Europe’s Selective Emulation of the RMA: Explaining Convergence and Divergence

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Key Questions

• To what extent have European states emulated the key concepts and capabilities which underpin the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)?

• How can we explain convergence and differentiation in Europe’s partial and selective emulation of the RMA?
  – Reforms to force structures
  – Military capability procurement
  – Concepts and doctrine

• These questions have an important impact on capacity of states to burden share in NATO/CSDP.
Key Findings

• Partial and selective emulation of RMA, but divergence in temporality, notably in Germany.

• Convergence and divergence the result of impact of material variables at the systemic and domestic levels.

• Low autonomy of the core executive fosters dysfunctional civil-military relations in German defence planning. In UK and France high executive autonomy fosters a more effective model of civil-military relations in defence planning.
The US-Led Revolution in Military Affairs

• Three core features:
  – Development of expeditionary forces and joint, modular command structures.
  – Technical Dimension of Network Centric Warfare (NCW): Investment in Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Capabilities (C4ISR).
  – Doctrinal development: The conceptual dimension of networking - implications of networking for command structures and Effects Based Operations (decline after 2008).
Europe’s Selective Emulation of the RMA

• Expeditionary forces and joint, modular command structures.

• Investment in C4ISR (Communications systems and Satellite-based ISR systems).

• Doctrinal development:
  
  – Network Enabled Capabilities (NEC): Scepticism of ability of technology to transform nature of warfare and of ‘long screwdriver’ approach to operations.

  – Effects Based Approach to Operations/’Effects Based Thinking’: Military operations have not changed in character, just the approach; need to embed within the Comprehensive Approach. Also focus on role of technology in COIN/Stabilisation operations.
Divergence in Temporality of Emulation

• Significant divergence in temporal location and pace of emulation:
  – **Expeditionary Warfare and Joint Command Structures:** From mid-1990s UK and France developed joint command structures and focused on expeditionary forces; Germany from 2003.

  – **C4ISR Investment:** In mid-2000s UK and France have invested heavily in C4ISR capabilities and developed ‘initial’ networked capability; Germany unlikely to reach this point until 2016.

  – **Doctrine:** UK and France exhibit highly-developed doctrine on Network Enabled Capabilities (NEC) and also on EBAO/‘Effects Based Thinking’. Germany is yet to develop an agreed joint approach to NEC.
Explaining Convergence: Neorealism and Military Isomorphism

• Neorealism: International system characterised by uncertainty and fear.

• 3 options open to states in defence reform:
  – Military innovation
  – Military emulation
  – Stasis

• For ‘secondary’ states like West European Great Powers military emulation the most logical response of least risk and greatest potential gain.
Emulating Best Practice

• Waltz (1979): States emulate on the basis of aggregate capabilities (the state of greatest capability in the international system).

• Resende-Santos (2007): States do not emulate the powerful, but proven success in warfare (military ‘best practice’).

• Defence reform a product of observation of experience of others (particularly Allies) and the lessons of operational experience.
Neo-Realism and Temporality

• Timing and content of European emulation of RMA in mid-1990s a product of two forces as nature of operational and strategic environment became clearer:

  – **Operational Experience:** Complex peace-keeping operations highlighted importance of ‘Mission Command’ and of ensuring that networking could assist in delivery of ‘effects’ across the conflict spectrum.

  – **‘Reformed Bandwagoning’ on US power:** Identification of US as key alliance partner – need to retain interoperability with US, while establishing C4ISR to permit European autonomy.
Explaining German Divergence

• Focus on systemic variables only provides partial explanation for temporality of European reforms.

• Domestic variables help us understand German divergence.

• Majority of the literature on German defence reform highlights impact of anti-militaristic strategic culture on content, pace and timing of defence reform.
Neoclassical Realism and Executive Autonomy

• Slow pace of defence reform in UK a result of deficits in autonomy of core executive in Germany.
  – Impact of federal political system on capacity of core executive to reshape culture.
  – Politics of base closures.
  – Linkages between social, budgetary and defence policy.

• Core executive focused on managing temporality of defence reform.

• Fostered dysfunctional civil-military relations in German defence planning on doctrine and capabilities.
  – Weak civilian oversight on defence capabilities.
  – Excessive civilian oversight on military doctrine.
Conclusions: Executive Autonomy and Defence Planning

• Huntington (1957: 57): ‘The fact that war has its own grammar requires that the military professionals be permitted to develop their expertise at this grammar without extraneous interference’.

• Civilians need to permit the military a strong degree of autonomy in doctrine development, but develop stronger oversight mechanisms in capability procurement.

• Executive autonomy a critical variable in determining the capacity of states to identify and adhere to military best practice. Has important impact on effectiveness of civilian military relations in defence planning:
  – Allows civilian policy leaders to focus on promoting the national interest rather than domestic interests.