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Sociopolitical Stresses and the RMA

FRANK J. STECH

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"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

-- F. Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby*

Three sociopolitical forces are smashing each other and shaking the foundations of military affairs.

- The fission of nation-states (and their armies) into complex multiples, often mired in multi-sided civil or tribal wars that erect political barriers, sear landscapes with hatreds, and "cleanse" whole populations;
- The surging quest for religious and community values that attack liberal political structures and supplant state power, often clouding the political atmosphere with eruptions of fundamentalist propaganda;
- The consolidation of the world's media organs into narrowly focused, increasingly powerful corporate conglomerates, flooding us with observations while restricting our perspectives on the issues that matter. Economic imperatives force the media to streamline explanations of consequences and to market simplified myths, rumors, and misperceptions over the back fences of the global village.

Much of the growing dissatisfaction with analyses of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) stems from the realization that the foundations of military affairs are shaking, with little understanding why that is so or what to do about the situation.[1]

The Explosion of Nation States

Samuel Huntington described the pattern of democracy-building in the 20th century: three waves that added more democracies, each wave followed by ethno-nationalistic reversion to non-democratic governments, often military dictatorships.[2] While each wave added more democracies, each reversal resulted in a smaller number of back-sliding governments than the last. These waves gradually increased the number of democratic governments. That was until nation-states began to fission. Estimates of the number of possible new countries range from another 200 by the year 2000 to as many as a thousand in the next few decades.[3] As the third wave of ethno-nationalism divides existing states, yet another backlash of anti-democratic regimes is likely to follow. There are many implications for military affairs in the shift from nationalism to ethnic tribalism:

- Indirect and nonlinear conflict dominates our planning and operations. Boundaries mean little to tribes which claim ancestral geographical rights, or are willing to "ethnically cleanse" to "purify" their claimed territories.
- Nonlinear tactics and special and unconventional forces are required. Front lines, centers of mass, and critical targets may be few; close-in small-unit infantry fighting will predominate rather than air-land, armor-artillery, mechanized warfare; military operations may be executed largely through terror and criminality; and tribal fighters may be distinguished by no more than the green bandannas of the Chechen rebels.
- Operations other than war (OOTW) are on the increase. Peace-keeping, peacemaking, border patrolling, law enforcement assistance, refugee management, and humanitarian assistance have gained the status of "real operations" in the latest US doctrine.
- There will be a premium on intelligence--particularly information about groups, leaders, motives, traditions, institutions, cultures, languages, and histories.
- Armies and conflict will be increasingly civilianized through increased reliance on reserves and militias, and through heavy involvement with nongovernmental organizations in humanitarian and crisis-response operations.
- Inter-ethnic violence also will be civilianized; children and grandmothers are the fighting reserves of tribal

militias.

Ethnic conflict also puts political constraints on military intervention. Examples of such constraints include lack of public or congressional support, no quick military outcomes, no clear end state, lack of allied cohesion, weak UN goals and mandates, the need to minimize civilian casualties and damage, media coverage, and "global transparency." [4] Technology may help the military profession to cope with tribal conflicts amidst the collapse of nation-states, but technology has little effect on the root causes of tribal warfare.

Communitarianism and the Values Revolution

Technology plays even less of a role in explaining the second destabilizing feature of our world: the quest for values, rooted in ethnology, regionalism, religion, and other fundamentalisms. [5] This quest generates what Samuel Huntington termed "the clash of civilizations." [6] The quest for values, while virtuous in many dimensions, also tends to attack liberal values and supplant state power, civics, and citizenship. "The faith of the Enlightenment in the inevitable triumph of human reason and liberty," wrote Almond and Verba in *The Civic Culture*, "has been twice shaken in recent decades." [7] This "faith" in the reason and science of the Enlightenment is under broad attack again, not by fascists and communists this time, but by intellectuals, ranging from fundamentalist Islamic mullahs to liberals such as Vaclav Havel and conservatives such as William Bennett. Fewer every day seem prepared to make Descartes' declaration that identity depends solely on pure reason. Fascism and communism challenged the "inevitability of democracy" in this century; challenges in the next century will be based on values, not ideologies.

