

Obama and the Third Offset: From Strategic Bluff to War of Annihilation

by Carl Osgood

Oct. 10—President Barack Obama is a killer, but he’s also a faker. “Obama and company are trying to intimidate the world into submission — but it’s not likely to work. There are many nations and forces in Asia and even in Europe who can’t be convinced by this.” That was *EIR* Editor-in-Chief Lyndon LaRouche’s judgment in discussion on Oct. 6 of the strong Russian Defense Ministry warnings against any U.S. attack on Syrian and Russian forces in Syria, and the furious threat to “beat Russia down,” delivered by U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley in a Washington, D.C., speech Oct. 4. Milley’s outburst coincided with a “leak” to Josh Rogin of the *Washington Post* that active options for U.S. attacks on Syrian (and inevitably Russian) armed forces are under discussion in the White House.

LaRouche added that “Obama would like to say that Russia is his number-one enemy, but his threats are not true. General war is beyond anything Obama can understand. He’d like to have almighty power, but he doesn’t have it any more. He’s more like just a British royal family agent with a bad smell.” Nonetheless in drone killings, in Libya, in Iraq, in Syria, now in Yemen, etc., Obama is a “lying mass murderer,” LaRouche concluded. “When you say

those three words — ‘lying mass murderer’ — you’ve got him.”

Old Wine in New Bottles

The murders by drone, which Obama orders every Tuesday, are an uglier caricature of the “air power” doctrine than, for instance, H.G. Wells’ seminal “Shape of Things to Come” of 1933. Death is dealt out from the air by omniscient supermen against whom there is neither defense nor retaliation.

After World War II, American enthusiasts for the 1945 firebombing of Dresden and for “systems analy-



White House/Pete Souza

LaRouche: “Obama and company are trying to intimidate the world, but it’s not likely to work.” Here, President Obama with members of his national security team in the Situation Room of the White House.



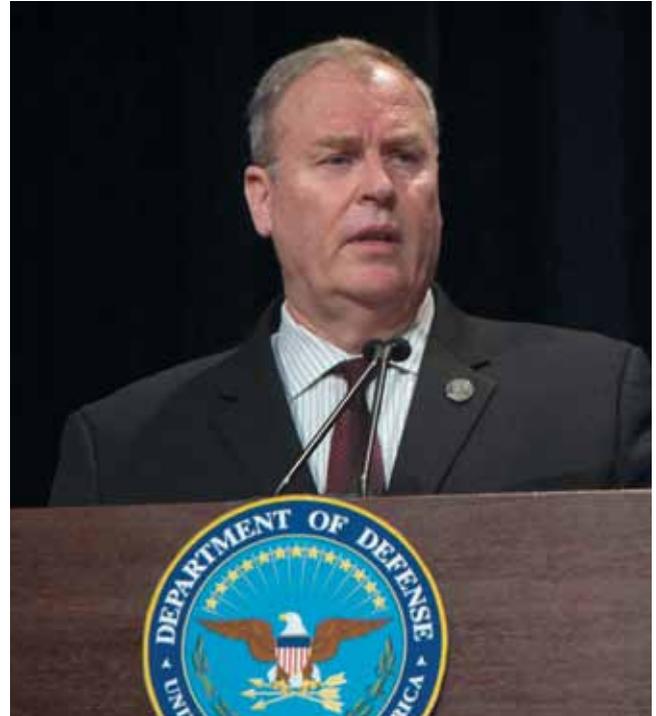
U.S. Army/Staff Sgt. Chuck Burden

U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley proposed to “beat Russia down” in a Washington speech Oct. 4. Here he testifies before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Feb. 24, 2016.

sis,” formed the RAND Corporation to advise the Air Force. Now Obama’s proclivities have caused him to embrace an incompetent strain of RAND Corporation thinking that has been resident at the Pentagon since at least 1973. This is signified today in the Pentagon’s so-called “Third Offset Strategy,” which is intended—or so its proponents say—to lead to technological innovations that will help the U.S. military overcome advantages that, in particular, Russia and China have gained in the past decade and a half in developing their military services.

The chief proponent of the third offset strategy is Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work, who told *Breaking Defense’s* Sydney Freedberg in an interview last February, that the third offset is “about human-machine collaborative combat networks.” In other words, Freedberg wrote, Work wants artificial intelligence to help humans make decisions, computers to keep “an unblinking eye,” to sort through gigabytes of “big data” for actionable intelligence and detect “subtle patterns” in the behavior of adversaries, and to execute military actions that are too fast for human reflexes.

