

THE REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS AND THE FUTURE OF ARMS CONTROL AND VERIFICATION

INTRODUCTION

There has been much debate on whether or not the technologies, weapons and emerging doctrines associated with the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) constitute a true “revolution” in the nature of warfare. There has been less consideration of whether the RMA will engender a corresponding “revolution” in arms control. In part this is because there is the view that the weapons systems, doctrines and military organizational changes associated with the RMA are not trends whose control is possible, necessary, or even desirable. In other words, while there is general agreement that nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons are fit subjects for arms control, even by some of those states which possess them, the systems associated with the RMA has thus far garnered no such consensus.

The issue of controlling the RMA is linked with other aspects of arms control, for it has in a sense complicated or intruded upon older weapons developments and efforts to control them. Thus no sooner did the end of the Cold War make possible the conclusion of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and II), than the RMA introduced a new class of weapons and warfare which in one sense has made strategic nuclear arms control less relevant than it had been. This is because nuclear weapons are no longer the dominant measure of military power for the United States and Russia. In another sense, however, the advent of the American RMA has heightened concern about the control of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Efforts at arms control such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), attempts to curb missile technology as well as chemical and biological weapons may well be more difficult as countries that lack the ability to respond to RMA systems in kind, will seek out alternative means of deterrence and defence. This in turn leads to a further complicating factor. Despite increased importance placed by the United States on the RMA, neither it nor its allies, seem prepared to entirely abandon nuclear deterrence in face of the spread of WMD capabilities.

The study below examines the RMA from an arms control standpoint. It discusses the question of whether the RMA itself can be subjected to arms control measures and what the impact of the RMA is on efforts to control WMDs. The paper does not take a position for or against the RMA or arms control. Rather, its objective is to provide an analysis of the various complicating factors that have arisen with regard to arms control as a result of the advent of the RMA. As with the previous Cold War era of arms control, wherein many of the paradoxes and uncertainties of nuclear weapons were never conclusively resolved, and where substantial disagreement existed over these issues, the arms control impact of the RMA points to a wide range of often self-contradictory scenarios and has likewise fostered differing views about the best policy choices.