

The Greater Middle East and Its Strategic Profile

Stephen Blank*

In Afghanistan and subsequently in Iraq America's armed forces consummated a strategic revolution, many of whose dimensions have yet to be understood. The strategic revolution revealed in these two wars comprises several critical aspects of modern warfare as they apply to the increasingly linked theaters of Central Asia and the Middle East (including the Persian Gulf). Indeed, this linkage is one of the key aspects of that revolution and our focus here. But the trends that we can observe emerging out of these wars also possess profound strategic relevance for military theaters beyond Southwest Asia and thus for the analysis of contemporary warfare and strategy in general.

While many military writers can plausibly argue that these victories illustrate the potential of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that argument, correct as it may be, is incomplete. For what we have seen and what we are witnessing is a Revolution in Strategic Affairs (RSA). As Lawrence Freedman observed in 1998, the RMA opens the way to this broader revolution.

The link between the military and political spheres is the realm of strategy. If there is a revolution, it is one in strategic affairs and is the result of significant change in both the objectives in pursuit of which governments might want to use armed forces, and in the means that they might employ. Its most striking feature is its lack of a fixed form. The new circumstances and capabilities do not prescribe one strategy, but extend the range of strategies that might be followed. In this context, the issue behind the RMA is the ability of Western countries, and in particular the US, to follow a line geared to their own interests and capabilities.¹

The Dimensions of the Strategic Revolution

On this basis, we can state that one aspect of the RSA shown by these wars is the reconceptualization of strategic space in and around the Middle East. Indeed, for purposes of military operations it is possible to talk of a greater Middle East that stretches from Turkey to Afghanistan and perhaps for some aspects also includes all of North Africa. It is also now obvious to outside observers as well that this reconceptualization of strategic space encompasses South Asia. This revolution does not apply only to the Middle East but also applies to both South Asia and to East Asia due to the capabilities of the new forces and military organizations displayed in Afghanistan Asia and Iraq. Even before the war in Iraq, Sir John Thomson, a former British High Commissioner to India wrote that,

The geographical definition of South Asia has expanded. If we had any doubt before, September 11 has made it clear that we have to take into account Afghanistan and its neighbors: Iran to the west all the former Soviet republics to the north; and China to the east. The geographical context for South Asia may be even wider. We in the West say -- sincerely, I believe -- that we are not against Islam, but many Muslims do not believe it. So, to a greater or lesser extent, our relations wit Arab countries can be connected with our South Asian policies. And this potential extension of our area of concern is being reinforced, unfortunately, by the spiraling disaster in Israel-Palestine..²

Thus undoubtedly the increasingly visible strategic linkage of these two adjoining regions --the former Soviet South comprising Central Asia and the Transcaucasus and the traditionally understood Middle East -- as comprising a single theater of strategic military operations (this term is taken from the Soviet term Teatr' Voennykh Deistvii -- theater of Military [or strategic] Operations or TVD) constitutes one major aspect of this revolution.³ Thus the major changes in warfare driven by the RMA are bringing about fundamentally new geostrategic phenomena or the means of conceiving of existing ones in new and innovative ways. Another way of stating this is to extend the argument made by some experts that the strategic parameters of both the Middle East and of Central Asia (including the Caucasus) are

not static and fixed. Rather they are dynamic parameters, subject to change, e.g. from the strategic implications of the technological changes now driving warfare.⁴

Even before September 11, 2001 Central Asia and the Middle East were undergoing a profound strategic transformation. There are abundant examples of increasing military-military relationships not just between Russia, China, and the United States with the states of the CIS, but also of strategic and economic interchanges among these states, India, Pakistan, European governments and key Middle Eastern states like Israel, Turkey, Iran, and even Saudi Arabia. Likewise many of the security challenges arising from the “illegitimate governance” and lack of effective and democratic states in these states and even on the Black Sea littoral suggests comparable problems and security challenges across borders.⁵ Though considerations of access to energy sources and to pipelines undoubtedly influenced much of this interaction, strategic and other factors also played a key role. Even the U.S.’ involvement in the Caucasus and Central Asia began by aiming to stop the visible efforts by a poorly controlled Russian military in 1992-94 to reassert a form of imperial control and intervention in those areas.⁶ But since then this transformation has accelerated and intensified to the point where it has become a genuine strategic revolution whose consequences are only beginning to be discerned.

If we borrow a Marxist metaphor, the accumulated quantitative but individually small changes in the regional situation reached the point of visible qualitative change after September, 2001 to the point where, taken together, they constituted a veritable revolution. The processes that comprise this strategic revolution are overlapping, simultaneous, and both internal and external in origin. Therefore this revolution’s geostrategic context and dimension are crucial to a full appreciation of its significance. However, despite the changes in Central Asia that preceded September 11, the core or catalytic event of this revolution only began well after then. Neither was this catalytic event the attacks on America of September 11, 2001, although the planning for those attacks originated in Central Asia. Those attacks merely continued Al-Qaida’s ongoing war against the United States even if they dramatically magnified the scale of attacks it could launch. On the other hand, these attacks showed that threats originating in

Afghanistan could strike at the heart of America and presumably anywhere else thus globalizing the reach of terrorism and of the threat it poses. Those attacks merely confirmed the tendencies at work in the Central Asian context that had heightened its strategic importance before September 11. But it was the American response that truly crystallized the impact of this globalization of military capability upon this new TVD, forcing us to reconceptualize the region's strategic space because it is clearly no longer immunized from the long-range strike and power projection capabilities displayed since 2001.