The term “third offset,” itself refers to what its proponents have defined as the first two offsets: President



DoD/Petty Officer 1st Class Tim D. Godbee

Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work, the chief proponent of the third offset strategy, which Work sees as an updated version of Blitzkrieg.

Eisenhower’s “New Look” nuclear doctrine of the 1950s, and the DoD’s technological push in the 1970s that resulted in stealth, precision-guided weapons, and other technologies that came to fruition beginning in the late 1980s. “The whole vision of the offset is to make the human better, not to make the machines better,” Work told Freedberg. “We’re building on the [existing] battle networks that employ conventional weapons, and we’re vastly improving them by utilizing [artificial intelligence] and autonomy ... to allow humans to make better decisions, to perform better in combat, and to be more effective.”

If this sounds at all familiar, that’s because it’s really old (synthetic) wine in a new bottle. It’s a new generation of the “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA) that failed so spectacularly in the sands of Iraq and the poppy fields of Afghanistan. The RMA originated in the Pentagon’s “Office of Net Assessment,” headed from 1973 until last year by Andrew Marshall, who began his career in 1949 “thinking about the unthinkable,” that is, how to fight nuclear war. While Marshall was thinking about fighting nuclear wars against the Soviet Union and China, he was also en-

gaged in building a network of disciples throughout the military and the national security think-tank community, from the 1970s on, who would then embed his method of thinking into the relevant institutions.

The key think-tank in Marshall's network is the "Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments" (CSBA), founded by retired Army Col. Andrew Krepinevich, a 1989-1990 alumnus of Marshall's office. The CSBA gave us the "Air-Sea Battle" operational concept in 2010, for waging war against China in the South China Sea. The "third offset" strategy, which the CSBA introduced with a 94-page report in late 2014, builds on the earlier work of the

RMA and the Air-Sea Battle concept. Robert Work spent the George W. Bush years working at CSBA, where he was well indoctrinated in the method of thinking of Andrew Marshall, if he wasn't already familiar with it before then. He was appointed Undersecretary of the Navy in 2009. Work moved to his present job in 2013, and was put in charge of the "third offset" effort by then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.

That the third offset is derived from the RMA is not lost on journalist Freedberg, cited above, who reports that both deal with the combination of precision-guided weapons, long range surveillance, and the networks required to get targeting information from the sensor to the shooter.

However, Freedberg claims they come from opposite directions. The RMA came out of the 1991 Gulf War, which convinced strategists that the American combination of precision, surveillance, and networks would always give America an unmatched advantage in future conflicts. The third offset, on the other hand "arises from the unhappy realization that the Russian



U.S. Army (ret.) Col. Andrew Krepinevich, a member of Andrew Marshall's network who founded the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. It employs Marshall's outlook and methods. In 2010 it produced the Air-Sea Battle operational concept for war against China in the South China Sea.



U.S. Army/Mr. Scott Davis

The "third offset strategy," like the earlier versions of the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs, comes from the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, long headed by Andrew Marshall. Marshall, shown here, began his career in 1949 with Herman Kahn, planning how to fight nuclear war against the Soviet Union and China.

bear is back, China is rising, and they're rapidly fielding the very combination of precision, surveillance, and networks that was once a U.S. monopoly," Freedberg writes. "Worse, they're developing tactics and technologies, especially in cyberspace and the radio spectrum, specifically to baffle, blind, or destroy our networked war-machine. If our adversaries are learning how to copy and counter our current advantages, we need to offset their growing power—hence the name—by finding new advantages."

The automatic assumption that China and Russia are U.S. adversaries is but one carryover from Andrew Marshall's thinking. During the Cold War, Marshall had focused all of his attention on the Soviet Union, but when the Soviet Union collapsed, he turned to China, commissioning translations of many Chinese military writings, in much the same way that he had earlier approached the Soviet Union.

