

everything they thought they knew.”<sup>25</sup>

Even if armed forces master the operational skills associated with the RMA, the outcome of warfare may not become more predictable. The spread of RMA related technologies will make it difficult to assess the balance of power to the extent that it is based on the expected outcome of armed confrontation. Opacity in the matter of military power may prove one of the most troubling feature of the RMA:

“As platforms become less important and the quality of munitions and, above all, the ability to handle information become more so, analysts will find it ever more difficult to assess the military balance of opposing sides...the revolution in military affairs may bring a kind of tactical clarity to the battlefield, but at the price of strategic obscurity.”<sup>26</sup>

In other words, while the well-known physical attributes of the RMA technologies may make it easier to predict what weapons are capable of doing in specific military operations, the spread of those technologies will make it more difficult to assess what the outcome of conflict will be. In this sense, the spread of technology would introduce a new measure of uncertainty into power relationships, even on the part of those countries which nominally possess the most advanced of the RMA technologies. This may impose caution on these states. At the same time, the general uncertainty engendered by this “strategic obscurity” may lead to a more unstable international strategic environment at odds with the interests of the United States and its allies.

As noted above, the enthusiasm about the RMA is only in part technological. Much of it is political and it is closely linked to the American desire to maintain its global dominance. This points to what some authors have called a fundamental asymmetry in the international strategic environment. The United States has overwhelming power in terms of the capability to intervene in foreign conflicts on a global scale. At the same time, “an asymmetry of interests” suggests “a policy of noninvolvement since so few contemporary conflicts seem to put in jeopardy key U.S. interests and therefore warrant the commitment of U.S. forces with the attending risk of casualties.”<sup>27</sup> But in fact the RMA can be viewed as being specifically tailored to a world in which America faces few direct threats to its vital interests, but may nevertheless wish to intervene in order to prevent a spread of conflict, to support allies, or for humanitarian reasons. It promises that technology can reduce the costs of unipolarism in both peace and war.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen, “A Revolution in Warfare,” p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Thierry Gongora and Harald von Riekhoff, “Introduction: Sizing Up the Revolution in Military Affairs,” in Thierry Gongora and Harald von Riekhoff, Eds, *Toward a Revolution in Military Affairs? Defense and Security at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 17.