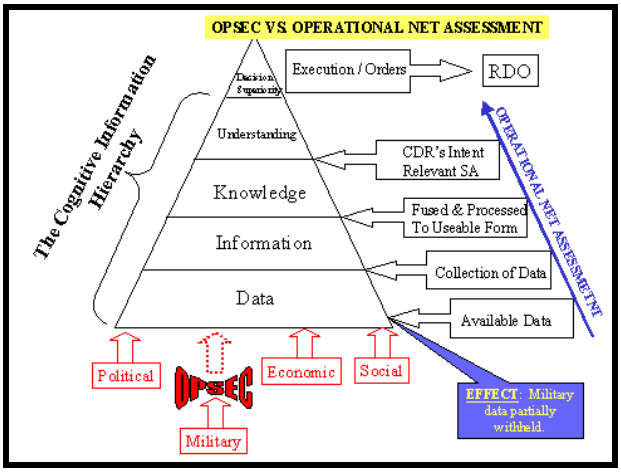

Figure 3: Western-style Peacetime IO vs. an Operational Net Assessment Collection Effort.

were not restricted or limited to times of hostilities or war.[19] This model is at odds with the US IO paradigm.[20] With the exception of somewhat passive operational security, American culture and laws appropriately restrict the interactions of the military with society and industry during peacetime. Hence, Americans and other westerners tend to think of, and look for, the application of IO processes in the context of individual wars, campaigns or operations. Not so encumbered were Soviet thinkers. Nor, in all likelihood, will be the future enemies of the US. Thus, while the operational net assessment concept seeks to attain knowledge through a multi-agency system of systems approach over the long term, an opponent might use a similar approach to produce ambiguities or a general lack of understanding—and be more efficient in his efforts. This distinction between US IO and maskirovka is critical. Western style IO seeks to affect data in conjunction with hostilities, thereby affecting data collection and information during operations. Maskirovka seeks to affect data and information over the long-term, thereby attacking knowledge: the key enabler for RDO.

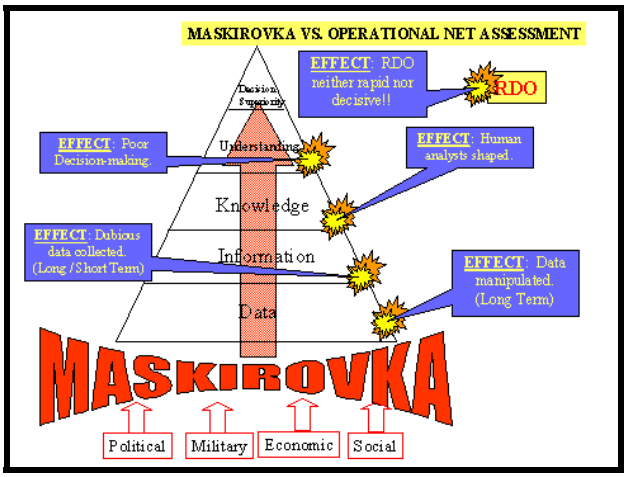

Figure 4: Maskirovka vs. an Operational Net Assessment Effort.

Maskirovka seems a logical defensive countermeasure to a threat reliant upon knowledge and information superiority to function properly. In a future conflict, its purpose would be nullify or mitigate US decision superiority, thereby slowing American decision-

making. While no future enemy could realistically hope to completely deny or mislead US information collectors and analysts, slight ambiguities carried through the operational net assessment over time might make great differences. Future American forces would enter into hostilities with a distorted knowledge of their enemy. Skewed knowledge, in turn, produces flawed understanding and poor decision-making. As operations commenced, substantially more data would be collected and passed through the erroneous knowledge layer of the cognitive hierarchy. The adverse effect upon decision-making could be exponential. The bombing of the Al Firdos bunker in 1991 and Chinese Embassy in 1998 are examples of the effects of flawed knowledge and understanding. These rather isolated incidents caused US leaders great consternation. One can only imagine the catastrophic effects on an American effort if such instances of apparent bungling became routine.

