

## **POLITICS, TECHNOLOGY, DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATION: THE DEBATE OVER THE RMA AND THE FUTURE OF WARFARE**

Whatever its real-life impact, the RMA has generated considerable upheaval in the strategic studies scholarly community. But it is a debate which to many goes beyond academic interest since it is expected that how it is settled will have profound impact upon how nations develop and posture their forces for war. This is especially the case in the United States.

For the RMA, especially its strongest proponents, technology and its application to warfare is the dominant theme. Most share Martin van Creveld's opening premise in his book, *Technology and War*, '...war is completely permeated by technology and governed by it.' Warfare, particularly from the introduction of gunpowder in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, "has been captivated by technology." "Some historians could make a strong case that since the introduction of the wheeled chariot mankind has been obsessed with the search for that particular technology that would guarantee success on the battlefield."<sup>1</sup>

War, however, is not, despite what so-called realists contend, entirely devoid of moral content. As Michael Walzer observed in his *Just and Unjust Wars*, "for as long as men and women have talked about war, they have talked about it in terms of right and wrong...aggression, self-defense, appeasement, cruelty, ruthlessness, atrocity, massacre-all these words are judgements, and judging is as common a human activity as...fighting."<sup>2</sup> Over the centuries, norms about what should or should not be done in war have evolved, even as they have been violated, most spectacularly in the last century. One of the most important of these norms is the requirement to avoid unnecessary civilian casualties. Indeed, as noted below, one of the claims of the RMA is that in bringing ever advancing technology to bear on war, it can reduce "collateral damage." In this sense, the debate over the RMA is consistent with all past debates over the nature of warfare combining both moral and technological arguments. But, as in the past, the technological dimension is the overriding consideration.

Andrew Krepinevich's definition is often cited as that most closest to the mark. An RMA takes place when,

"...the application of new technologies into a significant number of military systems combine[d] with innovative operational concepts and organizational adaptation in a way that fundamentally alters the character and conduct of conflict. It does so by producing a dramatic increase- often an order of magnitude or greater-in the combat potential and

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Howard Marsh, "Emerging Technology and Military Affairs," in Thierry Gongora and Harald Von Roekhoff, *Toward A Revolution in Military Affairs? Defense and Security at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 61-62.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p.3.