

## Summary

# Essence of Military Power: At the Dawn of the 21st Century

## A Summary

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We are fond of the expression, “The Essence of Military Power.” It is at the same time a catchy phrase and an important question to ask. But when you are put in a position to discuss it, you do not like it very much. It is such a tough issue to tackle. Against all odds, we embarked on this International Symposium with the intention to enquire on the “essence of military power.” Now at the end of the Symposium, we have to provide our answers, even preliminary ones, to this tough question.

There were three major questions that we started out with:

- (1) Has the nature of war and military power changed?
- (2) What will war and military power look like in the 21st century? Will they remain to be useful political tools?
- (3) What should we do to establish a more stable, or favorable, international order?

In answering these questions, we used history as the most valuable guide. With the devoted help of the distinguished participants from Israel, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, and of course Japan, we seem to have come to some conclusions.

Let me first take a look at the military power. How has the military power changed in the past and how will it change in the future?

## 1. Jointness

The most clear-cut consensus coming out from the discussions has been the need to bring different services together to create more joint armed forces. As Professor Williamson Murray pointed out, joint warfare had already become a “crucial component of military effectiveness” in the 20th century. Such a trend seems to continue in the new century. Admiral Bill Owens called for a much more “joint force” to optimize the value of coordinated knowledge.

In discussing land warfare, Professor Brian Bond noted that it was no longer realistic to discuss land warfare independently of air power. Major powers are emphasizing “smaller, highly trained and highly mobile units designed for rapid reaction from their home bases.” Admiral Richard Cobbold showed that the phrase, “Maritime Contribution to Joint Operations,” is used in the United Kingdom to describe naval operations. The Royal Navy’s Type 45 destroyer is procured under the auspices of integrated team led by an Army brigadier, who is a missile expert.

Yet, actually creating truly joint capabilities is not an easy task. Different services have different cultures. According to Professor Murray, professional military education, personnel promotion systems, and the present organization of the U.S. military in many ways impede jointness.

The U.S. armed forces had a successful experience of fighting war jointly in the Pacific War. However, even such an experience was not enough in transforming the U.S. military into a truly joint organization after the end of the war. It was only in the mid 1980’s that the U.S. Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Bill to force the U.S. military to become more joint. It was not a consequence of an initiative taken by the military establishment.

Although promoting jointness is generally welcomed, a single-minded pursuit of it is not necessarily a good idea. Professor Murray made a caveat that destroying the service cultures is not the right answer to the increased jointness. He contended that the basis of any joint approach to military operations must be a coherent and effective understanding of warfare in the different mediums: land, sea, and air because “officers cannot become truly joint until they not only understand, but have mastered the peculiarities and difficulties of the tactical problems that their domain raises.”

Admiral Cobbold contended that distinctiveness of each service will and should remain, particularly for the purpose of maintaining high professionalism and ethos. His words, “the tradition of naval people is the greatest single factor in being able to adjust to new strategies, doctrines, scenarios and technologies,” will probably apply to the Army and the Air Force.

Even in this era of jointness, distinct features of different services remain. Professor Bond concluded that land warfare would remain the ultimate touchstone in all armed conflicts. The most important war in the 20th century, war in Europe in the Second World War, was largely fought and decided on the ground. Professor Bond wrote:

...however ponderous and costly the operations, they (wars on land) had eventually played the main role in bringing about the defeat of Germany and her allies. Victory on land, or, at least, avoidance of defeat was understood to be of vital importance among victors and losers.

Currently ongoing and current conflicts show that well-trained and highly disciplined ground forces remain the crucial factor in ending operations and in achieving post-war stability.

The Navy will certainly remain to be an important part of armed forces. Admiral Cobbold indicated that indeed ninety-five percent of war stores for the Gulf War arrived by sea. However, the importance of the naval forces on its own might decline in the future. Future roles of the Navy may be expected in the littoral seas, the “brown waters.”

The proper understanding of the term “air power” is essential in thinking about the issue of jointness. Despite the widely held misunderstanding that the air power is presented by Air Force, fact of the matter is that air power “embraces not only Air Force aircraft, munitions, sensors, and other capabilities, but also naval aviation and the attack helicopters and battlefield missiles of land forces.” Air warfare is “an activity in which all services have important roles to play....”

