

THE RMA
AS DOMINATING MANEUVER:
THE INTEGRATION OF
PRECISION STRIKE,
SPACE WARFARE
AND
INFORMATION WARFARE

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The Building Blocks

All we have to work with are the various combinations of matter, energy and information arrayed in dimensions of space and time. These are the components of the universe. They are the building blocks of life, our environment and of war. We have become very adept at transforming all of these through advances in science and technology. The last century has seen tremendous transformations in our ability to collect, store and manipulate data; to at once miniaturize military capabilities and magnify their impact; and to exploit the third dimension of air and space. But the overlapping and reinforcing aspects of these changes--symbolized for us by the launching of Sputnik in October 1957--have been with us for barely forty years.

The simultaneity of these capabilities suggests we are in the midst of a what the Soviets first called a "military technical revolution." We have been able to arrange, and rearrange, matter and energy in different combinations to achieve capabilities which we call space warfare and precision strike. Our capability to control the flow of information has led to a recent infatuation with information warfare, seeking to fight and win war through information dominance. Thus, technologically, there is a concatenation of capabilities which seems to give us a greatly expanded means of conducting warfare. Taken individually, these are important but not utterly transforming. Combined appropriately, they are the first phase of the beginning of a true revolution in military affairs.

OSD/Net Assessment has defined the RMA as

"...a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of technologies which, combined with dramatic changes in military doctrine and operational organizational concepts fundamentally alters the character and conduct of military operation."¹

Success in achieving a true RMA is dependent upon the development of a supporting doctrine to train, organize, equip and employ the technological assets required. More important is the reorganization of the military establishment to support such employment and maximize its potential. But the most important aspect of this RMA has to do with a transformation in thinking, particularly strategic thinking. Achieving the reality of this RMA requires an emphasis on novelty and synthesis as much as on analytical assessment and logic. It is a slow process.

But the necessary insights and ingredients have been accumulating for some time. John Boyd, and his notions of the Observation-Orientation-Decision-Action (OODA) Loop and cycle time and his briefing entitled "A Discourse on Winning and Losing" is a major component.² So, too, is the work of Carl Builder at RAND on the evolution of technology, government and society, the nature of the armed services in general and the Air Force in particular.³ Some of Alvin and Heidi Toffler's insights in *War and Anti-War* and the notion of the "Third Wave" are a part of it.⁴ And, of course, the engine driving all this is as much the Office of Net Assessment and Mr. Andrew Marshall as it is the scholars, analysts, and combatants throughout the country thinking about an RMA and how to achieve it.

Each of these bring insights into what the critical problems are, why they are emerging as they are, and most important, how we have to think about them. While resources and objectives are important aspects of military thinking, they are virtually useless if one has not accurately defined the problem and correctly assessed the environment. Failure to get these right means strategic failure. What is critical is our ability to

think about these in different ways and to creatively synthesize the building blocks that we have. The major question is: How can we integrate emerging technologies and concepts to effect a dominating maneuver?

Dominating Maneuver

SAIC⁵ and others have been shopping the notion of a four part RMA consisting of 1) precision strike, 2) space warfare, 3) information warfare, and 4) the dominating maneuver. These are interesting concepts but dissimilar and of unequal value. The first three are means. The last is an instrumental goal, an effect, and is ultimately best described as the artful combination of the other three. Dominating maneuver is not a co-equal part of a four-fold RMA but rather the end product of the successful integration of the other three. This is what makes it truly novel and why it has no real historical analogs, though there have been other RMAs and other significant technologies paired with doctrinal change and military reorganization.

Our goal here is to express both the simple and compound meaning of dominating maneuver. On one level we seek to begin the process of strategic thinking about dominating maneuver. On the other we seek to add granularity and texture to this new view. Taken together we intend these to provide the key to unlocking the next RMA, an RMA that is the United States' to have or to forego. This is not, however, an exercise aimed at fussing with definitions. We aim for discernment and the power to use a new understanding to fuel the revolution.

Definition of "Dominating Maneuver as the RMA:

The dominating maneuver is the integration of precision strike, space warfare and information warfare to achieve a desired outcome.