Thus it was the ensuing American and allied response to September 11 that truly revolutionized Central Asia's and the greater Middle East's security situation. Throughout history Central Asia and the canonical Middle East have been the object of military operations by both indigenous and external forces -- most recently the British and Tsarist/Soviet empires. After 1991 Central Asia became the subject of ever greater strategic interest by Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, India, Pakistan, and the United States; the post-September allied offensive has fundamentally transformed this history. Indeed, this expansion of international economic and strategic connections among Europe, Asia, and these regions, i.e. globalization, has driven this transformation. But while what we might call the globalization of strategic and economic relationships among all these areas is the driving force of this revolution, the core or catalytic event that reveals the current profound geostrategic transformation or the reconceptualization of strategic space is essentially a military one.

This strategic revolution's core attribute can be stated relatively simply. *For the first time in history naval and air based military power has successfully been brought to bear in lasting fashion against Central Asian forces and targets. Therefore we can think seriously about the future projection of naval and air power into the Central Asian theater. The United States' ability to project and sustain joint military power into Central Asia is unprecedented. Moreover, the demonstration of America's capability to project military power into Central Asia through joint and combined action with allies prefigured what then occurred in Iraq. These outcomes and the capabilities displayed in both wars represent a quantum leap in the external and internal*

military capabilities that could be brought to bear in contemporary warfare. And at the same time they also represented a comparable quantum leap in the capabilities that were already being brought to bear on the two regions.

Previous instances where military power had been brought to bear from abroad on Central Asia were clearly part of the historic relationships known as the Great Game which continued right up to the demise of the Soviet Union -- in no small measure to its debacle in Afghanistan. However, to the extent that the United States has overcome the tyranny of distance and the threat of anti-access strategies against it or its allies and interests, this demonstration of America's power projection capabilities has also accelerated a pre-existing counter trend intended to revitalize that threat and deny the United States or other powers access to Central Asia and adjoining theaters. These counter trends or strategies comprise not just an anti-access strategy but also possibly could become part of a broader area denial strategy on the part of hostile powers or movements.

As our purpose here is to analyze the reconceptualization of the Middle East's and former Soviet South's strategic space we have to forego considerations of novel ways of organizing forces and the necessity for strategies for peace operations and for coalition maintenance. Those issues will be treated in depth elsewhere.⁷ Still these wars demonstrated that for operations in the expanded Middle Eastern theater, coalitions remain an indispensable necessity for the United States and the viability of coalitions has an enormous impact upon strategy here. The coalitional dimension of this strategic revolution pertains not only to the active military support in combat operations or in post-conflict stability operations but also to logistic and intelligence support, e.g. the facilities provided by Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrein, Central Asian, and Transcaucasian states that have been instrumental in facilitating America's permanent access to the Gulf and to lodgments there.⁸ More pertinently the crisis leading to the war in Iraq forcefully brought home the limited reliability of America's preexisting base and access structure for military operations in Southwest Asia. This crisis confirmed Robert Harkavy's forecast in late 2001 that obtaining access to either the Middle East or what he calls the greater Middle East,

including Central Asia and Afghanistan as well as North Africa, would be highly problematic in comparison to the extensive access the coalition had in 1990-91.⁹

Planners can no longer count on anything close to such access. A large portion of the troops and aircraft once in Europe have since returned to the continental United States. Access to, and transit rights over, such states as Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, and even Saudi Arabia are problematic, depending much more than before on the nature of the crisis, despite a much larger “permanent” presence in several of the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Even Europe could be in question if the political divide between the United States and the European Union over Middle Eastern policies should widen. Hence, worst-case scenarios have envisioned the United States in a tough situation, attempting to intervene in the Gulf area mostly from bases in the continental United States and from carrier battle groups and amphibious formations.¹⁰

These observations certainly apply as well to the campaign in Afghanistan when one examines the scope of U.S. and allied reliance on facilities and bases in the Gulf, Diego Garcia, Pakistan, and Trincomalee, and upon Russian logistical and intelligence assistance, Pakistani intelligence cooperation and the bases it acquired in Central Asia. But they also constitute warnings for the future that access to these areas cannot be taken for granted and may itself constitute a priority strategic objective in subsequent crises and campaigns. Therefore it is also hardly surprising that the United States is not only envisioning global changes to its base structures but also the development of hypersonic missiles that could reach anywhere on the planet from the continental United States and other forms of long-distance strikes that do not need to rely on prior terrestrial basing or on overflight and port rights.¹¹

But in the meantime and foreseeable future what emerges from this picture is that notwithstanding the innovations in force structure and operational concepts the United States cannot function in either theater successfully or for a long time without meaningful and tangible coalition support. Indeed, an examination of the scope of coalition activities in Afghanistan by 2002 reflects a truly broad and diverse international coalition embracing almost all the aspects of the struggle to reconstitute a viable and secure Afghan state.¹² The need for coalition support also emerges clearly from the transformation of NATO. Despite the crisis within the alliance, NATO has definitively resolved the out of area question and is now taking over the peace

operation in Kabul. At the same time its participation in Iraq or even between Israel and the Palestinians is now under public discussion.¹³ Thus NATO is being swept into this strategic revolution, a trend that will profoundly influence its future evolution.

In many operational respects as well the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq epitomize the nature of contemporary and future wars and represent as well the U.S.' ability to achieve major operational successes through the combination of long and short-range strike forces fighting in a "multivariant" theater that simultaneously comprises multiple conventional and unconventional operations.¹⁴ This success in overcoming the tyranny of distance illustrates the synergies that joint and combined forces can achieve by maximizing the implications of the ongoing Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and the imperatives deriving from that revolution and the transformed threat environment after September 11.

