STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS
THE SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL OF JOINT WARFIGHTING

BY

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The Search for the Holy Grail of Joint Warfighting

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the concept of Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO) and seeks to answer the question of whether or not Rapid Decisive Operations an achievable concept for the establishment of future Joint Warfighting Doctrine. This study starts with a detailed look at what Rapid Decisive Operations is, what it hopes to accomplish, and what important assumptions are being made in developing this concept. The viability of the Rapid Decisive Operations concept will be based on the criteria of acceptability, feasibility, suitability and risk. This paper will show that Rapid Decisive Operations is the beginning of a new Joint doctrine/concept of warfighting that has the potential of developing a Joint team with a shared training, education and military culture. A doctrine/concept that should embed Jointness within all of the Services as the United States continues to transform its military forces to meet future threats. But, much like the search for the elusive Holy Grail, Rapid Decisive Operations is an ideal that nations have searched for since the early days of warfare: A way to end a conflict with one decisive blow. Unfortunately, modern war is much more complicated. Just winning battles will not win wars.

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RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS – THE SEACH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL OF JOINT WARFIGHTING

> "There can be little doubt that the [Holy] Grail is an elusive idea. It has taken, and will continue to take, many different forms in people's minds. No one theory as yet has been able to explain all the details in the Grail mystery."[1]

Much like the search for the coveted Holy Grail, nations and armies have historically searched for the means to fight quick, decisive battles that resulted in a painless victory and minimized the expenditure of national resources in terms of both men and equipment. Sun Tzu in his book, *The Art of War*, which was written over 2000 years ago, states quite plainly that "those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations."[2] However, history is saturated with examples of nations planning for decisive victory, only to get bogged down in a combination of annihilation and attrition type battles due to the very complex nature of modern warfare. Clausewitz in his book *On War*, explains that war is not merely "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will," but a more complicated affair because of its role "as an instrument of policy." [3] It is because of this necessary interaction between war and political objectives that the United States' current system of developing a National Security Strategy is directly linked to how the United States conducts warfare and in turn, develops its military force to achieve these political goals when other means fails. "War is never an isolated act."[4]

THE NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The *National Security Strategy* (NSS) published in December 2000 and signed by Former President Clinton states that the United States "must transform [its] capabilities and organizations"[5] to meet the challenges of the future and ensure that the nation can secure its vital, important, humanitarian, and other interests. The most recent *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (QDR) acknowledged the need to transform the military and has established four distinct pillars for the transformation of U.S. military forces. Those four pillars are:[6]

- Strengthening Joint operations though standing Joint task force headquarters improved Joint command and control, Joint training, and an expanded Joint force presence policy.
- Experimenting with new approaches to warfare, operational concepts and capabilities, and organizational constructs such as standing Joint forces through wargaming, simulations and field exercises focused on emerging challenges and opportunities.
- Exploiting U.S. intelligence advantages through multiple reconnaissance, and enhanced exploitation and dissemination.

- Developing transformational capabilities through increased and wide-ranging science and technology, selective increases in procurement, and innovations in DOD processes.

The challenge in executing these four pillars is essentially Joint in nature. The implementation of the four pillars represents a challenge in dollars, Service parochialism and priorities. It is a challenge of shaping the U.S. armed forces for the future while still dealing with the present threats our nation faces.

Joint Vision 2020 has attempted to explain what military capabilities are required for the future. Hence, it's a driving document in the process of transformation. JV2020 details three important areas for the transformation, areas it tasks each of the Services to follow. The first is establishment of a common framework and language to drive Service doctrine and concepts to explain how they contribute to the Joint fight. The second is the process of Joint experimentation and training to test new concepts and ideas. The third is the process to manage transformation in terms of DOTMLPF (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel and facilities). [7] Joint Vision 2020 establishes a goal for future forces in terms of their capabilities and concepts. It develops the broad concepts and relies on each Service to develop a transformation campaign plan to bring into fruition the concepts it envisions. The executive agent for Joint Transformation is United States Joint Forces Command. It is this command that must bridge the gap between the individual Services, the CINCs and the Joint environment. If U.S. Joint Forces Command receives sufficient authority and congressional support, the U.S. military should be able to make Joint Vision 2020 a reality and ensure the total synchronized Transformation of the United States Military.

Joint Forces Command has a functional mission to act as "the chief advocate for Jointness and leading edge of transformation."[8] In addition to its role in transformation it also must provide forces to the CINCs and support domestic missions in support of Homeland Defense. In its transformation role, the command has recently adopted a concept of Joint Warfighting called Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO). The concept developers believe RDO is the warfighting concept of the future - one which will allow U.S. forces to achieve full spectrum dominance.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The development of the Rapid Decisive Operations concept is an attempt by the Joint Forces Command to execute joint transformation. In the words of the Commander, General William F. Kernan, RDO aims at infusing "our Joint forces with new ideas that change the way we [as a Nation] fight."[9] Rapid Decisive Operations rests not on the concept of "holding out for

silver bullet scientific breakthroughs,"[10] but instead, looks at a new concept for fighting. It depends on warfighting and not "any particular array of technologies."[11] It aims at developing a warfighting concept so powerful that the U.S. armed forces can "win a war in one blow."[12] The question then is whether or not Rapid Decisive Operations is the "Holy Grail" of Joint Warfighting.

