The Rise and Fall of a Defense Paradigm: The Revolution in Military Affairs

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Abstract:
From the ASSAULT BREAKER experiments in of the late 1970s through the 2003 invasion of Iraq, many defense analysts proclaimed a “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA). Yet, aside from stunning advances in precision strike and information processing how do scholars make sense of the rise of an idea and its advocates in defense policy? This is essentially a question of the antecedents of policy formation, the array of forces that forge policy options inside government. The following paper builds on over 80 interviews with senior defense officials to dissect the origin, evolution, and fall of the RMA construct. In studying the emergence and diffusion of the RMA concept, my research suggests a central role for collective actors sharing policy ideas and competing for legitimate authority and influence over sectoral policy making. The rise of the RMA as an organizing idea in U.S. defense policy is thus not reducible to bureaucratic competition, technological determinism, or strategic culture as an external set of norms. Rather, it can be portrayed as concatenation of actors and ideas, a social process involving boundary activation by bureaucrats and soldiers (re)interpreting their key tasks and core missions.

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Ideas & Revolutions

In 1994, Andrew Krepnivich, then Director of the Defense Budget Project, published an article in the National Interest outlining ten military revolutions in an attempt to define what constitutes a "revolution in military affairs" (RMA). The work reflected a public presentation of what was a growing research program in the Office of Net Assessment (ONA), a small unit in the Office of the Secretary of Defense headed by Andrew Marshall, examining how the combination of information-technology and precision strike called for new systems, organizations, and doctrine fundamentally altered warfare. Marshall, a presidential appointee since the Nixon administration, had been involved with a series of debates about the potential of precision weapons dating back to his days at RAND and questions about long-range accuracy, laser-guided munitions, and cruise missiles with a network of defense officials and strategic thinkers that included Albert Wohlsetter, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, and Richard Perle among others. The question was not just the extent to which war would change, but what it implied in for U.S. strategy.

What explains the rise of ideas in defense bureaucracies? How does one explain their relative gravity and pull on strategy debates, doctrine formation, and procurement paths? This is essentially a question of the antecedents of policy formation, the array of forces that forge policy options inside government.

With respect to defense transformation, at one level it would be easy to dismiss the fanfare as nothing more than rhetorical acumen, a sales pitch designed to capture resources amidst declining budgets or an extension of party ideology. In another reading, exogenous factors, the weight of large-scale history change between a loosely defined modern industrial and information based post-industrial society alters the confirmation of war (Toffler 1984a, 1984b, 1991; Van Crevald 1989, 1991). With the publication of a special issue in the Journal of Strategic Studies and the release of Dima Adamsky’s book on the RMA and strategic culture, there has been renewed interest in

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2 This line of inquiry can be seen as embodying a policy window type approach in which exogenous shocks produce the possibility of change in otherwise rigid, hierarchical institutions. On the concept of institutional evolution and punctuated equilibrium, see Campbell (2004), True, Jones and Baumgartner (1999), Thelen (2003, 2005), and Thelen and Steinmo (1992).
the RMA that tends to focus on the subject as a function of cultural antecedents (Adamsky 2009; Adamsky and Bjerga 2010).

In studying the emergence and diffusion of the RMA concept, my research suggests a central role for collective actors sharing policy ideas and competing for legitimate authority and influence over sectoral policy making (Genieys and Smyrl 2008a; 2008b; Hassenteufel et al. 2010; Genieys 2010).³ The rise of the RMA as an organizing idea in U.S. defense policy is not reducible to bureaucratic competition, technological determinism, or strategic culture as an external set of norms. Rather, it can be portrayed as concatenation of actors and ideas, a social process involving boundary activation by bureaucrats and soldiers (re)interpreting their key tasks and core missions.

In the following paper, I will establish an analytical basis for examining the intersection of ideas and agents in public policy using the RMA debate as an exploratory case. Triangulating the space occupied by policy networks organized around ideas requires situating the programmatic actor framework with respect to concepts from relational sociology, institutionalism, and organizational theory. In this respect, my work extends the pioneering research of William Genieys and Marc Smyrl on programmatic actors in French social policy at the Centre d'Etude Politique de l'Europe Latine and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Genieys and Smyrl 2008a; 2008b; Genieys 2010). Specifically, the programmatic actor model I derive from their work is about tracing how ideas diffuse in policy communities. In this respect, the analysis takes place in one distinct policy stream, the evolution of ideas in the policy primeval soup theorized by John Kingdon (2003, 123).

Programmatic Actors

Programmatic actors are relatively small groups of policy specialists predominately located inside government connected by their advocacy of a shared bundle of ideas and policy prescriptions not reducible to material self-interests and

³ In this respect, programmatic actors are the positive counterpart to veto players, seeking to advance an agenda as opposed to stop an alternative (Hassenteufel et al. 2010; Tsbelis 2002).
preferences along institutional lines. Rather, the interests associated with programs are defined in terms of the relative influence of individual actors inside government defined as *Herrschaft*, or legitimate authority (Genieys and Smyrl 2008a; 2008b). This authority may allow individual actors to capture additional resources inside government, but the capture of resources may not always produce increased legitimacy. As a collective actor, programmatic actors are held together by the extent to which they are connected by a given set of ideas, defined in terms of boundary activation, and predisposed towards advancing policy options that increase the resonance of these ideas and hence their individual authority. The struggle at the heart of government is thus a function of contentious bureaucrats advancing divergent programs.

In the Goffman sense of the term, a program is a “frame” organizing how events and interactions are understood (1974, 27). Inherent in any defense program are bundles of assumptions about what constitutes a threat, cause-effect relationships related to strategy development, and logics of appropriateness that define procurement and weapons design. They form a constitutive as opposed to regulative logic in a manner similar to Theo Farrell’s work on technical scripts as norms of warfare (2003). Programs are the cosmology of bureaucrats, how they understand the rules, norms, and organizing principals of their particular policy domain. As such, they tend to be focused on technical issues nominally associated with policy specialists and not reducible to a particular party ideology and only loosely linked to broader social discourses.

By its very definition a program is relational, connecting social sites and actors, and in the process, activating boundaries (Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 1999; Tilly 2005). While linking ideas, norms, culture, and other approximations of ideational

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5 This contestation though should not be reduced to Gramscian notions of hegemony or a global referential (Genieys and Smyrl 2008a, 33). Rather, a program deals with a specific sector of policy making. In this respect, it can be thought of in similar terms as an epistemic community, with the following caveats. First, unlike an epistemic community programs are not global in nature. Second, unlike an epistemic community programmatic actor networks are collective actors with a preformed solution in search of problems to legitimate it as opposed to actors who are organized to solve a single problem. Furthermore as a research program, one can consider programmatic actor with respect to veto players. While the veto player literature looks at how actors prevent reform, programmatic actor looks at how change emerges, is reified, and propelled across actors within a bureaucracy. In this respect, agenda-setting is not top-down and bureaucrats relegated to alternative specification (Kingdon 2003, 19).
factors to the policy formation process is neither novel nor new, what standouts in a programmatic actor orientation is the conceptualization of identity as relational site of competition inside government. Programs are vehicles of socialization and boundary activation for contentious bureaucrats.