Insofar as the United States will probably have to fight or at least deploy forces again in distant and austere, i.e. under-developed, and often relatively inaccessible if not land-locked theaters lacking infrastructure, water, lubricants and/or easy access, joint power projection and expeditionary forces who can arrive in a theater rapidly are increasingly likely to become the norm, not the exception. Likewise the sustainment of these forces becomes a priority strategic mission for all the services, highlighting the importance of both logistics and of long-term power projection and sustainment capabilities.¹⁵ These logistical, basing, and overflight requirements also bring us back to the immense importance of having reliable coalition members as well.

As a result failure to sustain critical components of land-based power in both the conflict and the allegedly "post-conflict" or peace building phase, will quite probably lead to an increasingly untenable strategic situation in the theater. We see this in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan the failure to achieve stability has enabled Taliban forces to reconstitute themselves and receive funding not just from disaffected Pakistani elites, but also allegedly from Russia!¹⁶ And in Iraq recent reports and charges raise the possibility of having U.S. troops there for years, a graphic sign of the earlier failure to calculate adequately the requirements for a successful stability and reconstruction operation (SRO) there.¹⁷ Thus it is no surprise that

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is now entertaining the idea of standing up an international peacekeeping force at the U.S.' disposal and under its control.¹⁸ Nor is it surprising either that Washington is encountering some difficulties in raising sufficient forces from other states to allow American forces to rotate out of Iraq.¹⁹

Afghanistan and now Iraq show that the military-financial-political requirements of victory and of gaining the crucial element of political legitimacy in each case are so enormous that no single state can assume exclusive responsibility for providing them. Neither can it be assumed in advance that some external agency will miraculously step in to provide those requirements after America has won the victory thereby allowing it to go home. That notion is a strategic fantasy, not a basis for serious planning.

A third fundamental aspect of this strategic revolution goes beyond joint and combined power projection capabilities and coalition warfare to embrace aspects of the current campaign to transform American forces. In other words, new kinds of forces are needed to conduct missions throughout this strategic space. These two wars highlighted the unmistakable and probably irrevocable evolution of U.S. and allied forces towards becoming expeditionary and rapid reaction forces with a global reach and who can dominate across the entire spectrum of conflict. The need for such forces appears to be ever more of a requirement for the successful prosecution of contemporary "multivariant" war.²⁰ The trend towards expeditionary forces who can rapidly get to austere and poorly developed theaters with difficult terrain and fight there successfully is clearly a global one even if its pace varies with the particular military under observation.²¹ This trend is visible among European forces as NATO, in its 2002 Prague summit committed to forming a rapid reaction force.²² Similar developments are also occurring among Asian forces, e.g. the Chinese army, as the following example makes clear. It is also noteworthy that these citations explicitly pertain to Chinese training for contingencies in and around Central Asia, an area where Chinese strategic planners harbor considerable anxiety about and opposition to America's military presence.²³

Col. Susan Puska (USA), the U.S. Army attaché in Beijing, has recently written that,

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has significantly advanced its near-periphery power projection capability through concerted experimentation and adaptation of modern warfighting capabilities during their threat-based training and exercises among targeted army, navy, air and missile forces.²⁴

These programs apply to all of China's military districts, including Xinjiang. Thus China has also developed rapid reaction forces (RRF) and what it calls Resolving Emerging Mobile Combat Forces (REMCF). As Col. Russell Howard (USA) of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, recently observed,

During the past decade, China has placed increased emphasis on RRF training, including an expanded capability to attack mountain regions with combined forces as well as a continued emphasis on the ability to conduct amphibious landings. The development of the RRFs has been linked to ensuring the ability to respond to internal and external threats in Tibet, Xinjiang, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea. The REMCF, believed to consist of an infantry division in each of China's seven military regions controlled by authorities in Beijing, is designed to meet a host of potential problems. These include border defense, internal flare-ups, and certain disaster relief requirements, all aimed at reestablishing central government control quickly and effectively. --- [Likewise] Since 1995 the PLA has increased the complexity of its exercises by adding long-range and intra-regional rapid deployments into exercise scenarios. For example, rapid reaction forces (RRF) units in different military regions (MRs) have conducted long-range and mobile combined exercises in challenging topographical locations such as the Gobi Desert, the Tibetan and Xinjiang highlands, and China's southwestern tropical forests.²⁵

These developments in the PLA are also not just aspects of China's ongoing strategic adaptation. They are also part of the broader trend toward ever greater external military interest and participation in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus on the part of all the interested players in today's version of the so called new great game, many of whom are seeking to build their own versions of power projection and expeditionary forces. Likewise Russia's growing Caspian Flotilla, is the only one of its Fleets to grow since 1991. A 2002 report described its growing capabilities, including power projection, as follows:

In the past five years Moscow has reinforced its Caspian Flotilla with new ships, amphibious aircraft, and patrol ship helicopters. Russia has also finished the construction of a military airfield in Kaspiisk and has deployed a brigade of marines there. And in July, Russia's Caspian Flotilla received its newly commissioned flagship -- the corvette

Tatarstan. The commander of the Russian Naval Forces Admiral Vladimir Kuroyedov, has additionally assured regional ship-builders that a new “state order” is under consideration. “Several dozen more ships will be commissioned, there will be enough work for more than one five-year plan” said Kuroyedov.²⁶

Towards A New TVD: The Greater Middle East

Finally a fourth, geostrategic, dimension of this revolution, the conflation for at least some strategic purposes of the Middle East and Central Asia is intertwined with this broader trend to create expeditionary forces with long-range strike capability. In Afghanistan U.S. and allied bases, capabilities, and lodgments situated in and/or earmarked for use in the Middle East were used for action in Central Asia which is a considerable distance away from the heart of the Middle East. Similarly, bases and assets located in Central Asia or Georgia and Azerbaidzhan could have been used for operations in Iraq and there were many unconfirmed reports that the governments in Tbilisi and Baku were considering the possibility of making such bases available to U.S. forces.²⁷