DIRECTION OF RESEARCH EFFORT

Rapid Decisive Operations is a new and evolving concept that continues to change and adapt as the issues are defined and resolved. Its developers present new terms that may or may not be old concepts renamed and dressed up to support the ideals of Rapid Decisive Operations. On the other hand, one must admit that selling new concepts to well-entrenched audiences is tough; there are more doubters then supporters when significant change is involved. At present, the Joint community is attempting to address future issues: especially those of inter-Service compatibility and capabilities, while developing a common, acceptable doctrine of Joint warfighting. The reality of Service Title X responsibilities makes developing Joint warfighting doctrine, and then forcing the Services to transform themselves in accordance with that Joint doctrine a formidable task. There is a general lack of linkage in the documentation to historical analysis and a theoretical base. Part of this may be due to over-reliance on technology or capabilities to address enemy threats. But lacking in virtually all of the studies is the human dimension of warfare: the harsh reality that future U.S. adversaries may not be rational actors.

This research paper will focus on a number of issues dealing with the future doctrine of Joint warfare and transformation. The initial focus is on dissecting Rapid Decisive Operations. Using as its primary source material from Joint Forces Command, this study will examine what Rapid Decisive Operations are, what they hope to accomplish, and the important assumptions associated with Rapid Decisive Operations. Then this study will focus on the viability of Rapid Decisive Operations based on the criteria of acceptability, feasibility, suitability and risk. Finally, this paper will provide an analysis and conclusion on the future of Rapid Decisive Operations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The United States armed forces are at a critical stage in their evolution. Emerging technologies, fiscal constraints, an increase in the number of failed states, international terrorism, and the lack of a true peer competitor are some of the many issues confronting the United States today. In light of these issues, the military is attempting to transform or evolve its capabilities to defeat any and all threats rapidly and decisively in a Joint and Combined

environment. Rapid Decisive Operations is the catalyst used by Joint Forces Command to address these issues. When looking at warfighting doctrine, capabilities and force structure, the important issue is not so much in getting it absolutely right, as it is to make sure that military analysts and planners do not get it too wrong.[13] Close should be good enough, and allows for adaptation as future threat capabilities emerge.[14] However, if this focuses on force structure and capabilities too narrowly, then the U.S. military may in fact reduce its options, capabilities, and ability to deal with a peer competitor in the future. This study will focus on both the good and the bad, with its final analysis directed at what may be major weaknesses in the Rapid Decisive Operations concept.

RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS – THE ENVISIONED CONCEPT

Rapid Decisive Operations is a concept designed to take Joint Vision 2020 from a vision into reality. It aims at the integration of Dominant Maneuver, Precision Engagement, Focused Logistics and Full Dimensional Protection to establish "Full Spectrum Dominance." Rapid Decisive Operations envisions taking the old "linear" tenants of Joint operations (phasing, preparation, predictability and synchronization) and developing new tenants (simultaneity, adaptivity, initiative and cohesion) in order to execute "non-linear" Joint operations.[15] Rapid Decisive Operations envisions being able to "to impose our will on the enemy, gaining a decision in a week or so for a [small-scaled contingency operation], or turning a [major theater of war] in our favor in that same time frame."[16] The power of simultaneity will lie in the massing of "effects in time, not space" to have the maximum impact on breaking not only the enemy's coherence, but also his will, ending the war or conflict in a single stroke.[17] Along with adaptivity, initiative, and cohesion, Rapid Decisive Operations aims to take advantage of the range of Joint capabilities and information technologies to develop a Joint team that has a "shared training, education, and military culture."[18] In short, Rapid Decisive Operations is looking at the future of warfare from the U.S. perspective as a fully integrated "purple fight," capable of overwhelming enemy forces across the spectrum of conflict without an over-reliance on technology, but also willing to absorb new technologies as they become available. The concept developers at Joint Forces Command argue that Rapid Decisive Operations might be the "equivalent of the 1980s Army/Air Force *Airland Battle*, a capstone concept that can be applied to the entire spectrum of military operations."[19]

According to the authors, Rapid Decisive Operations is an operational concept that envisions being able to "rapidly and decisively coerce, compel, or defeat the enemy in order to accomplish our strategic objectives"[20] by overwhelming, unrelenting combat operations. Rapid

Decisive Operations has an explicit aim of avoiding lengthy campaigns or having to conduct extensive buildup of logistical bases and forces. Instead, Rapid Decisive Operations is looking to accomplish its objectives using a concept that looks very similar to the decisive battle of Napoleonic times. Rapid Decisive Operations does, however, acknowledge that the decisive battle may not in fact resolve the conflict. As such, Rapid Decisive Operations is a concept that is designed to win the initial battles of a conflict and in doing so "establish the conditions to transition to a higher (e.g. major regional contingency) or lower (e.g. security and stability operation) level of commitment."[21] Another refreshing factor in Rapid Decisive Operations is the recognition of the other elements of national power. Specifically the ability to attempt to resolve a conflict before the commitment of military force by diplomatic, economic and/or information operations.

