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## **The Illusion of a Short-War**

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## **The Illusion of a Short-War**

*Stephen Blank (bio)*

A victorious strategy should possess particular cogency regarding the most dangerous future military contingency facing the United States, a major theater-level war. While such wars are currently unlikely, thinking

the unthinkable is essential to formulating sound strategy. The U.S. military strategy, however, is overly optimistic, excessively based more on a desire to re-fight the last war (Operation Desert Storm) than upon sound strategic concepts, and shot through with wishful thinking and illusions about future war. Current strategy also suffers from the rivalry arising from each service's theological certitude that it alone can bring about victory.

Consequently U.S. military writings about contemporary war and its practice overlook many strategic implications. Indeed, U.S. military planners have fallen into the trap of mistaking operational and tactical victory for truly decisive strategic victory, regressing to the Napoleonic and the early modern concept that decisive battle equates to a campaign and thus victory.<sup>1</sup> U.S. infatuation with technological superiority and new wonder weapons has seduced the United States into insisting upon a short, bloodless, victorious war. This short-war illusion becomes clear as one studies official military writings and confronts military issues that have perhaps been deliberately overlooked.

U.S. military strategy aims to exploit its technological and informational superiority and to convert it into a lasting operational and strategic superiority against any challenger. U.S. strategy thus seeks to exploit the wonders of technology that have materialized **[End Page 133]** thanks to the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), that is, advances in information, electronic, communications, and reconnaissance technologies. Adherents of the RMA and strategies that derive from the United States' lead in consummating it proclaim a new paradigm of warfare that can attack all critical enemy targets at once from afar. In many respects, these theories resemble Colonel John Warden's 1988 "inside-out theory" of the air campaign that alone could achieve decisive results.<sup>2</sup> Long-range strike platforms operated by fewer soldiers, state-of-the-art sensors, and precision-guided weapons will dominate future war.

This belief offers many political advantages to U.S. policymakers. It

allows them to claim that future wars will be clean wars with few American or foreign casualties. Immaculate coercion will thus take place with only buildings and installations being destroyed. Second, it allows the services to demand more money to keep ahead on the treadmill of technical progress. Third, rapid victory makes it possible to keep Congress and the media out of the conflict and thus subject an administration's policy to withering debate that could prolong the war by weakening "the home front."

The RMA also provides our strategists with the tools to overcome the dilemma of sequential military operations. Commanders can now plan strategies for a single uninterrupted decisive operation based upon possession of these technologies. By linking strike and reconnaissance capabilities and platforms in real time, armed forces can achieve decisive strategic outcomes in the initial operation, which becomes the only operation. Merging the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war into a single one converts sequential, interrupted operations into one joint, decisive, rapid, and continuous operation. An electronic and fire attack on military targets and the enemy's command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities (C4ISR), its true center of gravity, provides decisive victory. Air Force spokesmen argue that the United States is approaching a time when its technologies will make the battlefield wholly transparent, allowing its military to see and kill any target.<sup>3</sup> In this decisive and culminating first strike, technological and informational superiority would destroy the enemy's command and control over its troops and "situational" awareness. The United States, having decapitated the enemy, can then uninterruptedly roll up the disjointed forces as it supposedly did in Operation Desert Storm. **[End Page 134]**

Technological superiority also helps us control the ether, degrade enemy information structures and capacities, and decision-making systems and nullify his platforms' strike capability. Aerial, missile, and electronic attack, which exploits the mobility of multiple fires from many different distances, converts technological superiority into lasting

strategic superiority. Rapid victory overcomes time and trumps domestic political constraints of having...



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