These facts and reports point to a more profound geostrategic revolution in the area under question. Today for at least some strategic purposes Central Asia and the Transcaucasus (i.e. the whole former Soviet south) and the Middle East can be envisaged as part of a single and increasingly integrated TVD. Indeed, due to this reconceptualization of TVD’s these new expeditionary and power projection forces are needed to deal with the multiple threats situated in the greater Middle East. While this concept is not entirely novel as Anglo-American contingency planning in the Middle East during the 1940’s-50s discussed the possibility of aerial bombardment of Soviet Central Asia or the Caucasus from Middle Eastern bases; this is the first time in history that operations linking these adjacent areas actually took place and were successful.²⁸

Indeed this development may be one of the most revolutionary outcomes of these wars for it forces us and other observers into a radical reconceptualization of the Trans-Caspian and Middle Eastern strategic space. Experts having a deep familiarity with the security dynamics of the Trans-Caspian have been quite reluctant to see this area as embracing some sort of unity, let

alone merging with the Middle East. Roy Allison of the Royal Institute of International Affairs has written of the difficulty of envisioning the parameters or content of a common ‘Caspian’ security zone comprising both Central Asia and the Transcaucasus except in terms of securing the production and transport of energy products even if the question of delimitation of the Caspian Sea does unite these states in a common endeavor.²⁹ Similarly Lena Jonson of Sweden’s Institute of International Affairs doubts that there exists some sort of overarching strategic unity that embraces both these areas, not to mention the broader Middle East that includes the Persian Gulf littoral.³⁰ Nevertheless, since Central Asian and Transcaucasian states have gained their independence in 1991-92 other analysts, including this author, have forecast greater interaction with the Middle East and this geostrategic convergence now appears to be coming true.³¹ Certainly the broader pattern of interrelationships among states in the former Soviet Union and the classically defined Middle East alluded to above lends credence to the deepening of this trend.³²

Although geostrategic, geopolitical, and even geoeconomic theories available to explain either the Middle East or Central Asia or both abound, it nevertheless remains the case that both areas are very much objects of both intra-theater rivalries among local states and movements and of the rivalries of the major external states with significant power projection capabilities. Moreover, these states clearly belong within what Aaron Wildavsky and Max Singer called the zone of turmoil.³³ Speaking of what he calls the “greater Middle East” which includes Afghanistan and Kashmir, if not more of Central Asia, Harkavy observes that,

It is broadly characterized by an absence of democracy, internal instability, endemic violence etc. Daily events in Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Kurdistan, Kashmir, southern Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and so on offer little encouragement that this region is at “the end of history” -- the end of major warfare and security rivalries. In that obvious sense at least, geopolitics is alive and well in the Greater Middle East. It is a powder keg -- over which looms weapons of mass destruction and long-range delivery systems.³⁴

But this foreshortening or concentration of strategic space has profound strategic consequences.

Despite these regions' backwardness, as they merge into Harkavy's concept of the "greater Middle East", rapid development of infrastructures, roads, ports, pipelines, information technologies, modern communications, etc. is occurring. Paradoxically these developmental trends render these states increasingly vulnerable to strikes by modern precision weapons.³⁵ Thus they are no longer inaccessible to modern weapons or to the forward deployment of troops coming from great distances. Consequently the growing fungibility of military capabilities throughout this new TVD makes the struggles to gain and to deny access to the Middle East and/or the former Soviet south critical to any future capabilities for operations on the part of all interested parties. Indeed, that access whether it be to Central Asia or to the classically defined Middle East is already contested. Iraq's political strategy before Operation Iraqi Freedom (Henceforth OIF) clearly aimed to gain political support from states whose ability to withhold critical access to bases and forward "jumping off points" from which the U.S. forces could disembark en route to Iraq. Saddam Hussein hoped that they would thereby deny that access to the United States and it had a fair measure of success in doing so.

Iran not only pursues a similar strategy it also clearly uses terrorism, oil and gas revenues and the promise thereof, and its own indigenous and so far unhampered ability to build weapons or obtain them from states like Russia, China, North Korea, and Pakistan. Not only does it threaten to extend deterrence to the terrorists it supports, it also is busily constructing its own defenses. U.S. intelligence believes that it can already close the Straits of Hormuz for several days using those weapons.³⁶ And it also claims to be able to manufacture reliable anti-ship missiles on its own.³⁷ Those capabilities are purely conventional. However, as Iran develops space, missile, and nuclear capabilities to join its conventional, chemical, and biological ones and to intensify the latter it will also be able to enhance the threat it poses by using so called asymmetric strategies like terrorism to deny access to American or other forces and threaten its neighbors, Central Asia, and even Europe. or it can continue to send missile technology to other, similar inclined states like Syria, which it has begun to do.³⁸

Iran's emerging strategic potential embodies or exemplifies other attributes of the emerging strategic landscape of the greater Middle East. The possibility of Iran becoming the next member of the nuclear club immediately raises the issue of missile defenses in the Middle East and around the Caspian since potential allies will not risk hosting U.S. forces or facilities without some sort of guarantee.³⁹ If the likelihood of terrorism against either the Americans or the host population is added into the mix this hesitation will be magnified still further. Therefore Washington will have to make critical decisions concerning the utility of basing either land-based or sea-based missile defenses in these areas if we make the very uncertain argument that these systems will work reliably against ballistic nuclear missiles.⁴⁰ As it is, there is still no defense available or on the horizon to cruise missiles so even the stationing of such systems in allied states or off their waters by no means resolves their security dilemmas. Thus it is hardly surprising for example, that Turkey, facing possible missile strikes from Iran, and earlier Iraq, if not at some future date from Russia or Syria has been discussing with Israel the possibility of participating in the umbrella offered by Israel's Arrow (Chetz in Hebrew) missile defense system that it developed jointly with the United States.⁴¹ Indeed, the Iraqi and Iranian missile programs were the cause for the Arrow.