The current White Paper on Rapid Decisive Operations (dated 25 October 2001) defines both rapid and decisive operations. A rapid operation is the ability to "accomplish the objectives of the campaign with speed and timing that is superior, absolutely and relatively, to the speed of the adversary."[22] Decisive is defined as "imposing our will on the enemy by breaking his coherence and defeating his will and ability to fight."[23] Decisiveness, according to the White Paper, is accomplished by attacking an adversary using the full range of national capabilities to destroy the coherence of the enemy's ability to fight by striking his critical functions from dimensions and directions against which he has no counter. The overall objective is to rapidly break his will to fight and, as necessary, destroy his ability to conduct coherent operations. Rapid Decisive Operations are designed to attack and break the enemy's will to fight by demonstrating that he "cannot achieve his objectives and that he will ultimately lose what he values most if he does not concede." [24]

The functional concepts of Rapid Decisive Operations are divided into three categories: knowledge, command and control, and operations. These functional concepts and their supporting tenets encompass the anticipated characteristics or enablers of future joint operations, which are defined as knowledge-centric, effects based, fully networked and coherently joint.[25]

The first and most important enabler is referred to as knowledge-centric. Knowledge-centric demands that we achieve and maintain information superiority over our adversary. Information superiority, according to Joint doctrine is "the capability to collect, process, and disseminate an uninterrupted flow of information while exploiting or denying an adversary's ability to do the same."[26] This is a modern adaptation and expansion of Sun Tzu's statement of "know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."[27] Rapid

Decisive Operations assumes that the United States will have complete knowledge of our enemy because of its ability to conduct a full and sufficient Operational Net Assessment (ONA).[28] Knowledge-centric operations will rely on technology to give the United States informational advantage over its adversaries in order to facilitate strategic and operational decisions before the enemy can react to them or conduct their own counter-operation. A complete and flawless Operational Net Assessment will be critical in the ability of U.S. forces to execute Rapid Decisive Operations. A flawless Operational Net Assessment is critical in the overall effectiveness of the enabler referred to as effects based operations.

Effects based operations is an enabler that allows the United States to attack the enemy's systems with both military and non-military means to produce "a desired strategic outcome or effect."[29] The effect in this case can be physical, functional and/or psychological and will allow planners to predict second, third and fourth order consequences resulting from these operations.[30] The United States, because of its informational and technological advantages, will be able to clearly identify the enemy's decisive points, links and critical path to the enemy's centers of gravity. Understanding the linkages between the leadership, their war making capabilities and critical vulnerabilities will allow the United States' elements of national power to apply leverage within the system to collapse this system and subsequently defeat the capability and the will of the enemy thus ending the conflict. Executing effects based operations will depend on a networked force that is able to share both military and non-military information simultaneously, which is currently a major shortfall in the execution of Joint operations.

Developing a fully networked Joint force is another key enabler to the execution of Rapid Decisive Operations. A "fully networked Joint force" implies a Joint force that has a common relevant operational picture referred to as CROP. The ability of ground, air, space, sea and non-military assets to share the same information and thus provide the strategic planners and warfighters with a common operational picture is a critical issue.[31] Just as important is the ability to integrate this common operational picture with the other elements of national power. As a major enabler of Rapid Decisive Operations, developing a fully networked Joint force also addresses the issue of Joint and Interagency interoperability, a major weakness in the current U.S. Joint military environment.[32] Without the enabler of a networked force, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to conduct the envisioned, synchronized operations or be able to rapidly exploit the use of knowledge and effects based operations.

The realties of current and future operations is that they will all be Joint. The enabler of "inherently joint" highlights this fact. This enabler, once again, focuses on the issue of Joint interoperability and the need to centrally drive Service procurement, training, leader

development and doctrine so that they will support not only Rapid Decisive Operations but Joint Vision 2020. Inherent in this process is DOTMLPF or Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leader Development, Personnel and Facilities.[33] This is the construct used for analysis that each Service currently conducts in system development or when directed by Congress in support of the Joint effort. What impact a Joint DOTMLPF analysis will have in shaping each of the Service's support in Joint Transformation and Rapid Decisive Operations is an issue and may necessitate congressional mandate to have a true effect.

RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS AND JOINT VISION 2020 LINKAGE

The objective of Rapid Decisive Operations is the "operationalizing of Joint Vision 2020 in order to achieve full spectrum dominance."[34] To achieve this objective, Joint Forces Command has established near, mid and long-term objectives in order to develop integrated Joint Operations capable of achieving Rapid Decisive Operations. The near-term objective is to develop and exercise selected forces capabilities needed to execute Rapid Decisive Operations. This phase should be completed by 2005. The success of the near-term objectives should reinforce, and provide the motivation to the Services and the Department of Defense to accept the Rapid Decisive Operations concept. Mid-term objectives go from 2006 to 2010 and are designed to give selected elements of the armed forces JV2020 capabilities. Finally, the long-term objective (2011-2020) sees the U.S. Armed Forces achieving full spectrum dominance as described by JV2020. The overall role of Joint Forces Command will be in the integration of Joint concepts, which includes Rapid Decisive Operations as the centerpiece.

THE WAY AHEAD FOR THE CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS

The Joint Transformation campaign plan is centered around the concept of CETA – Concept/Experimentation/Training/Assessment cycle and what is referred to by Joint Forces Command as the "Big Three" – or the three experiment/exercises which will incorporate "training objectives of subordinate commands and Service components"[35] in two year cycles. The "Big Three" consists of Major Field Experiments (*Millennium Challenge* and *Olympic Challenge*) conducted during the even years. Scoping Limited Objective Experiments (*Unified Vision*) will be conducted during the odd years and finally the integration of Joint Task Force Command Exercises (*Unified Challenge*, *Unified Endeavor*, *Roving Sands*, etc.) into the field experimentation cycle (even years). Based on the outcomes of the first two year cycle, Joint Forces Command will continue to re-look and redefine Rapid Decisive Operations until they are able to achieve JV2020's goal of full spectrum dominance.