One result of the focus on China was a study called "Asia 2025," which came out in early 2000. According to a *Washington Post* article at the time, the report pos-



U.S. Navy photo/Chief Photographer's Mate Todd P. Cichonowicz

Exercise Valiant Shield 2016 tested the Air-Sea Battle operational concept in the Philippine Sea.

tulated that China will be a future threat to the United States whether it is strong or weak. This was the thinking that continued through the Air-Sea Battle concept—though the Pentagon tried hard to play it down—and is fully embedded in the third offset strategy. This also happens to be fully coherent with President Obama’s “Asia Pivot,” announced in January 2012, by which the United States would shift the majority of its military forces to the Western Pacific to counter a “rising China.”

The *Blitzkrieg* Outlook

Another sign that the third offset isn’t really all that different from the RMA, is the attachment to the Nazi *Blitzkrieg* model of operations of 1939-1940. According to Mark Pomerleau, writing in the Sept. 19, 2016 issue of the *C4ISR Journal*, Robert Work has described the end goal the third offset seeks to achieve, through the lens of the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s. All nations had access to the same technologies, such

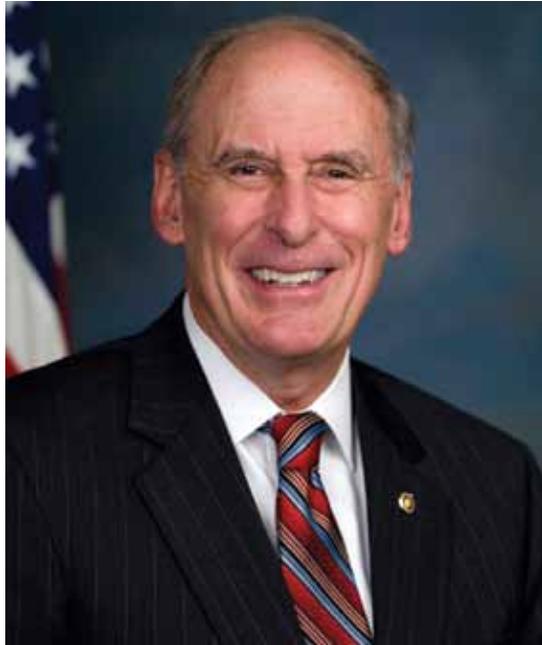
as radios, airplanes and tanks, “but only the Germans put everything together into an operational concept called *Blitzkrieg*,” Work said. “Now we were all fast followers. As soon as we saw it, we all said: ‘God, why didn’t we think of that?’ By 1944 we were ‘out-blitzkriegering’ the Germans.”

This is remarkably similar to the language used in an article by Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) that appeared in the *Joint Force Quarterly* in 1999. Coats was one of the architects of what became the U.S. Joint Forces Command’s “Joint Experimentation Directorate,” where many of the RMA concepts were developed into operational doctrine during the G.W. Bush years.

Coats wrote that only by integrating information age technology “with changes in organization and doctrine, based on truly joint concepts, can our capabilities be maximized. It was this type of integration that made *Blitzkrieg* and carrier aviation [into] revolutionary new technology used in new ways with new force struc-

tures.” He added that “During the 1930s, combat aircraft, tanks, and radio communications were available in both France and Germany. But through the efforts of von Seekt and Guderian, the Germans leveraged them with new organizations and doctrine to develop more effective war-fighting capabilities. Thus, the development of the *Blitzkrieg* offers insight into creating change.”

What Work is ignoring and Coats before him, is that the *Blitzkrieg* model of operations failed when it came up against an enemy—the Soviet Union—that was able to muster both the will and the capacity to resist it.



U.S. Congress

Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.), writing in Joint Force Quarterly in 1999: “The development of Blitzkrieg in the 1930s through the efforts of von Seekt and Guderian “offers insight into creating change.”

fare. The U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps were forced to abandon the buzz-phrases and learn how to fight a counterinsurgency campaign instead, exactly the opposite of what the RMA had predicted.

The RMA also failed in Israel. One study, produced by the U.S. Army’s Combat Studies Institute, attributed the failure of the Israeli military campaign in Lebanon in 2006 to precisely the operational concepts of the RMA. They were not designed to inflict actual military defeat on Hezbollah. Rather they were supposed to produce “effects” that would force Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon and cause it to disarm.

Why the RMA Failed

In earlier times, the proponents of failed ideas might have been fired from any positions of responsibility and consequently faded from history. In post-Cold War Washington, D.C., they get to change the names of their failed ideas and do the same thing all over again. The Revolution in Military Affairs failed because its thinkers didn’t take into account the human factor in warfare,— or better said, their whole *raison d’etre* is precisely to oppose the human factor.