As described it is at once an old concept of operations, a vision of the future and a present capability. As an old concept, it can trace its lineage to Clausewitz's "decisive battle," Mahan's undisputed "control of the seas," and Douhet's "knock out blow." As a vision of the future it is the vision of a true RMA which must evolve in other domains if it is to realize the promise that the concept offers. It is a way of thinking and a synthesis of extant capabilities which makes the combined, overlapping and truly joint employment of forces in new and different ways an RMA of great power and significance. Because of the combination of technologies that is required, the sophistication and robustness of the numerous systems necessary to constitute the precursor "system of systems" to employ these capabilities effectively and efficiently, there are a limited number of players in such an RMA arena for the foreseeable future.

What we have at the moment is not an RMA, but merely the opportunity to achieve one. Hidebound thinking, failure to seek, offer or accept constructive criticism, service parochialism, stovepipes and hierarchical organization, a lack of true jointness, and a failure to embrace novelty in thought and action will mean that the effort is stillborn. The odds may well be against its success; few revolutions unfold without resistance. The technology, however complicated and expensive, is the easy part. The thinking that is required to exploit and employ it successfully is the more difficult task.

If successful, the dominant maneuver will be THE RMA. It is the holy grail of true jointness. It represents the possibility of arriving at checkmate, a *coup de grace*, or end game swiftly and completely without the need for long drawn out campaigns and large casualties, military or civilian. Therein lies its attraction for advanced post-

industrial democracies of the "Third Wave," as the Tofflers would describe the US. It is the combination of information warfare techniques, the ability to operate from air and space in a variety of ways, and the capacity for precision strike that combine, are integrated and must be synthesized into the dominating maneuver.

To be effective and efficient, the dominating maneuver combines the other parts of the technological revolution in a perfectly networked concept of operations (CONOPS) and execution to deny all significant choice or behavior to an adversary save that which we want him to carry out. Thus, its purpose is to use our force to help an adversary choose to carry out the course of action we prefer he choose. Such a choice is one that advances our aims while progressively dislocating him from the opportunity to meet his. He may be deterred from certain actions, seduced into others, tricked into some, coerced into unattractive choices, or channeled into ineffective ones by a variety of means. In other cases the enemy's forces or the effects of enemy force are denied, disrupted, delayed, damaged or destroyed in a variety of ways. The purpose of the dominating maneuver is nothing less than control of his choice by structuring his trade-off matrix.

The simple meaning of dominating maneuver thus revealed, the compounded meaning lies vulnerable to our understanding. To create a new synthesis, we must first destroy some old understanding through analysis. Dominating maneuver tentatively has been defined by others as "the positioning of forces, integrated with Precision Strike and Information Warfare and Space operations, to attack decisive points, defeat the enemy center of gravity, and accomplish campaign objectives."⁶ This anticipatory definition describes or prescribes some important features of dominant or dominating maneuver.

First, it is maneuver in the sense of movement or positioning. Second, the maneuver is inextricably integrated with other operations. Third, the aim of the positioning of forces is to attack those decisive points that allow defeat of the enemy center of gravity and thereby accomplish campaign objectives. While most of these are descriptive and all are important, it is possible to build upon this foundation. An amplification and a finer definition of our larger one is:

Dominating Maneuver is (1) the massing of forces and *effects* (2) to physically (3) and psychologically dislocate an enemy from his strategy or aims (4) at the time and manner of our choosing (5) and in such a way that he cannot successfully resist the end state we assert (6) without risking a value set greater than the one his strategy originally sought.⁷

So What?

The additional insights are important. Consider what the revised definition postulates.

1) It asserts that maneuver is not just the “posi-tioning of forces...to attack decisive points...” The immediate object of maneuver is the massing or concentration of forces and effects. It is the concentrated and concerted application of force and effects that is critical to dominance. “Forces” and “effects” are just as much a plural abstract noun as a plural concrete noun. If the components of the universe are matter, energy, and information, then even electrons and photons are forces that can be concentrated to produce effects.

Deception, for example, is another force producing effects integral to dominating maneuver. Deception usually requires “forces” to produce the “force” of the deception.

The force of deception creates the effects sought: friendly capabilities or activities are masked, the enemy is confused, seduced, tricked, misdirected, or out of position. Because the deception rendered the enemy more vulnerable, mismatches in other forms of combat power aid the dominating maneuver. The force and effects of the deception are massed with the other elements of the dominating maneuver. Even the elegantly arrayed zeroes and ones of information, aimed at decisive points, aid in deception's contribution to the dominating maneuver.