ASSUMPTIONS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS

Assumptions according to Joint doctrine are those "supposition[s] on the current situation or a presupposition on the future course of events ... assumed to be true in the absence of positive proof, necessary to enable the commander ... to ... make a decision on the course of action."[36] If an assumption is proven wrong then it will either negate the current course of action or result in a branch plan or sequel to the overall operation. In the case of the concept of Rapid Decisive Operations, a bad assumption may in fact negate the concept as a whole and potentially lead to disaster for the United States military if alternative solutions are not planned or accounted for. In the case of the concept of Rapid Decisive Operations, the critical assumptions are as follows:

- Future U.S. forces will develop the capability for perfect "knowledge" and subsequent analysis of an adversary.
- The United States will retain its current dominance in military technology and information superiority.
- Future adversaries will not develop the capability to conduct an asymmetrical attack that will undermine or cripple current and future U.S. military advantages.
- Winning decisive, simultaneous battles will result in overall victory and/or regime changes.

If any of the above assumptions prove to be wrong, then it will undermine the concept of Rapid Decisive Operations.

In the case of the first assumption, perfect "knowledge" is a relative issue that must be addressed based on the adversary's abilities and speed to process information faster then the United States. It also assumes that the analysis of that information will be accurate and complete. The second assumption implies that the U.S. must continue to develop and implement future technologies into its military force ahead of potential adversaries. This will require continuous research and development and forward thinking by both the military and industrial complexes. The third assumption is directly related to the United States' ability to conduct a thorough operational net assessment on the current and future capabilities of potential adversaries. It may also require the United States to conduct pre-emptive, potentially unilateral operations, against an adversary to eliminate their capability to conduct a crippling asymmetrical attack against the United States. This maybe a politically dangerous path to follow with potentially adverse results throughout the international community. The fourth assumption addresses the theory of winning wars through decisive battles. If war was nothing more then battles, this theory has potential. However, war is not a simple affair and it continues to become more complicated especially in light of globalization.

ACCEPTABILITY – THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR[37]

Acceptability, for the purpose of this study, is whether or not the concept of Rapid Decisive Operations is consistent with the American strategic culture, which subsequently defines the American way of war.[38] The strategic culture of a nation is a driving factor in determining how a nation fights and how it interacts with other nations. Strategic culture consists of traits that define a nation (country, state, tribe or other organized groups, etc.) and gives them a distinct identity. It is based on historical growth, geographic location, international influence, traditional hates and fears, national quirks or flaws, strengths and weaknesses, and economy to name the major pieces. Combine all of these traits and you begin to establish the strategic culture of the nation. America over the years has developed a specific strategic culture that in turn has defined the American way of war.

In looking at American strategic culture, one only needs to examine its history -- long term, not short term. America is a nation of compromise, give and take. However, when the American way of life is threatened or attacked Americans will respond in force until they achieve the desired objective. America likes being seen and needs to been seen as the good guys. Americans expect its military forces to be dominant and subsequently technology is an important factor. Americans will take and accept casualties if they perceive the cause to be just. Examples of this are the American Civil War, World War I and World War II. Americans are not afraid to fight, but expect their leadership, military and political, to be responsible when using military force, and only after other elements of national power have failed to resolve the issue. Americans, as a democratic nation, believe in the rights of others, often to the extreme. If you attack America, then Americans are willing to suspend some of those rights to protect their way of life. The passion of the American people can never be underestimated. It will and has in the past guided the reasoning of the government, and in the event of an attack or atrocity will demand justice (some would also say vengeance) through the decisive use of military force.

Based on the American strategic culture, America has developed a unique way of war that is unprecedented in modern times and is a direct reflection of geographic positioning, economic, technological and industrial strengths, history and democratic values. The American way of war is thus defined as follows:[39]

- Emphasis on the use of overwhelming or decisive force
- Defined, clearly stated military objective
- Emphasis on technological superiority
- Risk and casualty adverse (for political reasons)
- Standing, professional, apolitical force (but not politically naive)

The concept of Rapid Decisive Operations conforms to the American way of war on a variety of levels. First, the concept envisions using all elements of national power to quickly overcome and defeat an adversary. It offers to the civilian leadership and strategic planner clearly defined objectives based on information superiority and knowledge centric based operations. Rapid Decisive Operations offers to the American leadership and public, the idea of quick, decisive battles that are technology based, especially in terms of information superiority, precision engagement, rapid deployability and future projected technological improvements in equipment and capabilities. It is a concept that is based on using detailed, precise overwhelming force that potentially will reduce the overall risks and casualties to military force. And finally it addresses the issue of maintaining a standing professional force with its emphasis on establishing a joint based DOTMLPF (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel and facilities).

SUITABILITY –HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BASIS FOR RAPID DECISIVE OPERATIONS

Suitability, for the purpose of this study, is whether the employment of Rapid Decisive Operations will actually accomplish the mission when carried out successfully. Successfully means well planned, prepared, rehearsed and executed. Does Rapid Decisive Operations have a historical and theoretical basis for success?