The programmatic actor framework begins from the assumption of organizational anarchy common in much of the policy process literature (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972; Kingdon 2003; Sabatier 2007). Competition is rampant among different bureaucratic actors, individual policy specialists, and broader advocacy networks. In the usage here, competition is not singularly defined by material interests, the turf and money bureaucrats are hypothesized to horde in strict rationalist renderings. Rather, competition is just as prevalent around the articulation of discrete policy logics, or programs, that frame policy options. This contestation over interpretation is as central as the search for resources and allies inside government. A war of idols defines the search for legitimate authority inside government. *If where you sit determines where you stand, seating is often shaped by who you know and the beliefs that bind you together.* Programmatic actor networks are thus internally structured collective actors that act in a manner similar to social movements. They compete over the legitimacy of a program, as a collection of ideas about how to govern, and in the process, mobilize resources and frame debates (Geneiys and Smyrl 11; Scharpf 1997, 55).

If the actors are small groups at the commanding heights of a bureaucracy, their objective is prestige and authority. In a Weberian turn, reform is thus at least partially a function Herrschaft, efforts to legitimate authority within a formal organization that produces viable career paths of its associated members and thus (re)produces the program that holds them together. Within any bureaucracy there is a process of creative destruction as actors seek to innovate as a means of legitimating and sustaining their respective program absent external shocks. In defense, these actors cut across multiple categories including senior officers, elected officials, civil servants, and industrial interest-groups. That said, they are relatively small groups, bound together by the program and thus differentiated from advocacy coalitions. They are not reducible to party lines or competing sub-organizations (i.e. service rivalry). Rather, they are generalized groups of policy professionals that are not unitary, but prone to
competition, contestation, and intrigue. Politics is war by other means; the battle ground of ideas of what should constitute the mandate, mission, and standard operating procedures of government sectors. In this authority becomes a stabilizing force, a form of institutional power that defines and directs competition.

**Research Design**

To date, case studies pioneering the programmatic actor model have focused on European healthcare policy (Genieys and Smyrl 2008; 2010). This grows from earlier studies by Genieys and Hassenteufel on social policy (Hassenteufel et al.1999). Since 2010, the emphasis has been on seeking a more generalizable set of propositions that derive from the model through cross-national comparison of health care sector reform (Hassenteufel et. al 2010). Furthermore, an edited volume in 2010 looked at expanding the scope beyond healthcare to other public policy sectors (Geneiys and Smyrl 2010).

My research fits within this continuum. Specifically, I seek to draw on the earlier work by Jean Joana exploring the programmatic actor model in the defense sector. Joana conducted a pioneering study of the end of conscription in France drawing on the framework and his earlier work on importance of studying defense actors in terms of the ideational basis of preference formation and institutional context (Joana and Smith 2006). Here, I also wish to probe the plausibility of a programmatic actor model as it relates to the U.S. defense bureaucracy.

The range of possible cases in the defense sector in which one could conceivably discern programmatic actors are varied by program, country, and year. This produces a large number of observations. If one assumed a single program per the fifty largest states since 1960 and that programs lasted an average of five to ten years, this would conceivably produce 500 potential observations. Furthermore, one could imagine the existence of multiple, competing programs within a defense bureaucracy and lower level programs within individual services. If one assumed this increased the mean number of programs per ten year window to three, the population expands to 1,500 potential cases.
Rather than analyzing a representative sample of this population, the underlying study seeks to clarify the programmatic actor model as it relates to defense thus emphasizing descriptive as opposed to causal inference and, in the process, explore underlying causal mechanisms. The research seeks to draw out the existing argument as opposed to test the conditional probability of underlying covariates. In this, the emphasis is on a single case study process-traces the evolution of the RMA debate within a single level of the U.S. defense bureaucracy, the Department of Defense (DOD). Given its size and unique position as overseeing a “command of the commons” (Posen 2003), the U.S. defense sector represents a special type of crucial case, a pathway case, that clarifies a hypothetical relationship and underlying causal mechanisms (Gerring 2007; Eckstein 1975).

The programmatic actor model begins with the assumption that small groups compete for legitimacy authority and influence inside government. Note that the actual content of policy and policy implementation is assumed to be more contingent and subject to standard arguments about interest formation. The emphasis in a programmatic actor model is policy formulation, the articulation of possible paths given the underlying program and actors associated with it. By formulating, translating, and mobilizing their programs, as discrete policy logics, these agents play a constitutive role within the policy formation process. This constitutive role should be observable along two dimensions: 1) the context of policy; and 2) the number of policy proposals. With respect to the context of policy, the operative frames should match those of a programmatic actor network. Similar themes, references, implied heuristics, and language should be present reflecting a correlation of kind. Assuming the frame is similar, a programmatic actor network should be associated with the increased generation of policy options demonstrating an endogenous engine of institutional change, a correlation of degree. These options are solutions in search of problems. Whereas other accounts would see policy options framed as debate, programmatic actor orientations looks at bureaucratic discourse more as colonization - options are generated to sustain the program at the expense of other alternatives.

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6 This criteria is drawn from earlier studies by Genieys and Smyrl (2008) and Hassenteufel (2010).
The extent to which new policy frames and their circulation as the formation of new policy options are present should correspond with the configuration of a program actor network. First, the following attributes need to be observed to hold that a programmatic actor network was present and sufficient to influence the articulation of policy options: 1) organization, a network organized around a set of ideas that both define a particular problem set and mobilize solutions; 2) capacity, evidence that this programmatic network had either direct or indirect access to the policy process; and 3) resonance, indications that the programmatic actor network sought to expand its influence through perpetuating the program and increasing its corresponding legitimate authority.

Furthermore, each category has variation depending on the degree to which it is present and latent attributes. Organizations can be either heterogeneous or homogenous depending on the degree to which they allow new participants and ephemeral or enduring depending on the longevity of the programmatic network and its member's participation. One would expect to find organizations that are more homogenous and enduring to be associated with increased policy options. That is, they generate solutions in search of problems as a means of sustaining the position of the program and by proxy its members. Capacity can be thought of on a spectrum running from low, no direct access to the policy process, to high, access to both formulation and implementation. One would expect to find high capacity associated with the generation of increased generation of policy options linked to the program. Last, resonance relates to the degree to which bureaucratic actors use the language of the program and its associated with policy heuristic. If a program is resonant there should be a limited number of frames, or a coherent program, and agent career trajectories should be related to its circulation.

The confluence of these factors helps to isolate the programmatic actor model from other policy analysis heuristics. First, given that programmatic actors are treated as collective actors, almost social movements within government, they can be separated from both policy networks and advocacy coalitions, both of which imply broader, diffuse, and ephemeral coalitions as opposed to more enduring, unified
bodies. Second, because these programs bind the actors, the programmatic actor network plays a creative, constitutive role as opposed to a mere broker or packaging role described by John Kingdon in his analysis of policy entrepreneurs (1984). Finally, whereas many studies increasingly point to institutional veto players or spoilers, programmatic actors can be thought of enablers. They are the local engines of change in institutionally stable settings.