Despite the U.S. victory in Iraq and the growing pressure on Iran for greater transparency if not suspension of its nuclear program, the threats to the greater Middle East from proliferation do not end there. Indeed, Harkavy raises three possible threat scenarios connected with the likelihood of further missile and WMD deployments in and around the greater Middle East. First there are several nuclear or potentially nuclear pairings among states with a long, even primordial hostility to each other, Iran and Israel and India and Pakistan. Nor should we assume that their rivalry could not spill over into Central Asia and the Caucasus. In fact Iran regularly inveighs against the "Zionist" Influence in the area, one reason for which is clearly Israel's attempt to restrict and curtail opportunities for the expansion of Iranian influence and gain access to states which are critical in many ways to its interests.⁴² Similarly the Indo-Pakistani strategic rivalry has long since exceeded the bounds of the Subcontinent to comprise not only Afghanistan

-- which has been critical to Indian security for centuries -- but also Central Asia as a whole.⁴³ India and Pakistan are busily seeking to extend not just their political, diplomatic, and commercial influence to the entire Trans-Caspian region but also are projecting military power through arms sales and the establishment of air bases as India has done in Tajikistan.⁴⁴

Harkavy's second point is that these nuclear pairings and potentially other states as well are likely to acquire ballistic (And cruise) missile capabilities so that for example Pakistan and Israel could target each other or states far beyond the classical or greater Middle East.⁴⁵ Iran's threats in 2001 and 2002 to Kazakstan and Azerbaijan regarding access to Caspian energy deposits suggests plausible scenarios for wars other than what we might expect between Iran and Israel.⁴⁶ Likewise the fact that Iran and India signed what amounts to a virtual alliance earlier in 2003 where Iran would get Indian upgrading of its planes in return for air bases in the event of a war with Pakistan suggests another all too plausible scenario.⁴⁷

Harkavy also raises the third possibility of the specter of a so called "rogue state" using its missiles to threaten an allied state or American assets and targets abroad in what he calls indirect or "triangular" deterrence/compellence to deny the target or the United States the option of the full use of its capabilities in the theater.⁴⁸ Iran's previous willingness to extend deterrence for terrorists that strike not only at Israel but at targets in the United States, Latin America, and Europe, or perhaps on behalf of Al-Qaeda (and it recently conceded that there are several operatives from the latter currently inside Iran and that Pakistani intelligence believes that the center of the organization is now there⁴⁹) epitomizes this scenario.⁵⁰

Given all the foregoing conditions and the austere climate, geography, infrastructure, and ethnic rivalries throughout the greater Middle East, it is clear that new tactical, operational, and strategic concepts, along with novel forms of packaging forces and tailoring them to missions here are required. Since ground operations or naval or air operations alone are clearly insufficient to obtain lasting strategic outcomes, access to bases and secure platforms in and around these theatres is vital. And consequently denying those bases and ports to an adversary is no less vital a mission. This consideration strikingly enhances the need for allies and coalitions

as well as the importance of access and anti-access or even anti-area or area denial strategies on the part of the major players.

Threat Assessment

To grasp the strategic implications of this proliferation of conventional, missile, and unconventional weaponry we must first outline the broader Middle Eastern strategic situation. Perhaps no other region in the world contains within it the actual possibility of wars and conflicts running the gamut from teenagers throwing rocks to the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in what would otherwise begin as massive conventional wars. Nor is it impossible to conceive of situation where guerrilla warfare or low-level conventional warfare and WMD threats come together. In other words, multivariant war is all too conceivable an option here.⁵¹ As noted above, Iran has already threatened Israel with WMD on behalf of Hizballah to deter threats against it in Lebanon. Similarly Iran and Syria are transferring missiles to Hizballah in Lebanon for use against Israel.⁵² Iran's efforts to ratchet up the Palestinian terror war against Israel in 2001-02 using Russian made weapons or weapons using Russian-transmitted knowhow are a mater of record.⁵³

Neither can we assume that despite what happened on September 11 that the terrorist threat is essentially one of non-state terrorism or of terrorists who have somehow captured a failed states like Afghanistan. Admittedly failed or failing states make ideal sanctuaries for terrorists.⁵⁴ But as Ariel Sharon remarked years ago terrorists have an address. Even Al-Qaeda could not flourish without considerable state support or support from members of or connected to the ruling elites in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. That is still the case at least as regards Afghanistan and Pakistan where the Taliban has reconstituted itself, according to intelligence reports with assistance from Pakistan, China, and even Russia!⁵⁵ But beyond these facts we know that Pakistan still supports Kashmiri terrorists, that Iran and Syria support both anti-Israel and international terrorists and that Iran now admits to being the host for many Al-Qaeda operatives. Russia's intelligence services have had very strange relations with groups like the Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan (IMU), and it supplies Iran with conventional weapons whose

end-user could be groups like the Palestinian Authority.⁵⁶ Russia has also not hesitated to resort to coups d'états or assassination plots in the CIS and its support for separatist breakaway states there is a matter of record.⁵⁷ Chinese weapons are still going to Pakistan and presumably to forces like the Taliban and the Kashmiri terrorists.⁵⁸ And nobody knows for sure what the relations are among terrorists, intelligence services in key countries, the drug business, and other forms of trans-national criminals. But what we do know from all this is enough to create considerable anxiety.