On the theoretical issue, there are a number of theorists who ideas support those envisioned by the authors of the Rapid Decisive Operations concept. The first of these theorists is Sun Tzu. Throughout Sun Tzu's writings there are a number of points that he highlights that directly relate to RDO. The first one, previously mentioned, was the idea that generals who were skilled in war could position themselves in such a way that the enemy had no choice but to surrender or die.[40] A complete victory, without having to fight as a result of a force's disposition was possible in the era of Sun Tzu. It was possible because the warring factions in China were of similar cultures and values. It consisted of a society or culture where the military was the absolute power of the warlords. To lose the army was to lose power and subsequently, when the army was put in a precarious position, it was best to retire from the field of battle in order to retain power. Today's world is much more complicated, more global then it was in the times of Sun Tzu and today, the military is just one critical element of national power. Sun Tzu also talked about the need for complete information and knowledge about you, your enemy and the environment. Rapid Decisive Operations expresses a modern day version of this concept using information superiority and knowledge centric operations, which includes an operational net assessment.

Sun Tzu was a believer in rapid, decisive operations. He states that "[v]ictory is the main object in war. If this is long delayed, weapons are blunted and morale depressed . . . [f]or there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited."[41] Thus the idea of rapidly defeating your enemy is at least as old as the writing of Sun Tzu. However, the theories of Sun Tzu must be put into proper perspective when we try to relate them to modern day warfare. First and foremost, the Emperors of Ancient China maintained their position through the strength and effectiveness of their army. When an army was defeated on the field of battle, it was much more decisive in terms of regime changes and cost with respect to human life than today's modern democratic societies. There were no war crime tribunals and the power of the Emperor was absolute. These same criteria do not exist in American democratic society. Fortunately, these conditions have existed in other areas in which we have fought. An example used by the proponents of Rapid Decisive Operation is the 1989 invasion of Panama, referred to as Just Cause. By applying Sun Tzu's writing in absolute terms to today's modern world, Operation Just Cause is an example of a well-planned and rehearsed operation that successfully accomplished its initial military objectives. However, Operation Just Cause is not a good example to use in supporting the concept of Rapid Decisive Operations because it did not adhere to the basic tenets of Rapid Decisive Operations, as described by Joint Forces Command.

On 20 December 1989, the United States executed Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama. Tensions between the United States and the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega had been growing ever since Noriega forced the elected Panamanian President Dr. Nicolas Ardito Barletta from office in 1985 and replaced him with then Vice President Eric Arturo Delvalle.[42] The following is a synopsis of the critical events that ultimately lead to the decision to invade Panama by the United States:

- 1986. The Reagan Administration cuts aid to Panama by 85 percent and sends national security advisor John M. Poindexter, to meet with Noriega and warns him to stop dealing in illegal narcotics.
- 1987. Noriega is publicly accused by a former chief of staff, Col. Roberto Diaz Herrera, of the murder of Dr. Spadafora (a critic of Noriega that was found dead in 1984), and in the manipulation of the 1984 Panamanian elections. These allegations caused a series of riots and ultimately led to the arrest of Herrera by Noriega's Panamanian Defense Force or PDF.

- 1987. The United States Senate passes a resolution demanding the removal of Noriega from power. Results in the United States Embassy in Panama being targeted by rioters who were supporters of Noriega.
- 1988. The United States Department of Justice charges Noriega with supporting the illegal drug trade. Noriega removes President Delvalle from office.
- 3 March 1989. Panamanian Defense Forces stop 21 Department of Defense school buses full of school children because the bus drivers were driving buses with U.S. Government license plates.
- 5 April 1989. Alleged CIA operative Kurt Muse is arrested by Panamanian Defense Forces.
- 18 April 1989. Noriega requires that all U.S. citizens traveling to Panama must have visas to enter the country.
- 7 May 1989. Panamanian Elections are held.
- 8 May 1989. Panamanian Defense Forces raid vote-counting sites and usurps the election process, declaring Duque the winner.
- 9 May 1989. Noriega annuls the elections because of "obstruction by foreigners."[43]
- 10 May 1989. Opposition leaders Endara, Ford and Arias along with their supporters stage a demonstration against Noriega, which is brutally dispersed by members of Noriega's Dignity Battalion.
- 3 October 1989. Members of the Panamanian Defense Force attempt a coup against Noriega, which fails and leads to the execution of several members of the PDF.
- 15 December 1989. Noriega announces that a state of war exists between the United States and Panama. Noriega announces himself as the Maximum Leader.
- 16 December 1989. Marine Lieutenant Paz is shot and killed by Panamanian Defense Forces. That same day, a Navy officer and his wife are arrested and abused by Panamanian Defense Forces.
- 20 December. Operation Just Cause is executed.

Operation Just Cause was designed as a campaign with specific and limited military objectives. Those objectives were:[44]

1. Protect U.S. lives and key sites and facilities.
2. Capture and deliver Noriega to competent authority.
3. Neutralize PDF forces.
4. Neutralize PDF command and control.

5. Support establishment of an U.S.-recognized government in Panama.
6. Restructure the Panamanian Defense Force.

A vital requirement of the campaign plan was the simultaneous neutralization of 27 PDF objectives throughout Panama. Planing for Operation Just Cause had actually began as early as 1988 and was originally called Blue Spoon. Blue Spoon was changed to Operation Just Cause by General Kelly, the chief of operations in the National Military Command Center, and Joe Lopez, the deputy for current operations, once the operation was approved.[45] Operation Just Cause was a Joint Operation with elements from every service participating to one degree or the other. It was deliberately planned and rehearsed and was targeted against Noriega and his defense forces. At the time of the operation, Noriega's support from the general population was low and his center of gravity was his security forces and members of his elite circle. With this in mind, the United States executed a quick, decisive military operation that effectively defeated the Panamanian Defense Forces and ultimately led to the capture of Noriega and the restoration of basic democratic values.