As a pathway case study, assuming one is able to identify the presence of a programmatic actor network and prove that they shaped the policy formation process, the next step is to draw out the causal mechanisms associated with the process. The programmatic actor model outlines two ideal-typical processes connecting actors, programs, and policy change that account for the production of legitimate authority and hence the content and character of sectoral debates endogenous to a bureaucracy. These are each associated with a process that explains how policy heuristics intersect the desire for Herrschaft and produce the possibility of policy change even in stable institutional settings prone to isomorphism. This does not seek to replace the possibility of external shocks, bureaucratic interests, or path dependencies. Rather the objective is to locate a particular modality of institutional change that is self reinforcing and local.

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Analyzing these processes requires focusing on causal mechanisms as opposed to co-variation. Mechanisms can be defined as “a delimited class of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” (Tilly 2001, 25-26). For example, the market mechanism in neoclassical economics implies that observation of supply and demand determines purchasing and production patterns. They represent the logic of causal relations. In analyzing defense policy, I draw on mechanisms associated with social boundary activation. A boundary represents any zone of contrast between internally connected groups (Tilly 2005, 134). These groups share a common representation that is enacted when they come into contact with other groups. In defense, it can be organizational cultures, military branches, even more diffuse ideas and strategies about how to realign...
sector policy examined here as programs. Inside a program, as a type of policy boundary, actors exert autonomy and influence through interpretation and reference to the program. It can be further inferred that a program will interact with the communities sense of core mission and tasks (Wilson 1989, 90-110; Halperin 1971). The programs resonance will be defined in terms of how it links a subunits core mission and tasks to the overarching concept of change. If a common interpretative framework can be established, the program should have a higher degree of bureaucratic buy in.

In analyzing programmatic actor networks that bridge different organizational actors in defense policy, I draw on two boundary activating mechanisms from relational sociology to analyze how programs interact with existing communities and diffuse: encounter and activation/deactivation (Tilly 2005, 138). Encounter describes the process whereby actors are introduced to new programs. It is a necessary condition as the “encounter” produces the possibility of change. It can be analyzed in terms of mapping the sites of socialization bureaucratic actors used to facilitate the spread of ideas. Encounter implies that two members of previously distinct groups enter the same social space and interact. As they interact, their encounter either “activates” new or existing boundaries or “deactivates” old boundaries. This is the sufficient condition. It can be analyzed in terms of the ways in which programs interact with core missions and tasks (Wilson 1989).

Together these mechanisms concatenate into two processes. The first process, mobilization, emerges from the encounter mechanism specified above and identifies how new actors enter a given program thus expanding its influence and prestige. It deals with socialization and the (re)production of programmatic content. The programmatic actor model does not seek to reproduce structural or functional accounts of policy change and contention. This emphasis on agents is similar to rational choice perspectives which predicate their analysis of social action on collective action problems and relatively autonomous, instrumental agents seeking to maximize their interests. Much of bureaucratic politics can be seen as stretching the analytical utility of this model to factor a positional logic whereby the autonomous individual becomes the autonomous organization, captured in how Graham Allison analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison and Zelikow 1999). As seen in the figure below, individual actors
inside the bureaucracy are mobilized through being introduced to programmatic frames through patrons, war-games, workshops, directed studies, panels and by reference from other peers. As they are socialized they expand the reach of the program.

As used here, the emphasis on agents does not reduce social action to the search for instrumental gains measured by material payoffs. Rather, actors search for authority as the capacity to generate prestige and future gains. To this end, they align with programs. Alternatively, there might be social sites through which actors are exposed to the underlying ideas that constitute a program. These could include commissions, war-games, and workshops or studies. Last, there might be a distinct cohort effect whereby a critical mass of new entrants to the bureaucracy admires a particular set of ideas.

The second process, articulation, emerges from the activation/de-activation social boundary mechanism and concerns how programs are maintained and translated into policy ideas that constitute the basis for change. Programs are expressed as actual policy options via framing. Framing is how actors situate their identities, opponents, and coalitions (McAdams, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 16). Programs can be conceptualized as similar to the process of category formation. Category formation refers to the process whereby actors are constituted, here a programmatic actor, through common articulation of a distinct set of ideas that bounds them from other actor networks (McAdams, Tilly, Tarrow 2001, 116). As categories form, they drive incessant competition and brokerage as actors align based on boundary activation, seizing opportunities to advance their agenda in opposition to alternatives (McAdams, Tilly, and Tarrow 322). As seen in the figure below, programs are used to frame options in policy forums. This produces boundary activation that reinforces the program. As policies emerge that carry the programmatic frame, they reify the program and produce legitimate authority and thus increased prestige for associated officials.
To evaluate these claims, the paper will now turn to exploring the emergence of the RMA debate and the extent to which it parallels a programmatic actor hypothesis. The empirical data is derived from multiple sources including secondary historical treatments, archival documents, and over 50 interviews with high level retired officials associated with an individual service, the Department of Defense, or Congress. First to ensure an adequate analysis of capacity, individuals were selected only if they met the following criteria: field grade or higher officer (note: flag officer preferred), GS14 or presidential appointee, and with respect to Congress either staffer or senior aid. Multiple services and political parties were selected in order to ensure that party politics or individual service perceptions did not cloud observation. In analyzing the empirical data, the research examines if without a programmatic actor the policy environment, the
type of options generated and their range would have been different.\footnote{This implies a use of counterfactual analysis derived from Weber and the concept of ideal-types. On counterfactuals, see Fearon (1991). Note that in his assessment, counterfactuals are an applicable check on validity as long as they analyze conditions vs. strict causation and that the counterfactual claim is “contenable” with initial facts and conditions (1991, 190-191).} This implies analyzing the attributes defined above (organization, capacity, and resonance) and the proposed causal mechanisms, mobilization and articulation across four decades: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000. The assumption is that program evolves over this period and should see alterations in the configuration of the associated programmatic actors in terms of their organization, capacity, and resonance. These observations allow one to further define the approach and consider the causal mechanisms: mobilization and articulation.

**Alternative Perspectives**

The programmatic actor approach shares many important similarities with the advocacy coalition approach to policy formation.\footnote{On advocacy coalitions, see Sabatier 1988, 1991, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, Sabatier and Weible 2007.} Both frameworks emerge from the policy networks approach and focus on the intermediate level of the policy process, the ways in which networks of specialists frame debates and generate policy options.\footnote{For an overview of the policy network approach and important sub-discipline therein, see Carlsson 2000.} Yet, important differences define the approaches based on: 1) their understanding of “who” participates in the definition of programmatic content; 2) their conceptualization of collective action; and, 3) the orientation of ideas a core beliefs as either dispositional or relational.