Military leaders and policy makers would certainly make operational adjustments when their decisions produced unexpected results. Adjustments like these, however, take time and lengthen the decision-making process. As a result, the US operation would be neither rapid nor decisive. If—consistent with current service and joint visions—the joint force consisted of light, tailored forces deployed on an extended tether, there would be little flexibility to deal with such a circumstance. Possibilities for exhausting and defeating the Americans through prolonged conflict, disproportionate casualties and unacceptable collateral damage would abound.

Exploiting Maskirovka: An Example

The successful employment of maskirovka will be a powerful tool, but is not an end in itself. A US defeat will only be achieved if the maskirovka concept is imbedded within a larger warfighting construct. For that America's future enemies might employ a concept of

'Total National Defense' (TND)[21], a concept in which one party assumes the operational defense, but seeks to inflict a myriad of tactical defeats on his opponent until the offender relents from exhaustion. TND suggests the use of a conventional force only to delay a stronger assailant. The main effort would actually consist of peripheral attacks by conventional remnants and militia forces designed to overstretch and exhaust the invader. If such operations did not defeat the aggressor, all military forces would wage an indefinite partisan struggle to demonstrate that "while the country could be swallowed, it could not be digested."[22]

The TND model offers a reasonable methodology for belligerents facing opponents (like the US) who seek rapid conflict resolution. Given the overwhelming superiority the US will possess in information collection, C2, precision and execution of RDO, TND has some face-value shortcomings with respect to its future applicability. When augmented by appropriate maskirovka and implemented with American vulnerabilities in mind, however, it presents some intriguing possibilities. A pre-hostility maskirovka effort, as an example, might be used to exaggerate the relevance of the conventional armed forces while a small cadre of leaders is discreetly trained to organize and fight decentralized groups of partisans. Concurrently, the adversary's political and economic apparatus might be used to present misleading data regarding infrastructure, industry and buildings: blurring the accuracy of the US operational net assessment and, by extension, the application of the PEC when hostilities commence. Once conflict erupts, the maskirovka focus would use the sincere, but probably vain, efforts of the conventional force to overshadow the formation of partisan forces that would establish themselves in cities and other covered areas. Political and economic efforts would make it appear that the defeat of the conventional force meant imminent defeat for the

nation as a whole. But as operations progressed, previous efforts to taint knowledge of infrastructure and buildings would begin to pay the adversary dividends by way of embarrassing incidents of collateral damage. As American ground forces were given missions, unexpectedly strong partisan forces laying quietly in wait to engage them at close range would meet them with a vengeance. US ground forces, employed under the concepts of dominant maneuver and precision logistics, might be at the end of a long tether, making relief or reinforcement difficult. The joint force's casualty list would begin to grow.

In such an example, the COP would have presented real-time information across the force that was incomplete and occasionally inaccurate. US informational efforts would have to shift from gathering data and producing knowledge, to identifying and sorting out flaws in the operational net assessment. The US decision cycle would thereby slow. More importantly, the conflict would lengthen and the major vulnerabilities in the American way of war would be influenced.

Conclusion

For any nation, implementing a comprehensive maskirovka concept would not come without its challenges. Once implemented, it could not be perfectly successful. Whether applied in concert with TND or another warfighting construct however, it would be viable and could have substantial effect against a future US RDO effort.

The enthusiasm that American reformers and military planners have for implementing new technologies and associated concepts is understandable. Moderation is the key. The US military thirty years hence will unquestionably be more capable than any the world has ever seen. The service visions, reformer influence and influx of technology will produce a more effective war machine if mixed thoughtfully. Creating lighter, "more joint" forces that use

precision and stealth as multipliers is a fine idea. But these forces must be flexible enough to deal with unexpected circumstances when they inevitably arise. The concept of information superiority is not flawed per se, nor is the desire to leverage the new information technologies. There is a potential, however, for the confluence of these to produce flawed warfighting doctrine.