When analyzing Operation Just Cause as an example of Rapid Decisive Operations a few key issues must be addressed. First and most important is the fact that the simultaneity of the operation was critical in the effects that it had on Noriega and the Panamanian Defense Force. It shows that the effects of simultaneity as expressed by Rapid Decisive Operations are possible, but specific conditions existed that allowed for this simultaneity. Secondly, the United States had a permanent presence in Panama that in effect was a forward logistics base for the operation. The build up and pre-positioning of logistics and forces of United States began as early as 1987 and continued until the actual execution of the operation. In addition, the operation was rehearsed for three months prior its actual execution. The United States fought an enemy that allowed them to deliberately plan, execute and control the overall tempo of the operation. The enemy in this case did not have a real vote nor did it have the military or political means to defend itself from the overwhelming forces introduced into its country.

Joint operations worked because of a well-developed and rehearsed plan. Its "knowledge" of the enemy came from the experience of the men and women who had been stationed in Panama and from the numerous contacts that had developed over the years. However, even with collection assets, both technical and human, the United States was unable to initially track the location of their prime target, Noriega. Four days after the invasion, the United States was notified that Noriega was at the Papal Nuncio under political asylum.[46]

Operation Just Cause is a poor example of effects-based operations. While the political leaders and strategic planners understood the key to Noriega's power was his defense forces,

they failed to take into consideration the effects of eliminating the country's security forces, which resulted in wide spread looting until US forces were able to stabilize the situation. Effects-based operations based on a total operational net assessment may have identified this issue, but this level of reasoning and analysis was not done. Understanding second and third order effects of military operations is critical and Operation Just Cause provided many lessons for future operations of this nature.

The ability to remove a regime with a series of simultaneous operations is one of the stated attributes of Rapid Decisive Operations. But, as Operation Just Cause shows, unless conditions are perfect, it cannot be done. Even when the situation is ideal, as it was in Just Cause, military forces still must contend with the human element of conflict and most importantly the fog of war or friction. As Clausewitz states, "[f]riction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper."[47]

The suitability of Rapid Decisive operations is questionable. Sun Tzu provides some theoretical basis for the concept, but the world is much more complicated then it was during the times of Sun Tzu. Today, decisions to go to war and the political objectives are much more complicated because of the advancements in technology, the interactions of both national and international governments and the world community as a whole. Perhaps the greatest difference is that modern wars, fought by established nation states, are fighting limited conflicts and do not have the ability to ruthlessly prosecute war, as did the Emperors of ancient China. While Sun Tzu offers some great ideas and theories, they are not 100 percent practical in today's strategic environment of limited warfare.

Operation Just Cause showed that it is possible to conduct simultaneous Joint operations with overwhelming forces and effect a regime change, but that is all it shows. The build up of forces, establishment of a forward logistics base, coupled with the friction of war, all point to the fact that the suitability of RDO accomplishing what it advertises is questionable at best.

FEASIBILITY – A REALISTIC EXPECTATION OF FUTURE TECHNOLOGIES AND CAPABILITIES?

In discussing the feasibility of Rapid Decisive Operations the key issue is whether or not future technology and capabilities will realistically achieve the desired end state? The end state in Rapid Decisive Operations is the ability to "rapidly and decisively coerce, compel or defeat the enemy in order to accomplish [the United State's] strategic objectives without a lengthy campaign or an extensive buildup of forces."[48] The first issue is one of technology and the second issue is the ability to accurately analyze the collected information. Is it possible to defeat

an adversary with a series of simultaneous attacks both lethal and non-lethal, to include the leveraging of all elements of national power?

In the area of technology, the primary requirement is to establish the network that enables a "knowledge-centric" capability. This will allow the United States to "know more about the enemy, the operational environment, and [themselves], and the interrelationship of each" as compared to future adversaries.[49] The technical means to gather and distribute information in terms of a common relevant operational picture is well within the reach of the United States and currently exists at certain levels and within certain organizations. What still must be accomplished is the fusing of information between the Services and Government agencies. This too, is work in progress. The technical ability to collect and distribute information is not the issue. The issue is the ability of people to accurately analyze, understand, and predict future 2nd and 3rd order effects of all operations on the capabilities and the will of the enemy to continue to resist. This ability is a critical concept in the success of Rapid Decisive Operations. An over reliance on technology for the collection of information at the expense of trained human collectors is a deficiency that has already been identified at the national level, but not yet rectified. Technical collectors cannot tell an organization what is in the adversary's mind, what the adversary is thinking or what the adversary is hiding. It cannot predict the future 2nd and 3rd order effects of operations on the opponent. For that you need trained analysts with practical experience in the region(s) to provide an element of ground truth to the assessment.[50] This task becomes even more difficult, especially when dealing with an irrational actor or an adversary with a different set of values and/or objectives then those of the United States.

The ability to defeat an adversary with a series of simultaneous attacks both lethal and non-lethal, to include the leveraging of all elements of national power is a concept that needs to be pursued. Fully integrating all elements of national power, along with symmetrical and asymmetrical capabilities will give the United States the ability to fight and win and/or prevent future wars. However, without the establishment of a national strategic policy or strategy, the United States Military is developing future warfighting capabilities in a vacuum. War is not an isolated act. As Clausewitz so elegantly states, "war should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy."[51] Without that policy, and without a national strategy, then the capabilities potentially offered by Rapid Decisive Operations will only succeed in winning battles and not wars.