But if communitarianism (the devolution of power to groups and the seizing of authority from the nation-state by communities) seems good for established democracies, those same democracies seem unwilling to grant that such actions may be good for ethnic groups and tribal enclaves, for Yugoslavia or Chechnya. "We should stop touting order imposed from the center for others," wrote William Safire recently, "even as we come to reject that course for ourselves. On the contrary, we should encourage others to go with the flow of centrifugal political forces all over the world." [8] Many would reject Safire's "go with the flow" perspective, seeing that communitarianism's ideals conflict with the core democratic political precepts which sharply limit the claims of state, government, and community on the individual. There are no assurances that all communities will share the same values, that different groups will concur on moralities and responsibilities, that all citizens will obey the same authorities. Wrote French journalist Jean Daniel, "America is wondering if its citizens have less in common than they have differences. . . . [T]hey all come together not under the banner of assimilation or oneness, but of coexistence This tendency toward 'communitarianism' is as alarming for Europe as it is for the United States. We can see in Lebanon and the former Yugoslavia where this kind of convulsion leads." [9]

Western nations may continue to defend liberal political values (human rights, democratic processes, free speech), even as their citizens shift to more communitarian motives for political actions (community rights, moral processes, socially conscious speech), devolve more political power to communities, and find their armies becoming more exclusive enclaves of a warrior spirit. Such spirit stands good stead for traditional offensive and defensive military missions. It is less clear, though, how well "warriors" will perform in the "operations other than war" that represent much of the future work of Western military forces. If the citizenry question the political foundations of these operations, their military execution will become that much more difficult to sustain, regardless of the depth of warrior spirit or professionalism in the armed forces. And pitted against these Western defenders of liberal political values (perhaps only feebly supported by communitarian voters) will be the warriors of nations and ethnic groups that implacably hold tribal and fundamental values. OOTW seem far better served by a professional ethic than by a warrior spirit.

These concerns are very like the worrisome problems the Founding Fathers debated in the Federalist Papers and at the Constitutional Convention, concerns that prompted a Bill of Rights and state militias and the avoidance of standing armies to protect individuals from the tyrannies of majorities and from oppression by communities of warriors. America and the world are on the threshold of a political revolution, which the communitarian values movement may portend. The military must be ready to have these worrisome problems raised, addressed, and resolved again; we must reflect and decide (or have decided for us): how much warrior, how much professional?

Cyclopean Viewpoints

Despite the conventional wisdom, there has been a dramatic narrowing of media viewpoints and perspectives even as the markets for news and communications and the mechanisms to satisfy demand grow exponentially. These trends are likely to continue: booming markets demanding more news and information, with fewer corporate organizations to supply it. In a sort of media hydraulics, as this growing volume is forced into narrower channels, news velocity greatly increases. The news volume hits us harder each day, preventing us from perceiving the growing homogeneity of the torrent of words and images.

The corporations that operate world information media are increasingly integrated and consolidated in what Katherine Fulton, founding editor of *The North Carolina Independent*, called a "frenzy of media mergers." [10] The mergers reduce the dimensions and narrow the perspectives of these perceptions, even as the media are blossoming with new technologies of delivery. "The economics of mass communication do not promote diversity [of ideas]," wrote Fletcher School media expert Russ Neuman, noting:

a curiously powerful centripetal force in the marketplace of ideas that leads to . . . "excessive sameness" . . . [T]he powerful market dynamics that reinforce homogeneity pose a significant threat to the democratic ideal of pluralism and diversity [W]hat most people hear and see in the mass media is remarkably uniform in content and world view . . . not the result of a nefarious ring of scheming conspirators; it is structural. It derives from . . . the marketplace.[11]

World mass media are increasingly becoming privately owned (rather than government operated), less regulated, and more profitable. These political-economic characteristics tend to increase concentration of media products, formats, markets, and firms. Additionally, various forms of information transmission and communication are being integrated technically and commercially; telecommunications are becoming conduits for mass media, while mass media are becoming interactive, i.e., telecommunications media.[12] These concentrations and integrations provide an increasingly powerful focus on the consequences of the collapse of nation-states and the rise of values, but with a cyclopean rather than a stereoscopic vision. The danger is that we can only see where there is light, and cannot light what we must see.

The 1970s saw increased concern over the concentration of media outlets by a shrinking number of Western conglomerates, culminating in the 1980 MacBride Report and UNESCO's call for a "new world information order" to reduce "cultural domination" by Western media ownership.[13] One Third World media critic declared "the flagrant quantitative and qualitative imbalance [in North-South communications] was nothing less than a violation of national territories and private homes, a veritable form of mental rape." [14] These concerns did little to slow trends toward consolidation, particularly in the United States. In 1981 there were 46 dominant US companies producing newspapers, magazines, television and radio broadcasts, and motion pictures. By 1988, seven years later, there were only 23.[15] The head of Turner Broadcasting predicts a future with perhaps three English-language global news networks, with other networks in French, Japanese, and possibly Arabic. Turner is trying "to take a 30-40 percent interest in each of these, help set it up and operate it, and at the same time make each one a news supplier to the others, thus lowering news-gathering costs." [16]

If political leaders can find fewer viewpoints and perspectives in the news media to inform their judgments, they increasingly feel the heat of those focused perspectives. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres pointed to the central role played by the information media:

The media and the public judgment [they bring] to bear on governments and leaders [have] become an increasingly critical force in diplomacy between states and in negotiations among parties at conflict. The greatest change in our time has not been effected by armies or states or international organizations; it has been driven by the spread of information.[17]

Daniel Boorstin, former Librarian of Congress, observed how television can shape the culture underlying politics as well (as any viewer of tele-evangelism can attest): "Television has offered us new avenues to community. Democracies are very weak in ritual . . . so there is a tendency for the media to fill the gap." [18]

Historian David Jablonsky observed, "In the age of CNN, future wars and OOTW will occur in real time for both the American people and their policymakers." The potency of the "CNN effect" on policies and political action has reached the point that analysts are now at pains to observe that not every policy move is taken with an eye on the CNN feed from Atlanta.[19] But when observers label CNN "the office intercom of global elites," reaction cannot be far behind. Media analyst Nik Gowing argues (with somewhat lame relief) that "the influence of TV news on foreign policy is not as profound as the conventional wisdom holds . . . [I]nstantaneous TV images . . . may well induce policy panic [or] affect a government's tactics . . . but they rarely affect strategy." [20] CNN-induced "policy panics" and media influences on government decisions and planning are significant enough that they should cause military professionals and their civilian counterparts to expect and prepare for these media effects in military operations. To base such preparations on the limited perspectives provided by the media spirals into diminishing returns, but as Peres noted, to ignore those same perspectives can be very dangerous. To make effective preparations for the "CNN effect," the military must recall that, rich and diverse as the media may be, the cleavages and facets of media stories are sharp, simple, broad, and few. We must describe the tapestry of plans and operations honestly, so that the media will have to explain any refusal on its part to provide that which soldiers and diplomats offered willingly to the American people.

History's Ironies: Back to the Future

History does not repeat itself; it repeats its ironies. Following the Civil War, America's Army, the smallest it had been since the Revolution, was relegated to "peacekeeping" in ethnic conflicts on our Western frontier. It became a "professional police force refereeing disputes between cattle and sheep ranchers . . . and protecting settlers from resentful bands" of Indians; their countrymen "seldom looked beyond the Mississippi to hear the ominous sounds of massacre and depredation that the troops were trying vainly to suppress." [21] Those were difficult, unappreciated missions. One-quarter of the Army, for example, over 5000 soldiers, took many months to bring Geronimo and a handful of Apache warriors to ground on the reservation. The Army was widely vilified for not hanging him on the spot. US soldiers enforced federal treaties and kept peace on the frontier as often by protecting Indians from whites bent on ethnic cleansing as by operations against the native Americans. [22]

The legacy of the last half of the 19th century was to be profound in the first half of the next. Many of our great captains in the World Wars took their first steps in the frontier posts of those Indian-fighters. [23] Historian Russell Weigley partly attributes the Army's safe, conservative tactics in the first half of the 20th century--its failures in war to take advantage of superior mass, mobility, and firepower--to its long, 19th-century frontier constabulary history. [24] Similarly, the Army's legacies of World War II and subsequent nation-state conflicts depend heavily on technology for combat training, air-ground joint tactics, and operations planning. That culture leaves the Army unready psychologically for policing the ethnic conflicts of the 21st century, and unprepared organizationally to return to a future as a "professional police force refereeing disputes" between 21st-century cattle and sheep ranchers and warring tribes.

The revolutionary collisions of sociopolitical forces will determine future conflicts, their nature, and the motivations of the belligerents, as well as our perceptions and reactions to them. These deep forces shake military affairs. Today's military professionals must anticipate those shocks and adapt their structures and technologies to function effectively despite their consequences. The military must function within the social movements identified here, channeling the interaction of military operations with these sociopolitical forces to move us closer to our military objectives and toward our nation's political strategies and democratic goals. Our revolution in military affairs should encompass and adapt to these forces. If we are truly moving back to the future, our failure to adapt can create the risk of reliving history's ironies. The Army could find itself standing its ground without realizing that the ground has shifted beneath it, causing others to see us dancing a ludicrous and dangerous ballet.

NOTES

1. Sir Michael Howard observed that "since Operation Desert Storm, there has been a focus on the technological dimension of warfare. The social dimension however, is no less important--possibly even more. In fact the two cannot be separated," *How Much Can Technology Change Warfare?* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 20 July 1994) p. 5. Jeffrey R. Cooper noted the "different, if not divergent, views . . . of an RMA,"

commenting that "too much time is still wasted on RMAs as technologically-driven phenomena. . . . RMAs are not merely more clever or even more elegant technological breakthroughs. . . . [T]hese revolutions are more profound both in their sources and implications," *Another View of the Revolution in Military Affairs* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 15 July 1994), p. v.

2. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

3. For example, the Secretary General of the United Nations estimated that there will be twice as many nations (400) in five years; Nik Gowing predicted 260 conflicts in Russia, in "The One-Eyed King of Real-Time News Coverage," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 11 (Fall 1994), 45-54.

4. William A. Stofft and Gary L. Guertner, "Ethnic Conflict: The Perils of Military Intervention," *Parameters*, 25 (Spring 1995), 41.

5. "The origins of the English word 'fundamentalism' are found in the United States, and date back to the 1920s. Any 'fundamentalist' movement, whatever religion it professes, interprets religious texts literally and maintains the myth of an idealized past, based on a selective reading of history"; Pedro Moya, "The Rise of Islamic Radicalism and the Future of Democracy in North Africa," Draft Interim Report, Sub-Committee on the Mediterranean Basin, NATO Civilian Affairs Committee, May 1994.

6. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (Summer 1993), 22-49.

7. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965).

8. William Safire, "Comes the Devolution," *The New York Times*, 9 February 1995, p. 23.

9. Jean Daniel, "God is Not a Head of State," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 11 (Spring 1994), 11-13.

10. Katherine Fulton, "A New Agenda for Journalism," *Nieman Reports* (Spring 1994).

11. W. R. Neuman, "The Political Economy of the Mass Media," in W. Russell Neuman, Marion R. Just, and Ann N. Crigler, eds., *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992).

12. Both broadcasting and telecommunications, traditionally state-owned industries in communist and many Western nations, are heavily represented in the worldwide wave of industry privatizations; see Susan Scherreik, "Your Ticket to the Privatization Party," *Business Week*, 18 April 1994. Booming global telecommunications expansions are allowing the industry to erode already shrinking national media and telecommunications regulations; see Catherine Arnst, "The Global Free-for-All," *Business Week*, 26 September 1994. The profits of the media industries (motion pictures, publishing, newspapers, and broadcasting) in the United States are 1.3 to 2 times the average of other industries; Benjamin M. Compaign, ed., *Who Owns the Media?* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982). The integration of the various media blurs traditional distinctions between broadcasters and common carriers, the former publishers of information, the latter purveyors of channels of communication, in turn blurring regulatory and market distinctions.

13. See Muriel and Joel Cantor, "United States: A System of Minimum Regulation," in Raymond Kuhn, ed., *The Politics of Broadcasting* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

14. Mustapha Masmoundi quoted by Richard Parker, "The Myth of Global News," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 11 (Winter 1994), 41.

15. Ben G. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

16. Quoted in Parker, "The Myth of Global News."

17. Shimon Peres, "An Informed Public: The Third Party in Peace Negotiations," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 11 (Summer 1994), 39-40.
18. Daniel J. Boorstin, "A History of the Image: From Pseudo-Event to Virtual Reality," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 11 (Summer 1994), 16-21.
19. The role of CNN and the global real-time television coverage of political and military events are described in Frank Stech, "Winning CNN Wars," *Parameters*, 24 (Autumn 1994), 37-56; and Timothy J. McNulty, "Television's Impact on Executive Decisionmaking and Diplomacy," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 17 (Winter 1993), 67-83.
20. David Jablonsky, "US Military Doctrine and the Revolution in Military Affairs," *Parameters*, 24 (Autumn 1994), 18-36. Rich Zharadnik coined the "intercom" description, quoted in Parker, "The Myth of Global News." Gowing's disavowal of a CNN effect on strategy is from his scholarly effort to trace the ties between CNN-like TV images and policy decisions ("The One-Eyed King of Real-Time News Coverage").
21. William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur: 1880-1964* (New York: Laurel-Dell, 1978), pp. 34-35.
22. The irony grows richer the deeper one peers. Many of the soldiers were 9th Cavalry "Buffalo Soldiers," African-Americans preserving the Indians' few and shrinking federal civil rights decades before their descendants peacefully fought for their own. On the Army's 19th-century multifaceted peacekeeping OOTW, see John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891).
23. Born at Fort Dodge (now Little Rock) in 1880, Douglas MacArthur liked to reminisce (probably apocryphally) that "my first recollection is that of a bugle call," and he wrote of marching as a lad at the head of the troopers' columns; William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur: 1880-1964*, p. 54.
24. Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaigns of France and Germany, 1944-45* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981). Tales of America's lags behind Germany in the "revolutions in military affairs" in World War II are legion. As late as D-Day, American infantry units continued to use machine guns as company weapons; we had as many in an infantry company (2) as the German Wehrmacht had in two squads. The German MG42 weighed half as much and fired three times as fast as the US Browning M1919; Joseph Balkoski, *Beyond the Beachhead: The 29th Infantry Division in Normandy* (New York: Dell, 1989), pp. 99-105.

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