



Military Transformation Past and Present: Historic Lessons for the 21st Century

by Mark D. Mandeles

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Reviewed by

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Military transformation, whether in the form of new doctrine, new technology, or a revolution in military affairs, has been a popular topic over the past decade. However, little has been written on the best way to structure an organization, the Department of Defense (DOD) in particular, to most effectively bring about transformation. Mark Mandeles examines historical examples of military transformation to determine the best way to organize the American military for the future. *Military Transformation Past and Present* comes out of a study that the author conducted for the Office of Net Assessment within the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Mandelés posits that “military transformation will result more effectively from enhancing the interaction among DOD components to experiment, to discuss, and to set priorities” (p. 13). The proper development of what he terms a “multi-organizational system,” which encourages cooperation and competition between organizations and individuals with overlapping responsibilities, is the best

way to organize for transformation. This system is the antithesis of modern attempts to organize DOD, which have focused on streamlining, linearity, and reducing duplication of effort.

Bookended between an introduction and conclusion are four chapters that serve as case studies of military transformation, primarily from American history. The first of these substantive chapters discusses the history of American military development from the Civil War to the start of the 20th century. Mandeles relates that a number of factors, including funding cutbacks and the ongoing Indian wars in the West, resulted in the American military being unable to properly develop the structures it needed to analyze and adapt to modern warfare.

The next chapter covers aviation doctrine prior to World War II. Mandeles discusses the development of aviation strategy and doctrine in both the U.S. Navy and the Army Air Corps. While the two Services faced the same budgetary constraints, the author says that the Navy was better prepared for the coming conflict because it was able to use a multi-organizational system to develop sound doctrine. The following chapter compares the development of amphibious warfare doctrine within the U.S. Marine Corps with the lack of development within the Royal Marines prior to World War II. The final case study illuminates the development of the U.S. Navy’s Cooperative Engagement Capability in the last decades of the 20th century.

Mandelés does a good job of keeping his focus on organizations. He mentions individual leadership, including Major General John Lejeune’s importance in the development of amphibious doctrine. However, he contends that “smart people

aren’t enough” (p. 14). His discussion of the interaction between organizations is enlightening, and he uses appropriate historical examples to illustrate his point.

But it is Mandeles’ use of history that left this reviewer disappointed. The case studies lacked depth and at times needed context. In his discussion of military development between the Civil War and the 20th century, he does not mention the fact that the concept of a professional military first entered the American experience during this period. Mandeles claims that it was a “lack of substantial intellectual effort devoted to organizing to learn that created significant design problem for senior army and naval officers” (p. 25), despite the founding of numerous schools, including those at Fort Leavenworth, that would become the Nation’s first staff college and the establishment in 1878 of the Military Service Institution, which published the *Journal* and became America’s first military professional organization. In comparing naval aviation with the Army Air Corps, Mandeles chides the Air Corps for its lack of cooperation with other Army organizations in the interwar years. However, this critique is lacking context. Most of the senior leaders within the Air Corps were attempting to break away from the Army and form a completely separate Air Force, which made the development of multi-organizational systems difficult.

Mandelés’ interesting illumination of the Navy’s Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) documents the interplay between organizations that is an important part of the development of the technology. While the development of CEC illustrates the author’s thesis, it also appears to be a case of comparing apples and oranges. All the

other case studies involve the development of strategy and doctrine, but this chapter is a story of technological improvement. At just over 100 pages of text, the book is relatively short and would have been strengthened by the addition of greater historical discussion within the case studies and more clarification of the link between CEC and the other case studies.

Despite the relatively minor problems with historical depth and context, the author has an important thesis. Mandeles singles out the interaction between military organizations as the key element in successful transformation. A multi-organizational system encourages both cooperation and competition. The competition results in an empirical mindset where the organizations must develop quantifiable evidence to support their positions. The accumulation and analysis of that evidence reduces errors and results in the best product. The modern streamlining of the Department of Defense has been an attempt to eliminate competition and overlapping responsibilities. Mandeles tells us that DOD has lost the most important method for finding and eliminating errors: multi-organizational systems.

Mandelés suggests two audiences for his book: senior military and civilian leaders within the national security establishment and the military analysts who serve them and the public. Both groups would be well served to consider this book and its implications for the future organization of the Department of Defense.

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