As Therese Delpech wrote about September 11,

The possible use of nonstate actors by states to further state ends, however, must now also be seriously considered. In the September 11 attacks, Al Qaeda may have received support from foreign intelligence services (Reportedly from those of Pakistan and Iraq). Evidence exists that certain terrorists have had contacts with undercover services on several continents (In Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) and that some people provided the terrorists with the Social Security number of deceased people. The latter is typical of state agents' work. Moreover, the terrorists' ability to defeat U.S. eavesdropping, monitoring, and counterintelligence over an extended period of time also suggests that undercover specialists may have assisted the perpetrators. Thus the attack most probably involved a mixture of state and nonstate action. Incontrovertible evidence of any state complicity might never surface, however further complicating the mission to eradicate international terrorism. This lesson for the future is a dire one: states may learn that they can use nonstate actors to inflict major blows on an adversary without having to be held accountable for their actions.⁵⁹

Such threats may or may not materialize. But the fact that they have been made and the fact that apart from the violence with the Palestinians there were numerous reports of Syrian and Hizballah, Iranian, and Iraqi preparations for a major conventional war that obliged both the United States and Israel to take anticipatory action before Operation Iraqi Freedom indicates the dangers to which this area and the interests of major powers are there are exposed.⁶⁰ All the levels of conflict or types of conflict that can be found in the so called spectrum of conflict are either actual events here or readily imaginable events that are already latent.

Therefore America must be ready to conceive of challenges to its interests, allies, and forces that include terrorism, other forms of low-level fighting as in the Palestinian Intifada, the current insurgency against U.S. forces in Iraq, ethnic conflicts within states or across borders,

inter-state Arab conflicts that can include any of those forms of warfare along with a more traditional conventional scenario, as in Iraq's wars with Iran and the US-led alliance, interstate warfare against Israel as in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, and finally the possible use of WMD, either by terrorists, by terrorists acting through state-sponsored terrorism, or by a state acting on its own. Furthermore, the Middle East is no stranger to WMD or to its use in civil or internal wars within the region. Russian, Chinese, North Korean, or Pakistani assistance to Iran, Iraq, and Syria, often with foreknowledge that weapons will go to either terrorists or groups like Hizballah, could help make any of these scenarios come true.

Most dangerously, WMD has been used repeatedly and with impunity in these and interstate wars in the Middle East going back to 1962 when Nasser used chemical warfare in the Yemeni civil war, or the theater conventional Iran-Iraq war of 1988 where chemical warfare missiles were used. Similarly Syria used cyanide against domestic dissidents and Saddam Hussein used chemical warfare against the Kurds at home, again in a non-theater conventional war. He threatened Israel with conventional and unconventional missiles in 1990-91 even though it was completely uninvolved in 1991. And at least some observers believe that he was signaling thereby that if the U.S.-led alliance tried to destroy his army he would unleash chemical attacks on Israel in order deliberately to widen the war.⁶¹

What is particularly disturbing here is not just the impunity with which these leaders and governments were able to employ WMD, but also the fact that even under the conditions of the most stringent inspections regime ever devised or conditions of war in 1991, neither UNSCOM nor the alliance could destroy Iraq's entire WMD capability. Indeed, allied military forces failed to find or destroy a single SCUD in the entire Gulf War. Neither did UNSCOM Or now the United States find anything as of this writing in 2003. Significantly in neither the Yemeni civil war or the Iran-Iraq war did the users suffer any significant international penalty. This lesson has surely not been lost on Iran which was Saddam's target and yet received no foreign support. That experience remains one major motive for its nuclear and biological and chemical warfare programs. Nor can we attribute the use of WMD without significant international reprisals

against domestic opponents as Russia, Iraq, and Iran have done, or to gratuitously attack third parties as Iraq attacked Israel in 1991 to coincidence.⁶²

We must also consider these recent nuclear and military events in the Middle East alone. U.S. and Israeli officials now accept that Iran will have an IRBM and nuclear capability by 2005 with the Shihab-3 and will be close to expanding it into an ICBM capability with the Shihab-4. General Anthony Zinni, the former CINC CENTCOM publicly professed in 2000 that Iran would have a nuclear capability within 3-5 years, and the CIA now says it cannot guarantee that Iran will not have a nuclear capability to go with its recently tested Shahab-3 IRBM. More recent estimates say Iran is making more progress than was previously believed. This means that it could have a usable nuclear missile sometime during the Bush Administration's term or soon thereafter.⁶³ These developments were possible only with extensive Russian, Chinese, and North Korean proliferation.

Iraq too was rebuilding its chemical and biological missile and war capabilities, along with the nuclear capabilities it aimed for. Israel is going beyond its acknowledged first-strike capability to a second strike sea-based nuclear capability by purchasing German Dolphin Class submarines. As predicted, Israel is responding to its enemies' acquisition of a first-strike capability by building a credible second-strike sea-based option.⁶⁴ Yet simultaneously Israel is building the Arrow missile which will also have an offensive capability "to cover all bets" and prevent missile attacks upon its territory or forces.⁶⁵ Israel is also discussing providing Turkey with a modified form of missile defense against the missile threats that Ankara perceives from virtually all of its neighbors.⁶⁶ And Israel is also considering cruise missiles as Iran and probably Iraq are doing because they are harder to defend against than ballistic missiles.⁶⁷ Finally both Israel and Turkey, like Iran, are moving to enhance significantly their ability to monitor weapons developments from space.⁶⁸

Yet all these moves will do nothing to stop continuing proliferation and possible 'second-tier' or tertiary proliferation whereby states who themselves are the recipients of assistance designed to facilitate their nuclearization then transfer that equipment or knowhow to

other, new proliferators.⁶⁹ And furthermore, as critics of the Arrow point out, a country like Israel cannot afford to suffer one such missile strike and none of these systems can guarantee absolute reliability, only an imperfect deterrence at best.⁷⁰