2) The new understanding avoids limiting the means by which dominating maneuver will be executed. It does not suggest that the contributing elements to the RMA will be provided by separate force providers. Such thinking may erroneously hold that the Air Force contributes "space warfare" and "precision strike," that the Navy does "information warfare," and that the Army and Marine Corps contribute "dominating maneuver." It also refrains from tempting us to concoct recipes such as "stir a tablespoon of precision strike in with a cupful of information warfare, season with a dash of space warfare, and bake in the desert for 24 hours." Military genius *is* genius because there is no cookbook for producing its effects.

3) The "forces and effects" concentrated against an enemy may include the application of non-lethal force or the use of military action designed to have economic effects. Space warfare and precision strikes against any but cyber-targets may be unnecessary (or unauthorized) in some conditions. Even so, a dominating maneuver can still be planned and executed within all but the most foolish rules of engagement. Where the capacity for dominating maneuver exists, deterrence is more likely. The reasonableness of the rules

of engagement derives from the capability. Said another way, if dominating maneuver becomes the lens through which we view the military problem and we have the means to impose it, then adversaries and leaders would both know. Tailored to the problem at hand, including both robust offensive *and defensive systems*, dominating maneuver is not escalatory. Rather, it only seeks to dominate that portion of the environment and the problem to which it applies at a particular time.

4) The new awareness can incorporate advances in technology. It does so by not limiting the components of dominating maneuver or the means by which dominating maneuver is achieved. For example, by 2025 very accurate ionospheric and atmospheric predictive weather models may be available. If so, weather can be integrated into the scheme of maneuver much in the same way that daylight and darkness are today. If microscale weather modification is possible, it too can be used to help achieve the dominating maneuver.⁸ Is weather modification a form of precision strike, information warfare, or space warfare? No. It is something else. The current definition and understanding preclude this “something else” from being a part of dominating maneuver. This new understanding does not preclude these new capabilities. It accepts that the concentration of forces and effects can arise from widely dispersed, distributed or de-massified points and forces. Indeed, the revised definition accepts that while such may be the case in 2025, the dominating maneuver *must be envisioned and executed as a single harmonious maneuver*, no matter where the force originates or where the forces are located.

5) Dominance, in turn, is not just the result of positioning and integration to attack decisive points or centers of gravity. Recall that Clausewitz asserted that *successive*

successful operations against separate centers of gravity aimed to collapse these many small centers into one *single* center of gravity. Defeat of this single center in one *Hauptschlacht* was the aim of the campaign. This was, as it had to be in former times, a serial process of battles. The revised definition applies the expected capability of future technology to **new concepts of operations**; an organic set which compresses and accelerates the process Clausewitz envisioned into a single, large operation. (This is not precisely the same notion as “parallel war.” Parallel lines never converge. The effects of dominating maneuver converge in a grand way.)⁹ This single operation is intended to have immediate, rather than prolonged, cumulative effects.¹⁰

The culminating point is not developed by serial actions, but by what is intended to be a single action. Technology did not allow the realization of this vision in former times. Even so, Clausewitz himself noted, that

If war consisted of one decisive act, or a set of simultaneous decisions, preparations would tend toward totality, for no omission could ever be rectified. . . .

But, of course, if all the means available were, or could be, simultaneously employed, all wars would automatically be confined to a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones--the reason being that any *adverse* decision must reduce the sum of the means available, and if *all* had been committed in the first act there could really be no question of a second. Any subsequent military operation would virtually be part of the first--in other words, merely an extension of it.¹¹

It may be that Clausewitz’s “if” condition may be satisfied by technology in 2025. Yet, the caution Clausewitz urges is aimed at answering the questions “What next?” and “What if some omission inadvertently occurs?” Note that the new understanding not only satisfies the vision of Clausewitz, but also applies new technological capabilities to

the theories of Mahan and Douhet. Thus, dominating maneuver at the tactical level is conceptually the same as dominating maneuver at the strategic level. The principal difference between dominating maneuver at the strategic level versus tactical operations is that the latter may not be directed against those centers that can affect the enemy's larger aims directly.

