

NETWORKING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Alfred Kaufman¹

Abstract. This paper argues that advocates of Network Centric Warfare are not fully responsive to the strategic changes that have occurred in recent years and suggests two ways in which their efforts should be correspondingly modified. The first suggestion asks for special focus on what components one would like to network and recommends inclusion of systems complementary to what we employ today; the second, recommends that networking be enlarged to include, beyond connection of hardware elements, a “bringing together in a coordinated manner” of complementary concepts of operation and perhaps even complementary strategies. These complementary systems, concepts of operation, and strategies, when used in conjunction with current systems, concepts of operation, and strategies, would significantly reduce an enemy’s ability to exploit the singular vulnerabilities that characterize any capability and would thereby consolidate the Alliance’s capability to handle the asymmetric threats that have replaced the symmetric threat of the Cold War.

The events of September the 11th 2001 have brought home for all of us what we have already known for some time but never squarely faced: war in the future is not likely to be played in anything like the way it was played in the past. If, before last September, we could talk about the significant changes in the strategic environment but do little about it, now we must seriously focus on the consequences of that change. This article intends to explore those consequences as they pertain to Network Centric Warfare.

To understand the difference between the two types of war, the one we have been fighting for many years in the past and the one we may be forced to fight in future, we must start from the very beginning. Since everything in the theory of war appears to start with Clausewitz, we shall consult his views on the matter. According to him, the aim of warfare is to make the enemy comply with our will. Since in general the enemy has no wish to comply voluntarily, we must force him to do so against his will. The only way to accomplish that, is to render the alternative more painful to him by comparison. Individual examples to the contrary notwithstanding, there are only two things humans cherish more than their ability to be free of foreign imposition: life and property. Consequently, we must endanger these if we want him to comply with our will. History knows of only one way of doing so, employment of a military machine designed to kill people and destroy property.

If unopposed, a military machine so designed would control the enemy’s behaviour by destroying enough people and property to overcome his determination to resist our will. Should it be possible to make the consequences of their resistance clear to the enemy beforehand, we might even be able to accomplish our goal merely by credibly threatening to destroy enemy life and property. Historic examples of this can be found in the many occasions when cities opened their gates to an invading army whose reputation for destruction preceded his arrival.

The same is hardly true, however, if the enemy has a military machine of its own to oppose ours. He could use his machine to do two things: reduce the capacity of our machine to mete out the destructive power that it would otherwise be able to do, or press his own power until the alternatives to war begin to look more attractive to us. In either case, the centre of our attention will then shift from destruction of life and property to disarming the enemy war machine. In fact, warfare evolved to the point where it is no longer thought acceptable

to conduct military operations directed at civilians, at least in the civilized world, anyway. Such operations, if undertaken, are called by other names than war, such as terrorism, atrocities, etc, each of which carries a strong negative connotation of immorality. The fact that some people are nevertheless killed by way of disarming the military machine of the enemy has been made palatable both by visibly distinguishing between civilians and military personnel and by recognizing the unpredictable nature of war.

Disarming, is a human act which has come to symbolize the formal submission of one side in a military conflict to the will of the other, much like animals submit to the more powerful specimen by engaging in certain rituals recognized by their kind as ways of stopping a conflict. As such, disarming does not occur until one side manages to bring the other side’s war machine to the point of inefficiency. This can be done in two ways: either one forces the enemy machine into a position from which it can no longer execute its function, or one reduces the machine’s power to function by destroying its components in detail. To do the former requires considerably more ingenuity than killing, to do the latter requires considerably more killing than ingenuity, although ingenuity as well as killing are involved in both. World War I is a particularly plastic illustration of war by attrition of the enemy’s war machine, while the swift German advance in the early days of World War II is a good example of how ingenuity can render the enemy war machine ineffectual.

In the more recent past, the Allies relied heavily on ingenuity as they fought the Soviet Union to a victory under the umbrella of nuclear deterrence. Although not always directly acknowledged, future American warfare plans rely more on killing than on strategic and tactical ingenuity. Given our recently acquired ability to destroy objects with exquisite precision, this is a matter of convenience and expediency. On the other hand, likely enemies rely more on tactical ingenuity than on killing because they can not hope to match us in our strength but can easily exploit our most conspicuous military vulnerabilities, such as our critical reliance on detailed tactical information, our relative immobility, and our lack of patience.

Now, in a war of attrition, the two sides oppose each other symmetrically, much like two caribou at mating time, horns locked in combat, pushing against each other, and, therefore, the stronger protagonist is favoured to win its confrontation

¹ Institute for Defense Analyses, 4850 Mark Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22311-1882, USA.