

Revolution in Military Affairs Suffers Setback

by Carl Osgood

The so-called Revolution in Military Affairs suffered a stinging setback on Aug. 14, when Gen. James Mattis, the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCom), issued a memo, directing the command to stop using certain Information Age concepts in its support of training, doctrine development, and professional military education. Mattis's memo directly targeted the concept of "effects based operations (EBO)," as well as "operational net assessment," and "system of systems analysis," which, according to their proponents, were supposed to completely change the nature of warfare and eliminate, or at least substantially reduce, the fog and friction of combat operations, making their outcome much more predictable. As Mattis notes, these concepts did not live up to their promises in recent operational experience, especially including the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon.

Mattis's memo is made more significant by the fact that, since at least 2002, JFCom has been the center of experimentation and advocacy for these concepts. As recently as a year ago, Dave Ozolek, who was then the executive director of JFCom's Joint Futures Lab (J9) (Ozolek has since retired), told *EIR* in an interview, that the work on EBO that J9 was engaged in at the time was "coloring a whole different approach to operations than we were capable of thinking of five years ago," because of its focus more on the economic, social, and behavioral effects, and less on the attrition effects of military operations.

At bottom, EBO has always been about behavioral modification of the targeted population and various elements of the enemy. This is explicit in the 2002 book *Effects Based Operations: Applying Network Centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis and War*, by Edward Smith, and other works, published by the Pentagon's Command and Control Research Program. According to Smith, EBO uses physical actions "to create a stimulus" which "sets into motion a chain reaction or cascade of additional indirect effects." If the planning is done right,



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A memo from Gen. James N. Mattis, commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCom), calls for an end to certain "Information Age" methods, which have been adopted under the rubric of the "Revolution in Military Affairs."

the chain of effects "will sooner or later cross from the physical to the psychological or cognitive domain so that the resulting psychological and cognitive effects will in some way affect the behavior of observers."

'No Strategy for War'

The problem with all this, of course, is that there is, in fact, no way to map out, contrary to what EBO proponents claim, how the chain of effects will play out, nor how the adversary will respond, psychologically, to the contemplated actions. The Israelis, much to their chagrin, discovered exactly this problem with their war in southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. As *EIR* has documented (see "Behavior Modification Is No Strategy for War," July 18, 2008), the Israeli Defense Forces had been so taken up with their new doctrine, dominated by EBO and other RMA concepts, that its leaders forgot that the basic way to stop an adversary from launching rockets into Israel was to take the ground from which the rockets were being launched.

In a paper accompanying his memo, Mattis notes that these concepts "have not delivered on their adver-

tised benefits and that a clear understanding of these concepts has proven problematic and elusive for U.S. and multinational personnel.” Among the conclusions that the Army, the Marine Corps, and other observers have come to, Mattis writes, are the following:

- EBO assumes a level of unachievable predictability;
- It cannot correctly anticipate reactions of complex systems;
- It discounts the human dimension of war (such as passion, imagination, willpower and unpredictability), among others.

The Israeli experience is central to these conclusions, but so also are the outcomes of the 1991 Gulf War, the 1999 Yugoslavia War, and the “Shock and Awe” phase of the invasion of Iraq, in 2003. The dependence of all of these operations on air-delivered precision-guided ordnance, “underscore the fact that effects-based operations tend to be ineffective when used exclusive of ground maneuver operations,” Mattis writes. Mattis concludes that these principles are “fundamentally flawed and must be removed from our lexicon, training, and operations. EBO thinking, as the Israelis found, is an intellectual ‘Maginot Line’ around which the enemy maneuvered.”

The Air Force Reacts

Perhaps not surprisingly, while those experienced in ground operations have welcomed Mattis’s memo as a return to clear thinking about planning and conducting military operations (especially in an irregular warfare environment), the Air Force has reacted most strongly against it. Lt. Gen. David Deptula, currently the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance has been one of the most outspoken proponents of EBO. As recently as the Spring of 2006, Deptula wrote that EBO “is the exploration of control creating the necessary effects so that an adversary operates in accordance with our national security objectives. Ultimately, this mastering of effects will allow us to view the traditional military concepts of annihilation and attrition, which focus on destruction, as only one means of achieving control over an enemy rather than the operative means of doing so.” On the Mattis memo, Deptula would only say, through an Air Force spokesman, that, “I stand by my remarks on EBO and welcome internal discussions on the topic as different viewpoints in joint doctrine are important in raising dialogues that ultimately result in enhancing joint force operations.”

The Air Force response has, instead, been left to retired officers, notably Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney, well known in Washington as a proponent of a “shock and awe” bombing campaign against Iran. McInerney claimed, in an e-mail to *Inside the Pentagon*, on Aug. 28, that “by directing the removal of systems analysis, a resulting attritional approach will emerge and place many American military personnel, both short-term and long-term, at much greater risk. . . .” McInerney went on to suggest that commanders “ignore” what he considers to be the shocking (Mattis) memo, and calls it the “most parochial, un-joint, biased, one-sided document launched against a concept that was key in the transformation of warfare and proven in the most successful U.S. military conflicts of the past 20 years.” He concedes that EBO has been over-hyped but blames that on JFCom. “That many prior or current JFCom staffers and associated contractors distorted EBO concepts and made promises as to their effectiveness is fact and addressing such should be the limit of the stated policy’s aims,” he said.

Back to the Human Element

Then, McInerney calls on commanders to ignore Mattis’s directive. This from a service which is already having image problems because of its failures in managing its nuclear weapons stockpile, and because of public disagreements with the Secretary of Defense that led to the firing of both the Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force chief of staff.

Mattis’s memo does something which systems theorists behind EBO and its related concepts ignore. He has returned the human element to thinking about warfare. Critics of EBO have always complained that the systems thinking takes a reductionist approach to analyzing the adversary, treating it as one would treat a mechanical system, such as an electric power grid or an integrated air defense system. But human insight and free will can never be captured by this sort of reductionist thinking. Mattis notes that warfare is a “non-deterministic human endeavor whose ramifications are never fully guaranteed, because our adversaries have free will, which will inevitably impact the operating environment in unpredictable ways.”

Mattis’s memo and directive won’t end the debate on EBO, but may begin the process of freeing the military services from the degradation of military doctrine that has been brought on by trying to reinterpret it in the systems analysis language of the Information Age.