



“Our agenda is clear. The global war on terror is continuing, and it will for the foreseeable future. As we prosecute the war, we’ll need to continue to strengthen, improve and transform our forces; modernize and restructure programs and commands, which we’re working on; streamline DOD processes and procedures.”

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, January 6, 2004

Over the last several months, Frederick Kagan, a professor at the United States Military Academy at West Point, has written several essays critical of DoD transformation efforts. This issue of “Transformation Trends” presents a commentary on Kagan’s last article, which appeared on the *Wall Street Journal’s* OpinionJournal web site in November. That article can be found at <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110004289>. The commentary below is written by Tom Hone, associate director for risk management at OFT.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATION

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Part One: Kagan’s Argument

His basic argument is that “the current program of transformation turns its back on the approach that had [sic] brought America success so far, and flies in the face of the historical lessons about how to transform a military.” The successful approach that Kagan praises is one he calls “redundancy,” and it means the development of multiple systems to carry out the same or related military missions.

For example, in the 1991 war against the forces of Iraq that had invaded and occupied Kuwait, the Army’s MLRS barrages could strike the enemy’s rear areas even if the weather prohibited air strikes. The Army also fielded Patriot and other anti-aircraft systems to protect coalition ground forces in case Iraqi attack aircraft slipped through the coalition’s combat air patrols. Penetrating Baghdad’s air

defenses was a mission given to both the US Air Force's F-117 stealth attack aircraft and the Navy's Tomahawk cruise missiles. This is what Kagan calls "redundancy."

He goes on to argue that the critics of redundancy asserted that this duplication of mission capability was inefficient in cost terms. He admits that overlapping mission capabilities were indeed inefficient in cost terms, but he also claims that, "In military affairs, redundancy is a virtue." It is a virtue because it reduces risk. As he says, "The willingness to accept redundancy and inefficiency in defense programs [of] the 1970s reflected a larger willingness to balance the development of capabilities... across the services." In his view, therefore, the forces produced in the 1970s and early 1980s were better able to deal with conflicts because they did not depend for their success on just one type or set of capabilities. If one approach (such as bombing from the air) didn't work, then another (using the Army's aviation and organic artillery) could meet the mission need.

As Kagan also acknowledges, redundancy "is expensive," and he argues that the Defense Department, after the Cold War ended, turned to the American business community for ideas on how to field an effective force at the lowest reasonable cost. This effort to get more military power for less money led first the Clinton Administration and then the Bush Administration to turn to "network-centric warfare." This new approach to warfare was embraced as a "revolution in military affairs" that would solve the dilemma of how to field a powerful military on a peacetime budget.

According to Kagan, the revolution in military affairs had two parts. The most obvious was an emphasis on developing and fielding "long-range reconnaissance and strike capabilities." The second part was to purchase these capabilities by eliminating the redundancy that Kagan says was so valuable in earlier conflicts. As he says, the "watchwords for the Rumsfeld Pentagon have, therefore, been focus and efficiency," and "All of the services have participated in this race to a single goal," which is that all new weapons must be compatible with the network-centric approach to war.

Kagan strongly criticizes this approach: "The Rumsfeld vision of military transformation... is completely unbalanced. It will provide the U.S. with armed forces that do one thing only, even if they do it superbly well." Kagan does not pull his punches: "...this single model... is one of the most seductive and dangerous visions of modern times."

But why is this "single model" so dangerous? Kagan provides several answers. First, he goes over some history to show that past "revolutions in military affairs" have given the nations or forces that developed them only a temporary advantage. The British developed tanks in World War I, for example, but were defeated by the German Army's successful use of tanks, aircraft, and radio communication in 1940. In 1945, the United States detonated the world's first nuclear weapon. The Soviet Union "caught up" in 1949. Kagan's point is that this action-reaction cycle is inevitable, so that any effort by the United States to "freeze" other nations out of the market for long-range strike will inevitably fail. The key technologies will spread, says Kagan, and therefore any attempt to base U.S. military capabilities on them alone will not achieve the goal of staying ahead militarily. As he says, asymmetrical advantages "gained by one state do not normally last very long."

But his criticism is stronger than this. As he notes, "The search for an indefinite American 'asymmetrical advantage' ... requires not merely a revolution in military affairs; it also requires a fundamental revolution in human affairs of a sort never seen before. It requires that America continue to change her armed forces so rapidly and successfully that no other state can ever catch up—indeed, that

no other state in the world even try.” Then comes his major criticism: “This unrealistic requirement is central to the current vision of military transformation.”