RISKS

First and foremost is the fact that Rapid Decisive Operations is an evolving concept designed to bring the tenets of Joint Vision 2020 into reality. Rapid Decisive Operations is not designed for long term warfare. It is designed to fight high-end smaller scale contingencies. It is designed to fight and win battles and engagements quickly, and when situations are ideal, end a conflict early by overwhelming adversaries through full spectrum dominance. A major risk is that the United States Military will structure its military forces to accomplish quick strikes, using high technology elements that have very little staying power when fighting a peer competitor. The risk is that the United States will continue to work technology as a sole solution to warfighting problems and forget that it still takes troops on the ground to occupy territory and win wars.

Secondly, there are the assumptions that the military will have perfect knowledge of the enemy, everyone will have the same operational picture and everyone will interpret that information the same way. Friction or the fog of battle is real. Warfare is and always will be a human endeavor that cannot be replaced by technological solutions.

Finally, future warfare will involve the cooperation and participation of coalition forces. The cooperation of allies may be nothing more than providing basing and overflight permission. Their participation could cover a wide variety of assets from individuals to divisions and corps. The United States Military is the most advanced military force in this century and as it continues to push the technology envelope it will continue to overmatch future coalition partners.[52] The methods and techniques used by the United States are not the same as those of the allies that they might fight with in future conflicts. This is an issue that will continue to be a problem for potential allies in terms of cost, training, doctrine, force development, and political will. This fact alone will stress the issue of knowledge-centric operations, the establishment of a common relevant operational picture and, more importantly, interoperability in future coalition operations. The allies will want to have a vote, both politically and militarily. Rapid Decisive Operations will not fix this issue and as such, must be a consideration as Joint Forces Command continues to develop the future warfighting concept of the United States.

FINAL ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Rapid Decisive Operations is an evolving concept designed to transform the way the United States currently conducts military operations in order to deal with future threats the United States could encounter. It is an emerging concept with a goal of taking the best that each Service and civilian industry has to offer and mold it into a cohesive warfighting program

that will provide the United States full spectrum dominance. The problem is that Rapid Decisive Operations is focusing on a specific area of warfighting, high-end smaller scale contingencies. If Rapid Decisive Operations are unable to accomplish the nation's objectives then Rapid Decisive Operations must rely on other forces to finish the mission.

Rapid Decisive Operations as a concept appears to be acceptable when compared to the American way of war. It is what Americans want – quick, decisive, overwhelming battles and with few casualties. However, if those expectations are not met, then the United States faces the problem of losing public and political support. Without those two elements, the United States will not be able to win. As Clausewitz states "war is never an isolated act." [53] It takes the will and passion of the people, the reasoning of the political powers and finally the capabilities of an army to prosecute war to its fullest. [54]

RDO is questionable when compared to the feasibility of winning wars with a decisive blow. Panama was an operation that fully demonstrates the effects of simultaneous joint operations, but the conditions where ideal, to include the advantages afforded to the American forces by existing logistical bases, forces prepositioned, and the time to deliberately plan and rehearse an extremely complicated operation. Even with those advantages, the problem of post hostility operations was a major issue in the overall execution of Just Cause and Rapid Decisive Operations does not address this aspect of war. The biggest assumption and requirement of Rapid Decisive Operations is that the United States military will maintain its technological superiority over potential enemies. As long as the United States is able to maintain air, sea, information, and ground superiority it will continue to be able to militarily dominate its adversaries. The enemy will work hard to find a way to attack the United States asymmetrically and indirectly to counter our current and future advantages. As potential adversaries turn to commercial technology to solve their information requirements, the United States may not be able to maintain information superiority.

In the area of suitability, the technology issues are being worked and will become a reality in the near future. However, technology is only a small part of the solution to future warfare. The technology associated with knowledge-centric operations will provide commanders information near simultaneously and in theory will allow the commander to make decisions and execute operations much faster then his adversary. What is not considered is that commanders may become reluctant to make quick decisions because they do not have the 100 percent solution. Instead of making quick decisions with 80 percent of the information, commanders may opt for the 100 percent solution, losing valuable time and thus negate whatever advantage they have over their opponent's decision cycle. The underlining message is that future warfare

will be conducted in a Joint environment. In order for the military to remain relevant in the future, it must adapt a doctrine that is based upon a "purple concept" and Rapid Decisive Operations does provide the basis for that concept. It is a start for the transformation of the United States military.

The concept of Rapid Decisive Operations is a potential catalyst to force interoperability between the Services and the Interagency. It focuses on attacking the enemy asymmetrically with all assets available to the United States. To accomplish Rapid Decisive Operations, the force must have a structure that emphasizes adaptivity, initiative and cohesion, and is able to take advantage of the entire range of joint capabilities and information technologies. It must have a force that is capable of operating in remote and austere environments, physically isolated from other forces, but virtually connected through the use of a common operating picture, provided by Joint capabilities.

To achieve Rapid Decisive Operations, the Services must be more accountable to the Joint community. Currently each Service is responsible for providing trained and equipped forces to the warfighting CINCs and the associated Joint Task Forces. This will require interoperability, it will require service members to understand a common language and it will require a common training base in order to develop cohesive fighting units. In order to achieve Joint Vision 2020 objectives and Rapid Decisive Operations capabilities a major adjustment in how the United States military trains, equips and mans the force must be made. It may come to the point that the Services are eliminated or at least marginalized so that we eventually become a "purple" force.