That said, Professor Chung Min Lee discussed the recently ignited debate on the role and effectiveness of air power. According to Professor Lee, at the center of the air power debate is whether the current and emerging inventory of

air-delivered standoff attack weapons can effectively achieve key battlefield objectives “in lieu of ground forces.” He suggested that although many of the loftier goals articulated by air power advocates before the Gulf War did not come to pass, it was virtually impossible to imagine that Iraq’s military machine could have been effectively destroyed without air power that ultimately resulted in relatively low U.S. and allied casualties.

It seems that the relative importance among ground, naval, and air forces is changing at a time when the three services are coming closer together.

## **2. Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)**

In the 1990’s we were asking whether the RMA was in fact occurring. It seems that we have already answered affirmatively to this question and now we are asking how to best exploit the ongoing RMA.

Admiral Owens argued that the United States was indeed in the midst of a “revolution in military affairs” and that the revolution changed the risk of military operations disproportionately between opponents, reduced the need for attrition strategies, and undercut the military rationale for mass and the ‘Powell Doctrine.’” Moreover, much of the technology needed to consummate the American RMA is already in hand.

One of the most critical issues regarding the possible consequences of the RMA concerns the role of information in future wars. Whether changes in technology will eradicate Clausewitzian friction and fog of war was a matter of contention among different participants. Admiral Owens envisaged that lead in information technologies would offer “dominant battlespace knowledge,” or the ability to know more about what is occurring in a conflict than an opponent, and to gain that knowledge faster. Such knowledge will provide the RMA-based forces enough of an edge to improve the effectiveness of their operations and reduce the risk to them significantly.

Professor Murray agreed that modern technologies offered the possibility of significantly decreasing the frictions of war that U.S. and allied forces might face in a conflict. However, he cast strong doubts about eliminating the fog from wars. To him, RMA is not a panacea.

Acknowledging the potential for absolute dominance in which the enemy will have virtually zero capability to respond, however, Admiral Cobbold emphasized the difficulties involved in human beings making decisions based on insufficient information and under pressure of time even under the RMA-based environment. Human decisions will remain to be difficult to anticipate and train for despite the “wonders of synthetic environments and networked simulators.”

Professor Lee also warned that in the face of asymmetrical technologies and the very real probability of cataclysmic terrorism, fielding more RMA-intensive forces and weapons systems should not be construed necessarily as enhancing one’s deterrent capabilities against a spectrum of focused asymmetrical challenges.

Finally, one caveat must be given. Despite the consensus that RMA is indeed occurring, we are not perfectly sure whether that potential will actually be translated into reality. As Admiral Owens emphasized, in order for RMA to come into reality, convention, culture, and the power structure in one of the most conservative of American institutions, namely the U.S. military establishment, must be transformed.

### **3. RMA, Alliances, and Combined Operations**

RMA does not produce positive results only. It might also produce negative consequences. Admiral Owens pointed out that the RMA might negatively affect existing alliance relationships. He said:

To the extent that knowledge affords us earlier and more accurate predictions of where we may need military force, and to the extent that we develop flexible, lethal, rapid deploying forces, we can substitute force surges for continual forward presence.

It seems that the traditional value of the America’s Cold War allies, as forward bases for the U.S. forces, will decline in the future.

Admiral Owens further elaborated on the challenge that the ongoing RMA was posing to the U.S. allies:

Our military superiority can be unsettling, for the world does not feel comfortable with superpowers, particularly superpowers that are not balanced by some form of countervailing influence. So the capability that will give the US relative military impunity will also generate suspicion, jealousy, and an interest in balancing that power--by both our friends as well as our potential enemies. The greatest challenge to American diplomacy will be to keep such sentiments in check, particularly on the part of our friends. We will have to walk that narrow line between convincing others they cannot match or counter our military prowess without making them fear it so much as to feel compelled to try.

Admiral Owens suggested that the United States use its growing ability to have “battlespace knowledge” to bolster friendships. Since the central international issue now is ambiguity, coalition leadership in the future will proceed from the ability to quickly reduce the ambiguity of violent situations, to respond flexibly, and to use force, where necessary, with precision and accuracy. Like the nuclear umbrella, a U.S. “information umbrella” could become a foundation for a mutually beneficial relationship between the United States and other nations.