As he says, the problem “with the current program is that it relies on maintaining an overwhelming advantage in a single area of military performance indefinitely.” This, Kagan argues, is too risky. It invites defeat by opponents who become adept at guerilla wars and at terror. He points to recent events in Iraq as evidence of his claim that “Armies do more than destroy targets,” and that, in cases such as Iraq, “there is no escape from the need to have a large and capable army...” Having the ability to attack an enemy with precision munitions is not enough.

His criticism of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld is direct and harsh: “By focusing all of America’s defense resources on the single medium of air power [coupled with PGMs], Mr. Rumsfeld is betting America’s future security on the conviction that the U.S. armed forces will be able to do *every time* (his emphasis) what no military to date has *ever* (his emphasis) been able to do. In doing so, he is greatly simplifying the task of those preparing to fight the U.S. by presenting them with only one threat to defeat.”

Kagan’s recommended solution to this problem is straightforward: “A sound program of military transformation would proceed in exactly the opposite way. ... It would focus... on developing the capabilities of ground forces that are distinct from the capabilities provided by air power.” It would also “avoid the search for ‘efficiency’ in military affairs. Redundancy is inherently a virtue in war. America’s leaders should intentionally design systems with overlapping capabilities, spread across the services, and should intentionally support weapons that do not directly contribute to the overarching vision of war that they are pursuing.”

Part Two: Kagan’s Argument Criticized

The problem with Kagan’s critique is that *he does not understand transformation*. Transformation is not just about embracing new technology. Transformation is certainly not about just gaining a military advantage through the coupling of air systems (manned and unmanned) and precision weapons. Instead, transformation is an effort to provoke the military and civilian leaders of the nation to ask themselves some tough questions and then to find the right, though challenging, answers.

One question is this: Why did U.S. ground forces assaulting Baghdad have to find out what sort of enemy units they faced by using the traditional technique of coming to grips with the enemy? The Army calls this “movement to contact.” Why should our soldiers—fighting on behalf of the richest, most technologically advanced country on the planet—have to do this? Why can’t the nation’s resources be used to provide soldiers at the tactical level with a picture of what’s in front of them? And why can’t our ground, sea and air forces share a common battlefield “picture” that shows where they are and where the enemy is located?

Here’s another question: Why can’t the United States provide for its post-conflict forces a system that allows them to disperse crowds or mobs without killing a lot of people who don’t (at that moment at least) deserve to die? Small arms, tanks, machine guns, and grenades are good for killing and wounding the enemy. If the United States is to intervene in places to remove brutal dictators or to stop genocide, then why can’t our forces have the tools to handle the inevitable crowds effectively?

Here's yet a third question: If the prompt use or show of force is often enough to keep a relatively small outbreak of violence from becoming something much larger and more destructive, then why can't U.S. forces move quickly to the places, worldwide, where such outbreaks occur and then operate with the support of other U.S. forces, even if they aren't right next to the forces that have deployed? Put another way, why can't this country overcome the problem of not being able to combine the capabilities of widely dispersed forces?

Here's my last question: Why can't this productive and innovative nation combine intelligence with operations so that it is the enemy who is surprised and ambushed, and not U.S. forces? Why can't U.S. forces be both agile and immediately alert to the dangers they face?

Would anyone claim that trying to answer these questions is a waste of time and effort? I seriously doubt it. Yet these are precisely the sorts of questions that "transformation," which Kagan doesn't like, is striving to answer.

Or turn the clock back, as Kagan does, but select a different example. Put yourself in General Eisenhower's shoes after the Normandy invasion in June 1944. Wouldn't you like to defeat Germany in the West before winter sets in? Of course. But why can't you? For a number of significant reasons. One is that your air forces have essentially primitive weapons—unguided bombs dropped from high altitude level bombers or fast flying low altitude attack planes. The bombs aren't all that accurate. As a result, heavy bombers (B-17s and B-24s) trying to support ground offensives often miss their targets. Sometimes they even bomb Allied forces by mistake. Moreover, this lack of accuracy means that Allied bombers have to return again and again to targets within Germany in order to achieve anything close to the desired effects.

A problem worse than bomber accuracy is logistics. Through the summer and early fall of 1944, the Allied armies in northern France and Belgium depended on two ports for supplies, and both were no farther east than the initial Normandy landing beaches. As a result, the Allied offensive against the German armies in France began to slow down because of a lack of supplies. Logistics slowed down the offensive that had routed the German armies in northern France, and a slowed offensive gave the Germans more time to retreat and regroup. General Eisenhower wanted a rapid advance across a broad front. His logistics organization could not sustain such an offensive.