Rapid Decisive Operations is the beginning of a new joint doctrine/concept of warfighting that has the possibility of developing a joint team with a shared training, education and military culture. It is a doctrine/concept that will drive the development of new technologies to support warfighting. It is a doctrine/concept that should embed jointness within all of the Services as the United States continues to transform its military forces to meet the threats of the 21st century and beyond. But, much like the search for the elusive Holy Grail, Rapid Decisive Operations is an ideal or goal that nations and theorists have searched for since the early days of warfare: A way to end a conflict with one decisive blow. Unfortunately, today, modern war is much more complicated. Just winning battles will not win wars or effect regime changes. We leaned this lesson well during the Vietnam War. Clausewitz states that to have victory in war you must first destroy the enemy's army or force, second you must occupy his country, and third you must destroy the enemy's will to fight.[55] Rapid Decisive Operations envisions being able to defeat the enemy's force, addresses breaking the will of the enemy to continue to fight, but it does not

discuss occupying the enemy's territory. To occupy a country or territory you need troops on the ground and all the technology of the world cannot replace the effects both locally and internationally of a nation committing its treasure, its youth, its future, to a potential life and death endeavor.

WORD COUNT = 7980.

ENDNOTES

[1] Mariano Tomatis, "All the Theories about Grail," 18 October 1997; available from <www.geocities.com/thens/ Delphi/3636/teoriee.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 November 2001.

[2]Sun Tzu, *The Art Of War*, trans. Griffith, Samuel B. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 79.

[3] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976. Indexed Edition, 1984), 75.

[4] Ibid., 78 – 89.

[5] William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy For A Global Age*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, December 2001), 3.

[6] Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 30 September 2001), 32.

[7] The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2020*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), 4.

[8] United States Joint Forces Command, *Toward Transformation 2001*, (Norfolk, Virginia: U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2001), 5.

[9]Ibid., 2.

[10] Ibid., 2.

[11] Ibid., 23.

[12] Ibid., 2.

[13] Based on classroom discussions and the study of the history of the development of Strategic Art. The idea of "not getting it too wrong" is based on comments discussions led by COL Michael R. Matheny, the director of the Advanced Strategic Arts Program at the Army War College.

[14] Ibid.

[15] United States Joint Forces Command, *Toward Transformation 2001*, 18.

[16] Ibid., 18.

[17] Ibid., 23.

[18] Ibid., 25.

[19] Ibid., 26.

[20] United States Joint Forces Command, *A Concept For Rapid Decisive Operations*, White Paper version 2.0, (Norfolk, Virginia: U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2001), v.

[21] Ibid., 17.

[22] Ibid., 12.

[23] Ibid., 12.

[24] Ibid., 12.

[25] Ibid., 8.

[26] The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2020*, 8.

[27] Sun Tzu, 84.

[28] United States Joint Forces Command, *A Concept For Rapid Decisive Operations*, 19.

[29] Ibid., 9.

[30] Ibid., 9.

[31] Ibid., 10.

[32] Based on the authors discussions and observations with members of the interagency, joint staff and other military planners throughout the course of the academic year at the Army War College and past joint experiences in both SOUTHCOM and SHAPE.

[33] United States Joint Forces Command, *A Concept For Rapid Decisive Operations*, 9.

[34] United States Joint Forces Command, *Toward Transformation 2001*, 29.

[35] Ibid., 38.

[36] Joint Forces Staff College, *The Joint Staff Officer's Guide*, JFSC Pub 1, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), G-18.

[37] The discussions and analysis presented in this section of the study is based on the authors interpretations of class room discussion as part of the Advance Strategic Arts Program of the United States Army War College. During these class discussions, the author has had the opportunity to listen to and interact with fellow classmates, instructors and noted historians such as Russell F. Weigley and F.G. Hoffman. Additional endnotes in this section are used to delineate from the author's own interpretation to those of others.

[38] F.G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force. The New American Way of War*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Press, 1996), 1.

[39] The discussions and analysis presented in this section of the study is based on the authors interpretations of class room discussion as part of the Advance Strategic Arts Program of the United States Army War College. During these classroom discussions, the author had the opportunity to listen to and interact with fellow classmates, instructors and noted historians Russell F. Weigley and F.G. Hoffman.

[40] Sun Tzu, 79.

[41] Ibid., 73.

[42] Edward M. Flanagan, Jr. (Ret LTG), *Battle for Panama*, (New York, New York: Brassey's, 1993), 9.

[43] Ibid., 15.

[44]The Center For Army Lessons Learned, "Operation Just Cause Lessons Learned Volume I. Soldiers and Leadership," Bulletin No. 90-9, 25 September 1997; available from <http://call.army.mil/products/ctc_bull/90-9/9091toc.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2002.

[45] Woodward, Bob, *The Commanders*, (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 173.

[46] Malcolm McConnell, *Just Cause: The Real Story of America's High-Tech Invasion of Panama*, (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 267-271.

[47] Clausewitz, 119.

[48] United States Joint Forces Command, *A Concept For Rapid Decisive Operations*, v.

[49] Ibid., 13.

[50] Robert Baer, *See No Evil: The True Story Of A Ground Soldier In The CIA's War On Terrorism*, (New York, New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 74, 81.

[51] Clausewitz, 88.

[52] Based on the authors experience in SHAPE and as the G3 of Multi-National Brigade East in Kosovo working with over eleven different coalition partners.

[53] Clausewitz, 78.

[54] Ibid., 75-89.

[55] Clausewitz, 90-91.

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