First, whereas the advocacy coalition framework, and to a larger extent the literature of epistemic communities (Haas 1992), assume broad, often transnational networks of specialists participating in the policy process, the programmatic actor model narrows the gaze to focus on technical experts in the traditional iron triangle. In the case of the defense sector, the limited access granted to classified programs and monopoly the state seeks to maintain in questions of national security control the types of interest groups that can penetrate the sector. While defense contractors and scientists play a prominent role, they do so in a manner in which defense bureaucrats control their access and participation. Inversely, much of the advocacy coalition...
framework literature deals with environmental policy which by its very definition is open to a diverse array of actors and transnational cooperation including journalists, scientists, non-government organizations, public intellectuals (Sabatier and Weible 2007, 196).

Second, though the advocacy coalition framework sees an important role in the policy process for competing groups translating their beliefs into viable options as a means of marshaling resources and allies, it does not sufficiently articulate the logic accounting for how these dispositional attitudes are translating into policy (Schlager 1995, 252; Schlager and Blomquist 1996). In much of the institutional rational choice perspectives and bureaucratic politics literature, preferences are inferred based on position and organizational constraints. Collective action is maintained due to the expectation of material gain as a selective incentive.

A programmatic actor framework of policy change can be situated with respect to what it is not. First, the model proposes that change is not only possible, it occurs within relatively stable institutional settings. This can be contrasted with multiple perspectives in organizational theory predicated on stasis. For example, political ecology focuses on how entire sectors tend towards homogeneity (Aldrich 1979; Hannan and Freeman 1977; Hannan and Carroll 1992). The literature draws on biology to consider the relative birth and death rate of organizations. Institutions are seen as prone to inertia and often not capable of adaption due to sunk costs, institutionalized routines, standing and political coalitions (Hannan and Freeman 1977). This leads to policy change as a function of selection whereby those organizations best available to reliably deliver a service advance over those that do not. Furthermore, the relative number of organizations operating in a given sector, like defense, is a major determinant of the emergence of new organizations.

In a similar vein, much of the neo-institutionalist literature is built around the concept of isomorphism, the tendency of organizations in a particular sector to grow increasingly similar over time (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Developmental trajectories tend towards similarity as opposed to diversity. This tendency to conform is a result of peer pressure. Organizations either become more efficient over time causing emulation in rational variants, or they are subject to the diffusion of norms that reduce uncertainty
in sociological variants (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In still other readings, historical path dependencies tend to reproduce certain patterns of organizational behavior and structure (Pierson 2004). Regardless of the conformity mechanism, change becomes difficult and often is the result of exogenous factors that shape how organizations path determine their relative chance of survival.

The only possibility for escaping the gravity of the status quo is sudden, exogenous shocks that produce windows of opportunity. Through punctuated equilibrium, an institution evolves in fits and starts separated by long periods of stability (True, Jones, Baumgartner 1999). Alternatively, the programmatic actor framework understands reform as cumulative and evolutionary. Such a perspective complements the work of Kathleen Thelen (2006), emphasizing change as “incremental adaption rather than breakdown and replacement” (Thelen 2006, 155).

Continuing the assumption of stasis and resistance to change, in the study of defense organizations it is often assumed that military services represent extreme cases of parochial, conservative bias (Snyder 1984a, 1984b). Only external shocks, often significant in nature such as defeat in war, can bring about organizational change (Posen 1984). Furthermore, all things being equal bureaucratic actors should respond to domestic interest groups and political coalitions that threaten their resources and interests (Kier 1991, 1995). The logic of change is the calculus of survival. Bureaucratic actors seek to advance their interests relative to other organizations in government (Allison 1969; Cyert and March 1992; Halperin 1974; Simon 1947). Even those organizations that are capable of peacetime innovation not reducible to budget battles are defined by competing intra-organizational interests (Rosen 1988; 1991).

The programmatic actor model rejects the conservative bias of institutional and organizational analysis. Where many find conservative bureaucracies prone to the status quo, it finds that agents seek to alter their organizations as a means of advancing their careers. These episodes are not reducible to exogenous shocks, rational pay-off structures or path dependencies. They are an entirely distinct class of organizational phenomenon that links agents and ideas, programmatic actor network whose reproduction and conflicts act as the mechanisms of institutional change.
Second, a programmatic actor framework focuses on agents and their interactions as opposed to structures and functions. Most social science is built around the agent-structure distinction, the prefacing that analysts give to agency or structural determination in developing their explanations. Structure based accounts focus on durable, often invisible, entities that bound the range of possible action and thus limit the possibility of change. In one rendering of isomorphism, institutions are said to be held static by enduring logics of appropriateness, ideational structures and norms that increase the difficulty of change (March and Olsen 1989, 134-142). Similar to Berger and Luckmann’s treatment of typification, change is illusionary in that social reality is built around habitual action that produces a tendency towards reification of the status quo (1966; see also DiMaggio and Powell 1991). The existence of structures - be they logics of appropriateness or enduring dependencies produced by capitalism in a historical materialist reading - limits the possibility of institutional and/or policy change.

Agent based accounts begin from the assumption of relatively autonomous individuals. For example, rational institutionalism seeks to examine the ways in which institutions generate pay-off structures that reproduce isomorphism. Agents are analyzed as rational and autonomous with institutional preferences (Sheplse 1979; 1986). Institutions become equilibrium points, focal points through which actors balance their preferences and maximize their pay-offs (North 1990). They help actors escape the free-rider problem common in public choice perspectives (Olson 1965). It is an agent-centric account of change; albeit one that reproduces a very limited reading of human agency and interest formation.

Alternatively, one can take a relational account. By conceptualizing multiple modes of agency, the relational model moves beyond a singular, instrumental view of autonomous, rational agents (Emirbayer and Mischhe 1998, 970-975). For these scholars, agency is a spatially and temporally located process of interaction. This can be differentiated with conflationists who seek to sustain a space for structure and agents by claiming that agents are structures are ontologically inseparable and co-constitutive. For Anthony Giddens structure only exists in social practices and memory. It is invoked by, but not reducible to, agents (1984, 17-18). Alternatively, relationalism links Bourdrieu and Giddens emphasis on habitus and routine with the possibility and
Factoring multiple modalities of time and space in which agent relations are situated (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 963). The relations between agents are open and contingent as opposed to singularly codified by pre-existing structures. This is not to say that these patterns cannot be enduring; it simply implies that they are based on interaction and transaction in different sequences, settings, and circumstances. In the study of defense organizations one can conceptualize at a minimum the following modalities: 1) positional location within a bureaucracy and hence bureaucratic or service interests and 2) programmatic connection to a particular bundle of ideas.

Relationalism has a unique space in organizational theory that offers an alternative to the isomorphism or agent based rational institutional accounts and structure based sociological institutionalist explanations. Relationalism examines the context within which actors increase their capacity to transform their environments. It is the relations of actors, the context of their interactions, recurring transactions, organizational setting, etc. that configures the types of actions that are permissible and their relative transformative capacity (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 1004). Drawing on relationalism, Ackroyd refers to organizational settings as “sites for effective agency” (2000).