Consequently many defense intellectuals and the senior members of the Bush Administration now question the validity of deterrence or insist on defenses and preemption as a supplement to it.⁷¹ Moreover, the rush to build missile defenses, and the support for them as espoused by Henry Kissinger, Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld all underscore their growing appreciation of the fact that defense and deterrence may well be incompatible and that in today's world regional deterrence enjoys a very questionable reliability at best.⁷²

Indeed, in today's world, many experts and officials are increasingly strongly and openly attacking the deterrence paradigm of the Cold War as outdated or not fully relevant to the strategic situation of the present where many nations can employ WMD and the assured vulnerability and mutual destruction that were the foundation of deterrence may not be viable for many nuclear or WMD armed states. Similarly these critics of deterrence have arrived at the conclusion that those who would commit suicide bombings or organize them may not be susceptible to the constraints of the logic of deterrence.⁷³ The danger is quite real since we know that groups like the Palestinian Authority or Hamas and certainly Al-Qaeda have investigated the use of chemical, biological, and/or nuclear weapons.⁷⁴ Certainly in small Middle Eastern States like the Gulf monarchies and Israel one successful WMD attack can inflict decisive vulnerability.⁷⁵

This assessment comports with the broader tendency even before September 11 for nuclear states to widen the list of even declared contingencies where they might use nuclear weapons in a first-strike.⁷⁶ Similarly the Clinton Administration publicly stated that chemical or biological attacks on the United States could justify nuclear responses and it refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons as part of its counterproliferation program.⁷⁷ And it made such statements in tandem with the quest for a viable national missile defense. The Bush

Administration has strengthened these threats with the implication of preemptive strikes, building a missile defense, searching for new small-yield and bunker buster nuclear or conventional weapons.⁷⁸

Indeed, the new world order that is coming into being at least in the Middle East resembles the analysis by the distinguished Indian defense expert Brahma Chellaney who wrote that,

In the evolving situation, the existing premises of arms control, like the traditional principles of deterrence, are unlikely to hold. It is no accident that the process of arms control has ground to a halt in this state of fluidity. The proposed elimination of multiple-warhead ICBM's under START II was designed to encourage a shift from launch-on-warning to a launch-under-attack posture. But Moscow has made it clear that it intends to stick to a launch-on-warning posture (which is indistinguishable from the capability to preempt) and may not even eliminate its multiple-warhead ICBMs if Washington begins to deploy NMD. In a complex world marked by conflicting trends, it is apparent that each deterrent relationship will be different from the other, premised on principles at variance with classical deterrence theory. The concept of mutually assured destruction is losing relevance. Deterrence will be constructed on principles radically different from notions of qualitative or quantitative parity.⁷⁹

Meanwhile the Bush Administration clearly intends to go forward on national missile defense (NMD) to meet Iranian and Iraqi threats among others. Defense will take precedence over deterrence and it is not accidental that the so called rogue states were also known as the "undeterrables". It almost does not matter if that sobriquet is true in fact because the perception underlying it is what is driving policy here.

We must, therefore recognize that even if one argues that weapons of mass destruction, and particularly nuclear weapons are not usable instruments of military power, they are tremendous political weapons. Furthermore their deployment signifies that the new nuclear state has essentially declared its complete independence in defense policy and cannot be restrained by the great powers' blandishments or threats against it. That independence then diminishes the political-military and strategic capability of the great powers to project power and deploy influence whether in the Middle East or elsewhere. As Brad Roberts wrote in 1995,

A threat-derived assessment of the proliferation dynamic blinds people to the simple fact that the primary implication of proliferation is not military but political. The primary

immediate effect of the ongoing diffusion of the ability to make high-leverage weapons is the creation of a technically empowered tier of states that can, if they choose, build and use high-leverage military instruments. --- The emergence of a tier of states technically capable of producing high-leverage weapons is unprecedented in international affairs. Its emergence is coterminous with the end of the Cold War. The intersection of these two processes constitutes the unique moment in world affairs today.⁸⁰

Obviously this new group of proliferating states can exercise a great influence upon world politics if they chose to defy the prevailing consensus and use their weapons not as defensive weapons, as they have been commonly thought of under deterrence, but as offensive weapons to threaten other states and deter nuclear powers. Their decision to go either for cooperative security and strengthened international military-political norms of action, or for individual national “egotism” will critically affect world politics in general, not just the U.S. presence in the Middle East. For, as Roberts observes,

But if they drift away from those efforts [to bring about more cooperative security], the consequences could be profound. At the very least, the effective functioning of inherited mechanisms of world order, such as the special responsibility of the “great powers” in the management of the interstate system, especially problems of armed aggression, under the aegis of collective security, could be significantly impaired. Armed with the ability to defeat an intervention, or impose substantial costs in blood or money on an intervening force or the populaces of the nations marshaling that force, the newly empowered tier could bring an end to collective security operations, undermine the credibility of alliance commitments by the great powers, [undermine guarantees of extended deterrence by them to threatened nations and states] extend alliances of their own, and perhaps make wars of aggression on their neighbors or their own people.⁸¹

As we saw above even that latter alternative is no longer unthinkable.

These trends also represent the conventionalization of nuclear weapons and nuclear warfighting scenarios where the nuclear power in question visualizes nuclear weapons as being like any other weapon and hence usable for specific military scenarios. This conventionalization of nuclear weapons and of nuclear warfighting scenarios in and of itself substantially lowers the threshold for nuclear use. We must also remember that the possession of usable nuclear weapons or even merely having the reputation for having them allows states to extort meaningful

concessions from much stronger powers as the North Korean examples of 1994 and of today suggests, and to deter their attack.