The RMA was encapsulated in buzz-phrases like “effects-based operations (EBO),” “rapid decisive operations,” “operational net assessment,” “standing joint-force headquarters,” and so forth, that were flying around the halls of the Pentagon and military think-tanks in 2001 and 2002. As was explained to this author in 2002, the hypothesis behind all this was that a standing joint force headquarters that uses “operational net assessment” and employs “effects-based operations,” can achieve “decision superiority,” enabling “rapid decisive operations.”

As most informed people are aware by now, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, beginning in March 2003, went nothing like that. It was neither rapid nor decisive, and bogged down quickly into irregular war-

campaign that was supposed to produce those effects, and when that failed, the Israeli army launched a ground campaign that was supposed to do the same thing. Instead, it ran into an expertly prepared conventional but decentralized defense that was entirely unperturbed by Israeli efforts to generate “effects.” It was able to inflict heavy casualties on poorly prepared Israeli ground forces, whose major experience over the previous several years had been in occupation duty in the Palestinian territories. Ultimately, the RMA was about “behavior modification” of the enemy, not the proven principles of military campaigning.

The concepts of the RMA were finally demolished by Gen. James Mattis, now retired, but who was then commander of the U.S. Joint Forces Command. In an August 2008 memo, he cited the Israeli experience in Lebanon as well as the U.S. war in Iraq. Mattis noted that these concepts “have not delivered on their advertised 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 wrote, were the following:



CC/IraqVet225

A U.S. armored vehicle, put out of action by an improvised explosive device (IED), in Iraq. According to the doctrine of the Revolution in Military Affairs, determined civilian resistance was expected to be insignificant. It wasn't.

- EBO assumes an unachievable level of predictability.
- It cannot correctly anticipate reactions of complex systems.
- It discounts the human dimension of war (passion, imagination, will power, and unpredictability, among other human characteristics).

The third offset is moving in the same sort of direction as the RMA did but, according to its critics, is even less developed conceptually than the RMA. “The Third Offset Strategy resembles a high tech version of the casting call for the tryouts for *America’s Got Talent*; even the producers have no idea who will show up or how they will perform,” wrote the Lexington Institute’s Dan Gouré in a June 14, 2016 article in *The National Interest*.

Gouré is convinced that the third offset is nothing more than a smokescreen to cover the fact that the Obama Administration is shrinking the U.S. military, both in size and capability. “The hope is that the Third Offset Strategy will do for the military what is already being done for parking garages, fast food restaurants and retail stores: reduce the need for human beings.” There is certainly room for such improvements in the military, Gouré went on, but there are practical limits to how far that can be taken.

“The bigger danger is that Department of Defense will become enamored of its ‘new offset’ strategy and cut current programs and forces in anticipation of great results emerging from its investments in automation, big data, and robots,” he concludes. “There is a long history of the Pentagon and the White House promising huge leaps forward in military capabilities for future systems that are just Power-Point slides, but cutting real capabilities now.”

The problem is that war is never quite as easy as the RMA proponents think they can make it. “A lot of times when the Army talks about

the future of war, we don’t have a super-happy message,” said Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, deputy commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command and long a harsh critic of utopian ideas about warfighting, according to a Nov. 14, 2014 article in *Foreign Policy* on the debate over strategy in Iraq and Syria. “We’re saying: ‘War is hard. War is difficult to resolve.’ But there are those who actually have a happier message, but the problem is, it’s self-delusion. It’s visions of future war that are fundamentally flawed.” It is with that sort of delusion that President Obama is taking us into confrontation with Russia and China, a confrontation in which he cannot control the outcome despite the delusions of the RMA crowd. This is why Lyndon LaRouche characterizes his actions as a bluff.

In modern war since Ulysses S. Grant, or “total war,” the “human factors” of passionate moral commitment, total dedication, and creativity,—the same ones that Gen. Mattis cited—are ultimately decisive. Forget the childish “offset” theories as such. In Andy Marshall, Robert Work, Gen. Milley and their like, there is a passionate commitment to deny—to annul—the human factor. What they have done with their power in the past, and what they are doing with Obama now, should demonstrate that this is no different from Obama’s passionate commitment to mass murder.