If most accounts from the institutional literature are premised on isomorphism and exogenous shocks, accounts from organizational theory tend to reify an image of bureaucracies as resistant to change for a different set of reasons. In the case of defense, innovation can occur, but it is often a function of service level actors competing for new missions (Sapolsky 1972; Armacost 1969). Along these lines, the dilemma of the innovator is how to overcome large degrees of uncertainty and convince other organizations to that the potential benefits outweigh the near-term costs (Thompson 1967). Organizations suffer from the dilemma of complexity. The more complex an organization in terms of its sub functions, the more voices for change. Yet, the more complex the organization, the less internal cohesion required to sustain change and equitably distribute costs and benefits (Wilson 1966). In James Q. Wilson’s work, innovation is difficult to engender because it challenges core missions (Wilson 1989,

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14 On relationalism in organizational theory: (Blaike 1993, Tsoukas 1989, 2000; Reed 1997; Clarke 2000; Fleetwood and Ackroyd 2000; Willmott 2000)
222-24). To the extent that many officials do seek innovations, they are perverse reforms that tend to increase the autonomy and power of senior officials at the expense of true change and efficiency. This produces a situation in which government officials tend to underestimate the costs and overestimate the benefits of innovations (Wilson 1989, 229).

The key to actual innovation than is how costs and benefits are aligned inside an organization and the extent to which new constituencies are formed. For Wilson, change requires a dedicated subunit that owns the new missions and core tasks or the elimination of personnel beholden to the old system (1989, 2331). In James Thompson’s work, the existence of skilled bureaucrats able to maneuver amongst competing interest groups is what enables the alignment of incentives (Thompson 1967, Sapolosky 2000, 35). In Stephen Peter Rosen’s study of military innovation, it implies the existence of mavericks and career incentives (Rosen 1991). The key to sustaining change in altering the career paths in such a way that a new service community is able to advocate new ways of war such as carrier aviation, amphibious assault, and air cavalry (Rosen 1991).

In a relational reading, change need not be scarce. Bureaucratic actors should not be reduced to rational, autonomous agents defined by limited reading of institutional location (i.e. service, branch, interest-group, etc.). Interest-group pluralism and bureaucratic politics are incomplete explanations. Rather, an alternative, partial explanation for endogenous reform can be found in stretching ones analytical lens to imagine government not as a clash of interests, but a war of idols. Conceptualizing bureaucratic actors as simultaneously arrayed along cross-cutting ideational networks defined by a common set of programmatic ideas and seeking to expand their power, defined as legitimate authority, provides an account of organizational change that sees actors and ideas where others see only interests and departments. There is the possibility of a fourth model forgotten in Allison’s seminal study of bureaucracy (1969, 1999): the possibility of social movements inside government.

*Empirics: The Rise and Fall of the RMA*
The larger genealogy of the term “revolution in military affairs” can be linked back to two historically linked trajectories. The first trajectory involved a series of Russian doctrinal publications in the 1970s analyzing U.S. experiments with laser-guided weapons and precision weapons and space systems in general. These publications, including the *Scientific-Technical Progress and the Revolution in Military Affairs* (Lomov 1973) and the writings of Marshal N.V. Ogarkov (were translated by the United States Air Force and disseminated throughout the defense department by the Military Publishing House. Much of the research emphasized a growing “automated reconnaissance-and-strike complex” that would make it possible to achieve effects similar to those requiring nuclear weapons (Watts 2007, 12). Soviet theorists were carefully studying U.S. operations ranging from Linebacker in Vietnam to Assault Breaker, a program established by future defense secretary William Perry as the Deputy Undersecretary for Defense, Director of Research and Engineering.

The second related trajectory involved a broader discussion of the role of precision in warfare. According to former defense department officials associated with the defense policy board and undersecretary of defense, the deep origins of the RMA are associated with the ideas of Albert Wohlstetter and his push for both precision nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. Wohlstetter focused on the prospect of “near zero miss” weapons and how they would alter warfare. The logic was captured in a series of panels organized by the Defense Advanced Research and Projects Agency (DARPA) and Defense Nuclear Agency (DNA) in the early 1970s, the Long Range Research and Development Planning Program. The study had three panels attended by OSD and service representatives organized around advanced technology, munitions, and strategic alternatives, which was chaired by Albert Wohlstetter. Collectively, the panels put forward the idea that near-zero miss or precision weapons would generate “coerce response” options short of full-scale war that would maintain the delicate balance of terror (Paolucci 1975, 23). This logic put a premium on systems designed to “conduct military attacks with associated low collateral damage” including remotely piloted vehicles, or what became UAVs capable of persistent surveillance and cruise missiles.

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15 For a detailed historical treatment of the evolution of thinking about precision, see Watts (2006).
and precision missiles with a range of payloads and objective missions (i.e., deep earth penetrating, guided projectile, rapid mine laying, etc.) (Paolucci 1975, 29). Non-nuclear systems with low circular error probability (50-100 feet) were seen as satisfying “current United States and Allied damage requirements [that required] the use of nuclear weapons” (Paolucci 1975, 45).

In the 1980s, the idea was further articulated as “discriminate deterrence.” In 1987 the Reagan White House formed a panel of defense experts to study requirements to meet the security environment likely in twenty years. The resulting Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy published its findings January 1988 in a document entitled *Discriminate Deterrence* (Ikle and Wohlstetter 1988). Much of the logic and spirit, from precision weapons and integrating new technology, was directly drawn from the earlier LRRDP report. The Commission, like the earlier project revolved around working groups dedicated towards specific research areas such as sources of change in the future security environment, role of advanced conventional standoff weapons, and technology and national security. Andrew Marshall, head of the

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17 Figure 2: Systems Concepts of Military Capabilities (Paolucci 1975)
Office of Net Assessment led the working group of future security environments, a
group that included James G. Roche, future Secretary of the Air Force and author of
their force transformation plan in 2001, Dov Zakheim, future Comptroller of the Defense
Department under Rumsfeld, and two academics associated with the Office of Net
Assessment, Eliot A. Cohen and Stephen P. Rosen (Watts 2007, 82). On note, the
report called for “fast tracking” key weapon systems like stealth and cruise missiles to
avoid the “horse cavalry syndrome,” essentially a re-aligning of defense priorities that
favored DOD over the services (Ikle and Wohlstetter 1988, 48).

Both commissions though were clear that radical change did not limit itself to
introducing new weapon systems alone. A former Undersecretary of Defense and
Assistant Secretary for Policy and Plans summarized an anecdote attributed to
Wohlstetter: if a medieval knight discovered an M-16, what would he do with it?
Bludgeon his opponent or begin to engage targets over 300 meters away with precision
fire?\(^{18}\) In this reading, the precision revolution was not just about fielding new weapon
systems that would tip the balance in the U.S. favor without significantly altering the
‘balance of terror’ but about optimizing the organization in terms of doctrine, planning,
and bureaucratic configuration to ensure the full capabilities were harnessed.