6) Dominance, this new understanding asserts, results from massing effects to dislocate an adversary from his strategy or aims. This dislocation is both psychological and physical. The enemy is physically incapable of meeting his aims and psychologically unbalanced by the recognition of the forceful and sudden imposition of this incapacity. The new understanding thus adds granularity or texture to the earlier definition of dominating maneuver by plainly asserting just what "to accomplish campaign objectives" means. Thus, this new thinking glues together activities at every level. The assertion that dislocation must be physical as well as psychological also suggests that, even in the far future, hostile will may be physically subdued by hostile means in an area of operations. Deception and information warfare may, or may not, suffice.

7) If we properly describe dominating maneuver, the description will be just as applicable to enemy initiatives as it will be to friendly ones. Thus, the definition applies both to the conquest of an enemy state or the dislodging of an enemy from a friendly state. Whether the friendly forces have the mission of defense or offense, dominating maneuver requires that friendly force and effects be massed to deny the enemy the control and agility necessary to execute his strategy. Thus, even the friendly strategic de-

fense will orchestrate means to deny the enemy the assurance that enemy strategy can be successful.

8) The only way the enemy can resist the dominating maneuver is to accept or pursue some other strategy. This “other strategy” facilitates friendly aims and collapses enemy aims into preserving an enemy’s higher value, or preference, set.¹² (That is something like, “I guess I’d prefer to have sufficient combat power to stay in power in Iraq, rather than lose it by staying in Kuwait.”) While the enemy may resist the dominating maneuver (indeed, if the enemy engaged is a peer, *must* resist to remain a peer), the maneuver is planned and executed so that he cannot resist *successfully*. Thus, the new understanding incorporates the need to plan end-states and acknowledges that war termination on favorable terms is the goal of dominating maneuver. Envisioning the end-state, and planning for it, are valuable additions to joint operations planning.

9) Planning for dislocation of the enemy strategy is especially important in a fight with a peer competitor. As depicted notionally in Illustration 1 below, a fight with a peer has both a perceived aim and an actual aim. The perceived enemy aim may be the conquest or incorporation of another state’s territory. The perceived friendly aim may be the ejection of the enemy from the occupied state and restoration of the *status quo*. In reality, if friendly forces fight, their aim *actually* might be to eliminate the enemy state as a peer competitor. Likewise, in starting the fight, the enemy aim *actually* might be to create a *causis belli* that will allow the enemy to eliminate the friendly state as a peer competitor. “Warfare is the Way [Tao] of deception,” according to Sun Tzu.¹³ Deception can be the basis of actions taken at the strategic level, just as much as deception amplifies

actions taken at the tactical level. Thus, dominating maneuver can aim to impose an end-state superior to the *status quo ante*.

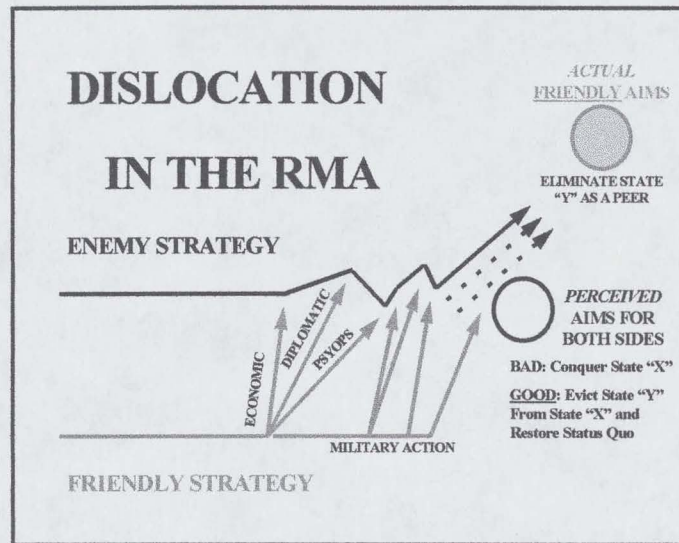


Illustration 1: How Dislocation Works

10) The new understanding accepts that this imposition is made by friendly forces at the time and manner of friendly choice. Time and timing are critical for dominating maneuver,¹⁴ especially if force and effects are concentrated from widely dispersed points and de-massified forces. Even so, it accepts that domination need not be thought of as a continuous condition. It may be a transitory condition (just as air superiority, sea control, and space control may be transitory conditions) *as long as the norms and objectives of the maneuver are met*. Indeed, dominating maneuver may be a powerful, compressed “pulse” of energetic force (electronic, informational or explosive and physically destructive) applied against an enemy’s decisive points. On the other hand, it may be a large punitive raid that produces strategic effects.¹⁵ This “pulse” violently fractures enemy ca-

pability and compresses the OODA loop of friendly forces, while suddenly adding thousands of phenomenological indicators to confound and prolong the OODA loop of enemy forces.¹⁶