Apart from RMA, alliances and combined operations played important roles in history, with all the benefits as well as difficulties. According to Professor Murray, allies have always been crucial to the conduct of foreign policy and strategy, a fact that has been true since the dawn of warfare. On the one hand, combined warfare almost inevitably brought in its wake considerable difficulties. Allies have different cultures; their militaries inevitably possess different training, concepts, and doctrine; and most importantly they have different goals and objectives. Thus, they can present a serious impediment to the waging of coherent military campaigns.

On the other hand, allies also possess the important advantage of bringing different capabilities and understanding of the opponent to the fight. For the United States in the 21st century, their understanding of the culture, history, and capabilities (political as well as military) will be essential.

Such an argument might sound contradictory to the discussion advanced by Admiral Owens; however, these two might actually complement each other.

#### 4. Relative Strengths of Different Actors

Before getting into the issue of effectiveness of war and military power, we have to touch on the issue of relative advantage of different actors in international society. As Professor Martin van Creveld and Dr. Yuichiro Nagao have discussed, relative strengths of the state actors and non-state actors will determine in a significant way the future outlook of the world.

Dr. Nagao posed a fundamental question on this issue: Is there any alternative institution that can replace the role of a sovereign state? His answer to this question was a negative one. He contended that states, especially, nation states, would remain viable in the 21st century. As recent history has demonstrated, when the existing states failed, or when a civil war broke out, new states always emerged in their place. Creation of Croatia, Bosnia, and East Timor are the cases in point. Even the Taliban regime wanted to be recognized as a sovereign state. States are the incarnation of the civilization of our time.

Despite his contention that the military power of states has lost most of its usefulness and that the state is going to fade away, Professor Creveld still acknowledged that in sub-conventional war waged against the state, what many non-state organizations try to do is to replace the old states with new ones, and not to remain glorious non-state organizations even after the war was won.

Professor Bond contended that the gap between rich and poor nations would widen as regards the use of force. The former will rely increasingly on superior technology and intelligence, and employ small, high-quality professional forces. Their main aim will be to “uphold the *status quo* and protect friendly or client states.” However, their opponents will exploit the advantages of terrain, ruthlessly controlled media, calculated acts of international terrorism and willingness to die for the cause.

Admiral Cobbold mentioned about the dual implications of globalization on different actors. A new and disproportionately effective degree of western dominance is giving a birth to so-called asymmetric warfare whereby weaker actors try to exploit specific vulnerabilities of stronger actors. In an ironical way, the same tools of the western dominance, globalized information systems and transport, enable the asymmetric responses.



## **5. Effectiveness of War and Military Power**

Finally, we have to summarize our discussion on the most important issue, effectiveness of war and military power in the new century. In so doing, the distinction that Professor Creveld made about different types of conflict is useful. He distinguished between four types of war: (1) nuclear war; (2) conventional war; (3) sub-conventional war as waged by the state against non-state organizations; and (4) sub-conventional war as waged by non-state organizations against the state. Let us take a look at the different types of conflicts one by one.

First, it is nuclear war. In our discussions, there seemed to be a general consensus that nuclear weapons had made war extremely costly and, therefore, not very useful as a political tool. According to Professor Creveld, nuclear weapons have made the military power less effective and war obsolete. Both Professor Creveld and Dr. Shinichiro Ogawa argued that nuclear weapons would continue to play an important deterrent role in the foreseeable future.

However, Dr. Ogawa was a little more pessimistic than Professor Creveld of the consequences of nuclear proliferation. For one, Dr. Ogawa argued that an emerging quad-polar nuclear world, featuring China and India in addition to the United States and Russia, might be less stable than simple bipolar world during the Cold War.

Also, Dr. Ogawa warned of the danger of relatively weak Third World countries going nuclear. He argued that possession of nuclear weapons by such countries would likely increase the possibility of touching off a war since nuclear capabilities not firmly backed by secure retaliatory capabilities might create a dangerous “use them or lose them” condition. In times of a crisis, these countries are likely to rush to use nuclear weapons while their opponents are tempted to launch a pre-emptive attack to take out these nuclear forces.

Moreover, Dr. Ogawa made an interesting point by suggesting that the widely shared sense of taboo against the use of nuclear weapons could be seriously undermined if emerging nuclear powers use their nuclear weapons on a limited scale. If the damages of limited nuclear use proved to be less disastrous than people tend to expect, that might shake the sense of taboo that has been gradually fomented since August 1945.