In the 1990s, the concept was used to propose concepts about realigning
defense priorities. While the major planning documents and strategic concepts that
emerged following the end of the Cold War such as the Base Force and Two Major
Theater War planning strategy called for largely continuing U.S. military posture albeit at
lower, conventional levels, the concept of a ‘military technical revolution,’ first proposed
in response Soviet readings of U.S. technology advances and related to the genealogy
of precision and ‘near-zero-miss,’ became a centrifuge for military officers and defense
bureaucrats.\(^{19}\)

In 1993, the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) contracted an alumnus, Jeff
McKitterick, and his team at the Strategic Analysis Center (SAC) within SAIC to
organized a series of workshops and war-games related to explore the Soviet concepts
of a military-technical revolution. McKitterick went on to change the name MTR to RMA
and organized a series of war-games around key concepts: dominant maneuver and
precision engagement. The goal of the workshops was to “infect a young generation of
officers with the RMA virus.”\(^{20}\)

With respect to dominant maneuver, much of the work built on local reform
initiatives within the Army under the tenure of General Franks at TRADOC (1991-1994)
and General Sullivan as the Chief of Staff (1991-1995). In response to the post-Cold
War draw downs, Franks and Sullivan set out to transform both doctrine and force
organization with an eye on creating a post-industrial army.\(^{21}\) Through the Louisiana
Maneuvers, Battle Labs, and concept development that culminated in Force XXI they
sought to realize increased combat from smaller forces by digitizing the force and
altering how they fought, captured in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5 and, to a lesser extent,

\(^{18}\) Interview 13 May 2010. Note, in a separate interview conducted 29 May 2010 with a long-time defense analyst
linked to the Office of Net Assessment, the anecdote was attributed to Marshall.

\(^{19}\) Interviews 3/3/2011 former Deputy Undersecretary of the Air Force , 2/24/2011

\(^{20}\) Interview 7 Oct 2010.

\(^{21}\) Interview 19 MAY 2010.
in the 1993 publication of FM 100-5 that introduced the term “Full-Dimensional Operations.”

After 1993, these local initiatives found resonance in the higher level DOD workshops organized by the Office of Net Assessment through a contract with SAIC’s Strategic Analysis Center. In May 1995, the first meeting of the Dominant Maneuver Working Group was convened to analyze a decisive movement to contact involving concepts like a swarm and digital command net. This was followed by a September 27 Army Round Table on RMA that included an analysis of small warfighting organizations, using precision to strike an enemies center for gravity, and projecting power from the U.S. chaired by Andrew Marshall, Stephen Rosen, and General Sullivan. These meetings were followed up in 1994 with additional workshops and war-games. After 1994, explicit efforts were made in the Dominant Maneuver Workshops to link the RMA and Force XXI concepts. The workshops were a key site of socialization. ONA personnel and army reform advocates tested their concepts and invited other services and DOD level offices to observe. In July 1996, the group held their fourth dominant maneuver war game to flesh out force design implications and campaign design, inviting both the OSD and ARSTAFF principals. In this way, the coalition was seeking to, in their own words, “infect” others with the RMA virus. By 1998, a total eight war games and multiple workshops had been held in an effort to visualize the implications of the RMA for ground forces. It is of note, that many of the earlier participants, like James Dubik continued to participate in the initiative as they advanced, with Dubik moving from General Sullivan’s speech writer to TRADOC’s DCG for Transformation in 1999.

The mid 1990s OSD and JCS were also RMA hothouses, with key individuals like Secretary Perry, Chairman Shalikashvili, and Vice Chairman Admiral Owens backing RMA related concepts emerging from its associated concept of “offsetting.” Secretary Perry made the case that the weapon systems displayed in the Gulf War were a byproduct of a larger strategy he helped shape as a defense official from 1977 to 1981 called “offsetting” in which technology was used to offset mass. That is, disruptive technologies researched by DARPA during his tenure including stealth fighters, more unmanned systems, and JSTARs would enable the U.S. to use less forces when confronting an adversary with superior numbers. He further hypothesized that in the future a “system of systems” could be built that integrated multiple sub-systems to achieve even further offsetting.

As a variant of the transformation thesis complementing the near-zero-miss and reconnaissance-strike-complex, the “system of systems” concept became a central aspect of efforts to usher in the RMA program in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and DOD during the 1990s. On his return to the Pentagon from 1993 to 1997, Perry’s career

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22 Jun 2010
23 Interview 7 Oct 2010
24 Interview 9 May 2010
25 7 Oct 2010
26 According to an interview 1 Dec 2010 The Army also sought to use the Army After Next (AAN) process as a means of connecting Force XXI to its long-term vision and research and development. According to individuals close to the program it was a means to leverage OSD work on RMA, in effect institutionalizing the program
27 Interview 5 May 2010
overlapped the movement of Admiral Bill Owens, a career submariner, to the position of Vice Chief of the Joint Staff in 1994. Perry drew on this concept to develop a model of systems integration, or RMA as a system of systems, around three areas: intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); command, control computer systems, and intelligence processing (C4I), and precision strike. Through integrating these subsystems U.S. forces would penetrate the competitors’ decision-making cycle, or OODA loop, and be able to rapidly find targets, process the information, select the appropriate weapon system, and engage it with a high level of accuracy before the enemy even knew they were being tracked. The concept became the basis for Owens later book, *Lifting the Fog of War* in which he argued for pursuing an RMA for three reasons: 1) take advantage of the strategic pause brought on by the fall of the Soviet Union; 2) prepare for the rise of China to a status of ‘near-peer’ competitor by 2010-2015; and 3) take advantage of a larger inventory turnover given the need to replace Reagan era legacy systems.

Owens converted this systems integration concept into a bureaucratic management tool on the JCS via two mechanisms: the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) and Joint doctrine. The JROC was a legacy of Goldwater-Nichols and a part of U.S. Code (10 U.S.C. 181). The council was designed to push for joint capabilities and integration via the acquisition process. Chaired by the Vice Chair, the council had flag officer representatives from each service tasked to identify and prioritize joint requirements. To do this, the council had to review any proposed systems over a small threshold. Prior to Owens, the council was a “rubber stamp” body with no real resistance to individual service proposals. Under Owens the council went from meeting four hours a month to twelve hours a week. As part of this increased meeting tempo, Owens would task the representatives to fly with him on trips and conduct meetings, getting them out of the building and away from their service networks so he could convince them of the necessity of analyzing programs objectively and with an eye towards systems integration; using jointness as the mechanism to achieve the RMA system of systems.