The enemy, especially a peer enemy, is expected to be resilient and have forces designed to remain resistant. An additional pulse applied against residual enemy capability would often or likely be required. Thus, and in rapid succession, the process might be: dominating maneuver, a period of respite for assessment and friendly force recovery, and then another dominating maneuver. Even so, the first dominating maneuver always is planned and executed to be decisive, even while attending to the cautions which Clausewitz raised.

What then are the tactical-technical characteristics of the weapons, operational schemes, and organizational forms that breathe life into this new notion of dominating maneuver? We expect that the quest for a 20th century “system of systems” will lay the foundation for a 21st century “organism of organisms” that becomes the revolution. “Systems” are engineering models. “Organisms” assert the power of the human neocortex in the asocial social activity of warfare. Key to the foundation is an importance of global thinking and global operations. Aerospace control is the key to global operations.

Dominating Maneuver and Aerospace Control

Maj Gen Chuck Link, USAF, has supplied one of the pivotal insights into the dominating maneuver in air and space power.¹⁷ According to Link, the dominating maneuver manifests itself in aerospace control by giving the Air Component Commander (ACC), the custodian of the third dimension, the combination of exercising mass and

maneuver simultaneously in multiple ways on multiple targets, with multiple assets. He is not limited in his avenue of advance (azimuth of attack) and can bring a much wider array of weaponry to bear thus blurring the supposed lines between tactical and strategic assets and attacks. Ground and naval commanders, constrained by operating in essentially two dimensional arenas, must choose between the desire to go to battle via mass or maneuver. Rarely do they have the chance to do both. The ACC, on the other hand, because of the unique combination of characteristics of airpower, need not make that choice but can effect both simultaneously.

Several caveats are in order. First, mass is defined here by the effects that are caused, not necessarily the aggregation of platforms or weapons. Mass, recall, is one of the forms that energy takes. Second, the effect need not be persistent to have strategic impact. Effects may be recurring and pulsed, or, under perfect conditions, be a truly decisive, knock out blow that need not be repeated. The latter, though necessary for an authentic dominating maneuver, should not be the only planning paradigm for a campaign plan, nor the aerospace contribution to it. (Clausewitz's insights must be preserved by those who seek wisdom to avoid trendy nescience.) Even so, a maneuver planned to be dominating must be planned to be irresistible in its fraction of time and slice of space

A truly effective aerospace control operation would best be enabled by surprise and should be carefully crafted. It should mix linear, sequential aspects as well as be non-linear, unpredictable and seemingly chaotic. It should be seemingly random in azimuths of attack, target sets, weapons loads routes and tanker tracks. Thus, save for the aspects of scope and scale on which to plan, attack orders would have to be radically

transformed to meet these criteria. Maximum exploitation of opportunities and enhanced situational awareness decree that commander's intent is supreme, be that commander the military officer charged to use military means to dislocate the enemy or the civilian leadership charged to orchestrate all the means of national power to achieve these effects. *Auftragstaktik* and the commander's intent are crucial. Empowered subordinates are mandatory.

Speed (responsiveness), range, vantage (perspective) and versatility are the keys to aerospace power and control. Lethality and precision are not hallmarks of aerospace power alone. The means may be lethal or non-lethal, and both lethality and precision are shared by other types of weaponry (services) as well. But how these are orchestrated is critical. Every effort should be made to prevent patterned performance in order to deny pattern recognition to adversary sensors of all kinds. Uncertainty for the adversary is critical. Hence, modulation of the pace, duration, timing, content, and target sets are all important considerations in the design and execution of an effective plan for aerospace control.