In similar fashion, possession, or the unverifiable report of possession of such weapons also makes the world safe for conventional war in the belief that the other side is deterred from going beyond the nuclear threshold. Increasingly it looks like that those states who have gone nuclear only pocket the conventional transfers that they received either to gain influence or to prevent them from going nuclear (one of Moscow's arguments vis-a-vis Iran that serves to justify its conventional arms sales to Tehran) and then return to developing their WMD and their conventional capabilities. Indeed, possession or anticipated possession of functioning WMD capabilities encourages as well a conventional buildup because it gives potential aggressors more security in their deterrence capability. This may have been the case in Pakistan's support for Kashmiri guerrillas' attack in 1999 a on Indian positions there.

Even if we were not living in an age of military-technological revolution, the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) such regional security tendencies would have the following impacts.

- All forms of conventional war in the Middle East now become possible simultaneously as nuclear power possession diffuses. Iran can employ terrorism against Israel or another state, relatively secure in the knowledge that it controls the escalation ladder and can turn this weapon on or off given its nuclear deterrence of even conventional warfare on the other side in response to the threat.
- These threats are not directed only at Israel but also can be directed at U.S. forces, installations, or allies, e.g. Saudi Arabia or the Gulf Emirates. They can be used in a time of "peace" to undermine the credibility of U.S. guarantees to its regional allies which ultimately take the form of guaranteed extended deterrence. Certainly possession by regional aspirants to hegemony would threaten the U.S.' conventional ability to project power by targeting American or allied targets to deny U.S. forces access to bases, propositioned stocks, ports, or any kind of lodgment in the Middle East as a whole.⁸²

- In that case, no six-month buildup in Saudi Arabia as in 1990 would now be possible. Nor would the kinds of strikes that the United States carried out against Iraq be feasible because ports, air bases, staging areas, and the like would be unavailable to it. Either U.S. allies, fearing the prospect of becoming targets would deny it the access or it would just be too risky to employ those “platforms” given enemy capabilities.
- States having even a minimum nuclear deterrent or WMD capability could then pursue conventional superiority over their neighbors or rivals regenerating the arms race at both ends throughout the region and further stressing already under developed local economies.⁸³
- Not only would nuclear or chemical and biological weapons in the hands of rivals deter American and allied forces in the Middle East, the significance of nuclear weapons would change from being a primarily defensive weapons that ensured the status quo to being an offensive weapon with distinct uses in wartime beyond merely brandishing threats. That transformation would undermine one of the foundation stones of American global strategy since 1945 but it would also herald the return of limited (and possibly even unlimited) nuclear war as a viable operational mission.
- And this is not a question of one or two states. Specifically nuclear weapons, rather than being primarily a defensive weapons, would become weapons for offensive use and revision of the status quo. Likewise the success of U.S. extended deterrence in inhibiting proliferation and regional wars would come under great pressure as regional bullies like Iran and Iraq could then undermine the credibility of U.S. promises to the Gulf Emirates and Saudi Arabia or Jordan all of which are potentially vulnerable to nuclear blackmail.⁸⁴
- Finally the readiness to obtain missiles and WMD capability and even to use them in conditions of either actual or feared conventional imbalance has stimulated Israel to develop not just layered a capability missile attack and of missile defense. In turn, Arab analysts argue that this is a contributing factor, if not the main one, in driving Syrian,

Iraqi, and Iranian missile and WMD programs. Moreover this competition is now extending into space as well. Thus, As these capabilities evolve, the arms race in the Middle East is becoming one between effective, accurate missile delivery assets and effective countermeasures, both offensive and defensive.⁸⁵

Proliferators and established nuclear power already see new justification for their use as threats change and as warfare becomes multi-dimensional to the degree that cyberwar is a reality as is the potentiality for weapons to strike from underwater, the earth, the sea, the air, and space at targets in any one of the other dimensions. And they are abetted by the trend whereby proliferating states then become salesmen of WMD systems to other proliferators, as China and North Korea have done.

Conclusions

Future wars in the Greater Middle East are by no means inevitable. But there are many who would have no hesitation in resorting to such policies if they saw some benefit from doing so. At the same time, the shrinkage or compression of strategic distance inherent in the weapons being developed in the RMA and the larger strategic transformations it is generating make it possible to talk about a single large TVD or of smaller but linked theaters in which the domestic conditions that facilitate war are deeply entrenched and well known. Globalization of economic and military-technological relationships both retards and stimulates the trends that could make for war. In this respect the evolution of this new TVD extends one of the most basic aspects of the “old” Middle East, namely that is one of the most “penetrated” regions of the world, a classic shatterbelt or zone of turmoil.⁸⁶

The most dangerous potential threat is the possibility of states or their proxies, or independent non-state terrorists acting to realize what the U.S.’ National Security Strategy (NSS) calls the “crossroads of radicalism and technology.”⁸⁷ In this respect the dramas now being played out in Iraq and Afghanistan will be decisive for they will determine whether or not American power will be enduringly present and seen as being both legitimate

and credible. If America fails then not only will its power fail to stabilize the area, that failure will then open the way to the reign of those who wish to exploit contemporary trends for war. Whatever people think about U.S. unilateralism as it pertained to Iraq or about U.S. policy in general, it is clear that these strategic developments are real and have real consequences. If others exploit them for war nobody in the “Greater Middle East” if not elsewhere will be safe. If for no other reason than this, indifference to or unconcern about the effort to bring peace, security, prosperity, and democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan is against all our interests and a guarantee, not of peace, but of still more frightful wars and collisions.

* Strategic Studies Institute ,US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013. The views expressed here do not in any way represent those of the U.S. Army, Defense Department, or the Government

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