Joint doctrine served as the other mechanism of change. The chairman, General Shalikashvili, like many senior Army leaders, was on board with the RMA systems concept. As chairman, he authorized the writing of Joint Vision 2010, a manual that sketched out military forces would need to change to realize the full effects of the RMA. Along these lines, its categories referenced the earlier RMA workshops sponsored by ONA and carried out by SAIC. A November conference on the RMA concept paralleled the release of the joint manual. The Chairman and Vice Chairman wanted to use the doctrinal piece and its elevation of the Army concept, Full-Dimensional Operations, as a conceptual blueprint for further attempts to realign procurement. Their objective was the standing PPBS process. Just as they hoped to feed PPBS with RMA concepts predicated on systems integration, the use of joint

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28 Interview 6 OCT 2010; Blaker and Manning 1997, 7.
29 Interview 4 MAY 2011.
30 Interview 4 MAY 2011.
31 Interview 4 MAY 2011.
32 Interview 7 OCT 2011.
33 Interview 30 Nov 2010.
doctrine would provide a context in which individual services would present their Program Objective Memorandum, a five year budget outlook that specified projected resource allocation. The combined effect would have been a two pronged attack on PPBS: through the JROC and service POMs.\textsuperscript{34}

![Emerging Operational Concepts](image)

Figure 3: Emerging Operational Concepts (CJCS 1996, 19)

Two dilemmas emerged. First, there was the question of turf. It quickly became clear that the net bill player for increased research and development would be force structure. Furthermore, services were resistant to let other parties dictate their cuts. They wanted to determine their own destiny.\textsuperscript{35} This was sharpened in the Army when they were confronted with increased operational tempo and the demands of replenishing their legacy force.\textsuperscript{36} Second, there was the question of language. A successful set of concepts usually revolve around an accessible metaphor or heuristic.

\textsuperscript{34} Interviews 5 Jun 2010.
\textsuperscript{35} Interview 28 Aug 2010.
\textsuperscript{36} Interview 26 May 2010
As the RMA concept penetrated the halls of the Pentagon, it was increasingly used albeit with different intent and meaning. Many RMA acolytes reported instances of service actors telling them “we are doing the RMA” when in fact they were just trying to purchase additional weapon systems in a business as usual framework.\(^{37}\) The meaning was reduced from systems integration and transformational operational capabilities to increased digitization and force modernization by bureaucratic actors seeking to preserve autonomy.

After the 2000 election, the RMA concept underwent further rebranding as “transformation.” Part of this change rose from the fact that many felt that the term RMA was being reduced to a foil for increased spending and technology change without getting at the true nature of large-scale innovation. For Marshall, the best analogy of the RMA was the interwar period, an era he commissioned multiple studies on. It was going to be a long, slow process that hinged on changing the way organizations were configured so that they could better realize change. As a mantra of change, this perspective called for changes in leadership dynamics, business practices, and the way the defense bureaucracy as organized to include its underlying culture.\(^{38}\)

The spirit of Rumsfeld’s effort to adapt the rhetoric of transformation to apply to organizational change as much as it did weapons procurement is clear in a September 10, 2001 Pentagon speech, one which he felt strongly enough to forward directly to President Bush and Vice President Cheney as a memo entitled “Waste to Warfighting.”\(^{39}\) In the speech he referred to the Pentagon bureaucracy as the “adversary” that is stifling innovation through institutional inertia calling in the process for a “war on bureaucracy.” Much of the speech emphasized that a technological revolution had transformed the private sector but failed to impact the bureaucratic processes in the DOD and individual services. Furthermore, excessive duplication of effort in items ranging from legal offices to healthcare was argued to produce waste and excessive costs for the taxpayer. To tackle these issues and the large amount of money spent on resources (including basing and infrastructure), Rumsfeld put forward an executive council headed by transformation acolytes Undersecretary Pete Aldridge,

\(^{37}\) Interview 3 November 2010.

\(^{38}\) Interview 15 May 2010.

\(^{39}\) Accessed from the archive at www.rumsfeld.com
Navy Secretary Gordon England and Air Force Jim Roche, directing them to transform the bureaucratic practices to realize efficiency gains. As a major example of institutional inertia, Rumsfeld cited the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) that he referred to as the last vestige of central planning in the world. He also chastised his officials for the length of producing new weapon systems, claiming that it took twice as long in 2000 as it did 1975.

The idea of a transformation that would shape organizational practices in order to accelerate the RMA was reinforced by a series of special studies Rumsfeld initiated after returning to the DOD in 2000. Similar to the discriminate deterrence project, Rumsfeld called for a Defense Strategy Review that framed the future security environment. The strategy review was accompanied by a series of panels designed to jump start transformational thinking. The studies were conducted separate from the congressionally mandated QDR process leading to a degree of confusion. Overall, the intent was to use the review and panels as a way of kicking off the QDR and PPBS process.

This confusion also proved a key point of resistance for the individual services. According to study of the process by SAIC, the J8 used the QDR to work the JCS agenda and protect the individual services. Because it still contained a push for transformation, it produced a large turf battle: to realize transformation would require significant cuts in force structure and pet projects like the Army Crusader. The debate was further complicated by the slow pace of confirming civilian officials. Only 3 senior civilian personnel were in place by May 2000 and Rumsfeld tended to view them and senior members of the JCS as Clinton loyalists who were not genuinely interested in change. In fact, much of the process of pushing transformation became constructed as an attempt by Rumsfeld to reassert civilian control over a military apparatus, both in the JCS and individual services, who had become accustomed to getting their way with civilian officials. Furthermore, while transformation was a “Congress-free zone” individual services would use hearings to lobby Congress and the budgeting process as
seen in the Crusader episode where the Army used members to unsuccessfully defend the program.⁴⁵

To further push the cause of transformation, Rumsfeld opened the Office of Force Transformation, headed by Admiral Art Cebrowski, a naval aviator close to Admiral Owens and former Secretary Perry. Within the Office they pushed Cebrowski’s view of network centric warfare, essentially a operational concept employing Perry and Owens RMA as a systems of systems. Work from the office was quickly picked up and altered by the Navy to produce a series of innovated designs like the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and a number of wide ranging organizational initiatives dealing with personnel issues, logistics, and business processes.⁴⁶

Yet, ultimately the effort to transform the pentagon was deemed a failure by its principal protagonists. A subsequent study authorized by the Office of Net Assessment, factored much of the resistance to transformation as a byproduct of organizational culture. These results were used by Secretary Rumsfeld in conversations with senior service chiefs about further changing the force.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the stress of two wars quickly weighed down the initiative and reprioritize short-term funding and war fighter requirements at the expense of realigning large-scale procurement projects. There were only so many battles that the Secretary and his inner circle could fight at once.⁴⁸

**Analysis**

Revisiting the underlying propositions of a programmatic actor orientation, one should find major defense debates like RMA are not reducible to exogenous shocks or bureaucratic politics. They should be partially explained by small groups that form around particular ideas and advocate for them, movements within governments whose search for legitimate authority influences the policy formation process. In terms of organization, while there was a small group that cut across standard bureaucratic lines it was much more fluid and heterogeneous than previous studies of healthcare policy.