The second type of war is conventional war. Given the assessment that the inter-state system based on sovereign states will remain unchanged as an international order in coming decades, Dr. Nagao predicted that rivalry among the states would continue as before.

However, utility of war and that of military power as war-fighting tool are likely to diminish, at least for relatively developed countries. Professor Creveld suggested that the utility of conventional war had declined since the countries in possession of nuclear weapons also tended to be the ones with the largest and most powerful conventional arsenals. Nuclear deterrence prevents wars among major powers. Professor Bond made a similar point by identifying four trends. First, most of the “developed nations” now rely on relatively small all-volunteer professional forces. Second, even “third world armies” or militias may possess quite sophisticated weapons, depending on their sponsors. Third, “open societies” conduct wars at a great disadvantage against authoritarian opponents. And finally, it has become harder to get the defeated party to accept the verdict of battle. Taken as a whole, it had become harder to translate military successes into enduring political gains or enhanced security.

Professor Lee also pointed out that despite the successful use of air power against the Iraqi, Serbian, and Taliban forces, the fact remained that they did not have a viable air force to counter U.S. air campaigns. According to him, the key question is whether advanced air power capabilities will result in the “effective dislocation or destruction of strategic and operational centers of gravity (COGs) of opposing military forces under fairly evenly matched quantitative conditions.”

In other words, major war has become largely obsolete and quite unlikely. The usefulness of conventional forces now seems to lie primarily in order maintenance, in conjunction with nuclear deterrence, for developed countries.

The third type of war is sub-conventional war as waged by the state against non-state organizations. There seem to be two dimensions to this war. On the one hand, as strongly suggested by Professor Creveld, the record of regular armed forces used against nationalist non-state organizations has been “disastrous.” The 20th century saw a number of such cases. Examples abound: the Germans against Tito’s partisans; the British against Jews; the French against the Algerians; and the Americans against the Vietnamese.

On the other hand, effectiveness of state armed forces used vis-à-vis “failed states,” or non-state organizations that pose challenges to the inter-state system is currently being tested. According to Dr. Nagao, a new role of armed forces to deal with such challenges is in the offing. The ongoing all-out anti-terrorist operations led by the United States with worldwide supports is a collective response to meet such challenges. In this sense, when viewed from the standpoint of building of defense capability, states will be required to strengthen their unconventional war capability by creating and improving special operations forces in the coming years and decades.

According to Professor Lee, some of the key lessons from the Russian air campaign in Chechnya included: (1) air superiority provides no guarantee of victory even against an enemy with no effective air force; (2) militias and guerillas can effectively use high-information assets as easily as modern armies allowing them to establish quick contacts, mobilize assets, and access other information; (3) operating in low-intensity conflict (LIC) environments will mean finding and defending against mobile targets spread throughout the country and the civilian population; and (4) realistic training is essential to overcome LIC threats.

Finally, the fourth type of war is sub-conventional war as waged by non-state organizations against the state. This type of war is a flip side of the third type of war just mentioned above. This type of war has proved to be quite successful particularly in creating new countries and in bringing about change of regimes. However, effectiveness of the war against the inter-state system as a whole is yet to be seen.

## **6. What is sought to Japan?**

Lastly, let us think about what is sought to Japan today. As a clue to this, we will examine four components of the military power in the future, which were always asserted by Admiral Owens.

According to Admiral Owens, the first component of the RMA-based military power in the future is an “information umbrella.” The second one is the precision strike forces, and the third one is the dominant maneuver forces. The

fourth is the smart logistic forces.

Naturally, these components may be applicable to the U.S armed forces only, and Japan may not necessarily be required to follow the path. However, as is obvious from discussions made in this Symposium, jointness of services, overall adoption of RMA, adoption of RMA in support of joint operations with the allied forces and measures against unconventional wars have become essential factors for effective use of military power as a political means.

At the same time, however, the effectiveness of war and military power has lessened for various reasons, especially in the developed Western countries. Today, reassessment of the proposition that war and military power are used as a political means may be necessary from a viewpoint of roles and use of the military power required by the international society.

More important is to clearly define the national goal of Japan. It is meaningless to discuss about the future of the military power, ignoring issues such as in which direction Japan is intending to go or what roles Japan wishes to play in the international society. In this context, it appears what is sought to Japan is to promptly build up “the Japanese Way in Warfare.” It is when the national strategy of Japan is finally spelled out that the roles of the military power will take their shape.