Achieving a Real RMA

Achieving a real RMA based on the promise of dominant maneuver requires three sets of tasks to be accomplished. The first relate to technology, the second to doctrine and the third to organization. First, we must fully exploit emergent technologies in the areas of space, precision strike and information warfare. We should also be open to other emerging new solutions. As it turns out, in a nation of inveterate innovators, this is the easier chore. Second, and harder work, we must develop appropriate doctrines which

achieve integration and networking, change service cultures and yet preserve service competencies. This not jointness as we know it today, but a new level of integration and organization. The publication of *Warfighting Vision 2010*¹⁸ is the next step down the road to change. But if we are to be truly adaptive and capable of regenerating our thinking and organization as well as our technologies, then we should explore doctrines, plural, not develop doctrine, singular. Otherwise, we become patterned and predictable to our adversaries.

Third, we must design and implement a new organizational framework to make dominating maneuver possible. The new organizational framework must function as a network, not only as a hierarchy, be creative rather than parochial and most importantly, be responsive and time sensitive. Done properly, these new organizational forms will preserve the value that separate services contribute, yet be much more adaptive and self-regenerative than the forms we see today. They will also be learning organizations if the RMA's "organism of organisms" is to emerge. It is this last area that is most difficult, but also the most necessary. Our doctrines must evolve and our organizations must adapt. We must devise regenerative, adaptive organizational structures capable of matching form and function. Merely being combined or joint is insufficient. They must be capable of creating new structures and syntheses to achieve the decisive effects of dominating maneuver.

We have learned much about life on this planet and the environment in which we live. Our study of individual organisms and complex systems both suggest that there are certain verities. All systems or institutions share the same characteristics if they are to

survive and prosper. They are decentralized, distributive, adaptive, redundant and spontaneous to some degree. Systems we devise to survive and prosper and those to prosecute war should be similar. Doing so will take a transformation of technological means, doctrine, and organizational forms to achieve a true RMA. Failure to complete all levels of this transformation will mean that the opportunity for a true RMA will be missed.

Achieving all three will take time and have to be executed, demonstrated and comprehended--by both us and our adversaries--to be truly effective.

¹ SAIC Briefing at Workshop II on Dominating Maneuver, Army War College, 18 January 1995.

² Col. John R. Boyd, USAF (Ret.) Boyd has given his "Discourse on Winning and Losing" briefing since 1976. Though he has never published anything, these concepts have been cited in over a hundred book and articles and had great influence on the Army, the Marine Corps and the Air Force.

³ Carl Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, and *The Icarus Syndrome*, Santa Monica, Ca.: RAND, 1994, and a briefing entitled, "Peering Into the Future," given at the Air War College, 13 October, 1993.

⁴ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1993.

⁵ Jeffrey McKitterick, et al., *The Revolution in Military Affairs*, SAIC Proprietary Draft, June 1995.

⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷ Blue Team Alpha--a cooperative group of Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force officers in the senior field grades led by retired Army Colonel Roy Alcola--offered and toyed with this new definition at the Army's Second Dominating Maneuver RMA War Game, held at the Army Center for Strategic Leadership at Carlisle Barracks, 20-22 June 1995, and sponsored by the OSD Office of Net Assessment.

⁸ "Possible" and "legal" are not the same. Current treaties prohibit weather modification as a warfare form.

⁹ Richard Szafranski, "Parallel War," US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, August 1995, pp. 57-61.

¹⁰ J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 26. Italics added. Wylie introduced the differentiations of sequential and cumulative in "Reflections on the War in the Pacific," US Naval Institute *Pro-*

ceedings, Vol. 78, No. 4 (April 1952), pp. 351-361. See also J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control, in Classics of Sea Power*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989), p. 101.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *On War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Book One, Chapter One, p. 79. Emphasis in original.

¹² Joseph A. Engelbrecht, "War Termination: Why Does A State Decide To Stop Fighting?" (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 1992).

¹³ Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei Chun Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993, p. 158.

¹⁴ Robert R. Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War*, (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994).

¹⁵ Viewed in this light, the "El Dorado Canyon" operation against Libya may have been a precursor form of a dominating maneuver with very narrowly defined aims.

¹⁶ See John R. Boyd, "A Discourse On Winning and Losing," unpublished briefing copy dated August 1987.

¹⁷ Briefing given by Maj Gen Charles D. Link. "Airpower: An Airman's Perspective," Air War College, 8 August 1995.

¹⁸ *Warfighting Vision 2010*, Joint Warfighting Center, Doctrine Division, Ft. Monroe, Va., 31 July 1995.

WORD COUNT: 5,000.