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⁴⁵ Interview 13-May-2010
⁴⁶ Interviews 2 Dec 2010; 17 Jan 2011.
⁴⁷ Note, an article commissioned by Paul Gorman in a 2003 study on military culture by ONA was forwarded to General Schoomaker by Secretary Rumsfeld July 28 (Rumsfeld.com).
⁴⁸ Interview 24 February 2011.
The RMA program tended to draw on external academics, small departments in the defense department, and members of individual services.

In terms of organization, in the 1970s Wohlstetter connected with a small cohort of defense intellectuals and bureaucrats through DARPA laying the ground work for the near-zero miss and later RMA program. The group was relative small, but more heterogeneous than the expected value. Beyond defense bureaucrats academics and think tanks, not explored here, like RAND were actively brought into the policy framing process. Thus a heterogeneous group was associated with the framing a range of policy options derived from the program including increased interest in cruise missiles and experiments with precision weapons like operation Assault Breaker.\(^{49}\)

In fact, organizational heterogeneity continued to be a defining feature in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1980s, the organization of the program remained more homogenous than one would anticipate with external actors still playing a predominant role as seen in the “Discriminate Deterrence” project. Of interest is the emergence of two nodes within the program: the Wohlstetter network compromising his students and their affiliates in government and the ONA network, or “St. Andrew’s Prep” as it is still called by its alumni.\(^{50}\) In the 1990s, the programmatic network involved senior service members like General Sullivan as well as members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and external contractors like SAIC where ONA alumni worked. Here the results again seem to challenge the homogeneity premise that small coherent groups should be better able to push their agenda. Broader programmatic networks were associated with increased policy formation in the 1990s and 1970s.

After 2000, the grow is less heterogonous owing to the way in which RMA shifted from a planning tool to a real debate that involved significant program cuts and cancelations. Battle lines were drawn thus increasing the extent to which the RMA crowd was predominantly located inside OSD and, not explored here, the Navy. The homogenous group, led by now seasoned RMA acolytes who were presidential appointees and long-time ONA veterans, pushed for the widest ranging changes to date including challenging the PPBS process and individual service POMs. Yet the

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\(^{49}\) Wolfowtiz interview

\(^{50}\) Hasslinger interview
increased volume and severity of the policy options led to other organizations consolidating along service lines with the CJCS and Congress providing further top cover.

Organization, the degree to which a group is homogenous or heterogonous in terms of its membership was not related to the number of policy options generated. In fact, to the contrary in two of the episodes that saw significant policy options generated, the groups were diverse and included a wide range of members. Of interest is two members who were not present to the extent that existing literature would theorize: industry and Congress. In fact, one official associated with the RMA debate in the 2000 referred to the episode as a “Congress-free zone” and lamented the fact that industry did little to help the process along.51

In terms of capacity, all episodes demonstrated a grow of like minded actors who had access to the policy process. In the 1970s, defense officials had direct access but it was confined to DARPA type experiments and not associated in any meaningful way with service POMs or the larger PPBS process. Here the initial assumption is challenged. Low capacity programmatic actors can generate not only a large array of policy options, but policy outcomes if they target small, disruptive reforms that can later be drawn on by services or the OSD. In the 1990s, the RMA program reached its zenith producing a number of new requirements and procurement concepts. Of note, is the way actors leveraged existing bureaucratic mechanisms, specifically the joint mandated JROC and joint doctrine to push for greater systems integration. After 2000, capacity was highest and the resulting degree of policy formulation increased. That said, it resulted in failure given the stark opposition it generated.

Last, in terms of resonance, the degree to which the program was referenced and actors’ career trajectories were impacted, there was corresponding evidence in each episode. In the 1970s, the emergence of near-zero miss generated increased interest in precision that was linked to DARPA programs and working groups. Individuals associated with the programmatic frames early on like the students of Wohlstetter, ONA, and William Perry continued to resurface in each subsequent decade. In the 1990s, the peak of the RMA, the frame took at interesting turn. After

51 McKitterick report
1996, individual services began to claim they were modernizing under the label RMA, as a means of justifying existing procurement timelines and plans. One participant lamented being turned away from every flag officer of the services with the claim, “yeah we are doing the RMA thing.” This dynamic indicates an interesting tipping point. Once a programmatic frame becomes omnipresent, it is used as a metaphor or justification for diverging strategies, and all encompassing but empty mantras of change. In the case of the Army, an early champion of the RMA, it even began to define a separate reform trajectory, transformation that focused on building an interim, deployable force under General Shinseki. That same term, transformation, was adopted by Rumsfeld as they sought to realign not just procurement but organizational practices to bring about the original programmatic frame, an RMA that dictated trading force structure for technological improvements, disruptive planning processes for established bureaucratic practices like the PPBS and POM systems. This observation relates to the articulation mechanisms: it is not only boundary activation that occurs, but definitional slippage and yoking as actors re-appropriate terms and concepts to justify their standing bureaucratic practices.

In terms of the two proposed mechanisms, a wide range of socialization forums and conflicting articulation practices define the programmatic actors. From documents that discuss ‘infecting officers with the RMA virus’ to the wide range of bureaucratic forum that were sought out, mobilization is a key practice in advancing programmatic content. Of interest was the importance of commissions, workshops, panels, and war-games. The ONA proved masterful in punching above its weight. An extremely small office, its careful selection of war-game topics, attendees, and contractors to facilitate the process provide critical sites of socialization in which OSD could connect with individual services like the Army during the dominant maneuver experiments without significantly altering budgets or challenging turf. As seen in the paragraph above, articulation indeed reinforces programmatic resonance but only to a point; eventually either the boundaries drawn are deep enough to cause existing bureaucratic cleavages to be drawn or the term is fashionable enough that everyone uses it thus stripping it of its meaning.

May interview.
Considered with respect to counterfactual analysis, a means of drawing out the logic of the pathway case, the RMA required programmatic actors. Put another way, *no Wohlstetter network, no ONA, no Perry-Owens, no revolution.* Individual agents, organized around the idea of precisions, offsetting, and organizational change and generated policy options that cannot be reduced to bureaucratic interest alone. In fact, what stands out is the fact that the major periods of success, the 1970s and 1990s were periods of declining budgets. On the surface this could signal that the RMA was nothing but a tool for DOD or the individual services to justify turf and resource allocation. Yet, such a claim misses a central aspect of the RMA: it was continually used as a justification for altering budget structure and reducing the size of the defense department, especially in Secretary Perry’s vision.

**Conclusion**

This initial draft sought to examine the extent to which a programmatic actor model, a policy analysis heuristic developed to account for policy change in stable institutional settings, could be applied to the U.S. defense sector. RMA, as a pathway, crucial case was selected for confirmation. The initial evidence points a promising research agenda that requires further study of both the U.S. case and the defense sector in general. First, the results need to be subject to further clarification, with additional interviews and declassified documents used to further scrutinize how and if policy options formulated can be linked to a hypothetical programmatic actor network. This would require individual papers on each period. Second, other defense bureaucracies need to be analyzed to see how and if the model can explain policy formulation in other military institutions.
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