Another problem for you if you're in Eisenhower's place is intelligence. You badly need to know where the effective German divisions are and when they plan to move by road or by rail. You have an advantage in the air, and you want to be able to use it before the weather covers the front with rain, clouds, and fog. But to use your aviation and limited ground forces effectively, you need to be able to locate the enemy. Your intelligence is effective, but not effective enough.

As Supreme Allied Commander, you face many other problems, but what if you could have solutions to those just mentioned? What if your air forces had precision munitions? What if your logisticians had more ports, larger transport aircraft, and better means of moving supplies from ports and supply dumps to the front? What if you didn't even have supply dumps, but could supply units with what they needed when they needed it? What if your intelligence organization could pinpoint the location of enemy formations and anticipate their movements?

If you could just have these things, you could avoid having to halt offensives for lack of supplies. You could isolate German armies from their support by using your superior air forces. You could use your airborne artillery (those B-17s and B-24s) to smash enemy positions and formations. You'd know where these targets are, and your aircraft would have weapons accurate enough to hit them—even in darkness and through clouds. Finally, your intelligence would warn you of efforts like the German Ardennes counteroffensive in the winter of 1944. In short, you could win the war earlier, with many fewer casualties.

This is what “transformation” is about. It says, “Take traditional military problems and ask what can be done to solve them.” Is the enemy hiding under cover or beneath storms? Then develop systems that can find the enemy and strike him. Is the enemy trying to hold his units together with electronic communications? Then identify those communications and disrupt or manipulate them. Is the enemy planning a phased operation? If so, then put it out of phase.

The emphasis on cost-effectiveness in “transformation” is necessary because the funds for national defense are limited. *There will never be enough funds to cover all the legitimate needs.* With funds relatively scarce, the Department of Defense must maximize the capabilities it offers to the president at the lowest reasonable cost. That can be (and is being) done by investing in sensors and in other means of gathering information. With adequate information—including the identification and location of key targets—the forces of the United States can maximize their combat potential while not taking an undue share of the nation's human and material resources.

What Kagan does is to set up a “straw man” and then demolish it. He reduces “transformation” to the “revolution in military affairs,” and then he goes even further and reduces the “revolution in military affairs” to using only aviation to attack key targets with precision munitions. In so doing, he ignores what both the “revolution in military affairs” (RMA) and “transformation” mean. Transformation is much broader than the RMA, and the RMA itself has emphasized sensors and communications far more than Kagan's paper suggests.

Moreover, he is just wrong to claim that the many redundant systems produced in the past were a planned effort to reduce risk through deliberate duplication and overlap. There was indeed redundancy, and redundancy of the type he describes and praises is indeed a means of reducing risk, but a lot of the redundancy of the past was the result of a lack of coordination among the services or the consequence of a requirements process that forced supporters of a new system to round up allies by inflating formal system requirements. There were no “good old days.” The funds have always been short, and therefore the competition for them has always been great. Now, however, there are some sensible military standards that the Secretary of Defense can apply to the many requests for scarce resources.

The standards are in the service and Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) transformation roadmaps. ***That's where you go to find the future.*** That's where you find answers to the really hard questions, such as “Why can't U.S. soldiers and Marines see into urban complexes to locate the enemies waiting there to ambush them?” Secretary Rumsfeld is trying to convince the services to stop competing for resources to do the same job or perform the same mission. His technique is to direct the services and JFCOM to actively participate in the defense planning process by developing coherent, consistent roadmaps that will lead eventually to forces that will have the capabilities required to support the national security strategy of the United States. Another way of putting this is to say that Secretary Rumsfeld wants a force that is deliberately and not accidentally relevant to the nation's security needs.

The services and JFCOM have responded to the Secretary's direction and taken his emphasis on "transformation" seriously. Does this mean that Kagan is correct when he asserts that the Department of Defense is trying to achieve an unattainable aim—the "locking out" of potential military challengers from the "marketplace" of military progress? No. What the Defense Department is trying to do is change the way those in this vast organization think about defense. "Transformation" is about thinking and behaving as much as it is about science, technology, and development. It is not about getting from "here" to "there" in a material sense. Instead, it is about regarding combat and conflict in a new way—a way that takes advantage of the great potential in the American people and in the economic, technical, and scientific institutions they inhabit and support. These are the traits manifested in the people that volunteer to man this nation's military .

Kagan is right to say that redundancy *can be and has sometimes been "a virtue in war."* But a lot of that redundancy he praises wasn't created to reduce risk in wartime. It just happened that way. It was accidental. "Transformation" is about making those virtues deliberate.

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