One does not have to possess particularly keen insight to recognize that a warfighting system predicated upon a virtual omniscience of the enemy's dispositions and intentions has its dangers. Yet, RDO, at face value, represents such a system. Under a system like maskirovka, dispositions can be misleading; and there is no evidence to suggest that technology thirty years hence will produce sensors and information systems that can ascertain enemy mindset and intent. Therefore, despite continued advances in the ability to obtain and disseminate data, information will continue to require human interpretation to be of any value. Gathering and interpreting information to produce knowledge is a very human process despite the technology involved. As such, it is vulnerable to other human processes. Information superiority and decision superiority should therefore be considered only as useful concepts within the construct of a flexible future force that adapts to its circumstances, not as the foundations upon which a future force is created.

Building the armed force of the future has always presented a challenge to military planners. With the US poised to remain a lonely superpower for the foreseeable future, uncertainty with respect to future conflict complicates the issue even further. America's enemies will emerge in time. No doubt, she will be ready for them. But the architects of her military must take a measured, reasoned approach and realize above all that no warfighting method, no matter how sophisticated, will go unanswered.

NOTES

[1] Carl Von Clausewitz, On War. Trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984) p. 75.
[2] The author is referring to Desert Storm, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan among others.
[3] See Army Vision 2010, p. 11.
[4] See Air Force Vision 2020, p. 5. and BG Dave Deptula's Effects Based Operations.
[5] See Forward From the Sea, p. 2-13 and Marine Corps Vision 21, p. 8-10.
[6] See Deptula pages 7-16.
[7] From the Joint Vision 2020 slide presentation in the February 2001 JEL CD ROM.
[8] These two concepts are envisioned to work synergistically with the concepts of 'Focused Logistics' and 'Full Dimensional Protection' to achieve 'Full Spectrum Dominance'. See Joint Vision 2020.
[9] The Definition of Full Spectrum Dominance is, "The ability of US forces, operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations." See JV2020 p. 6.
[10] J-9, United States Joint Forces Command, *Rapid Decisive Operations*, Norfolk, 2001.p. iii.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See, for example, John Boyd's "Patterns of Conflict" presentation. Available: http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm.
[13] J-9, RDO, Glossary.
[14] Information: 1. Facts, data, or instructions in any medium or form. 2. The meaning that a human assigns to data by means of the known conventions used in their representation. JP 1-02. Knowledge: 1. Familiarity, awareness, or understanding, gained through experience or study. 2. The sum or range of what has been perceived, discovered, or learned. American Heritage College Dictionary.

[15] J-9, RDO p. iii.
[16] In US parlance, offensive IO consists of psychological operations, deception, electronic warfare, physical destruction, operational security and may include other special measures such as computer network attack. See Joint Pub 3-13.
[17] For an introductory discussion, see Charles L. Smith's "Soviet Maskirovko." *Air Chronicles*, April-June 88. Internet. Downloaded 18 December 2001. Available: www.airpower.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj88/smith.html.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Smith provides an appropriate vignette: "An example of this, which pertains to both industry and the military, occurred in the period before World War II and at the onset of Operation Barbarossa. Tile USSR had purchased 100-mm artillery pieces from Germany before the war, and German intelligence estimates of the capabilities of the Red Army were based in part on the use of these guns. Following their invasion in June 1941, the Germans were shocked to encounter much more powerful Soviet 130-mm artillery pieces. The USSR had purchased the German guns and scrapped them while producing their own guns at the same time--a classic instance of *maskirovka."*
[20] See Greg Howe's, *Maskirovka and Opsec.* Online. Internet. Available: http://www.opsec.org/OPSJournal/Journal93/111.html
[21] See C. J. Dick, "Maskirovka in Yugoslav Military Thinking." Conflict Studies Research Institute, Sandhurst, UK. Internet. Downloaded December, 2001. Available: http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/docs99/A100-CJD.htm.
[22] Ibid.

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