that the Confederacy failed in its bid for independence, many historians have worked backward from Appomattox to explain that failure. They argue that the Confederacy lacked sufficient will to win the war, never developed a strong collective national identity, and pursued a flawed military strategy that wasted precious manpower. Often lost is the fact that a majority of white southerners steadfastly supported their nascent republic, and that Confederate arms more than once almost persuaded the North that the price of subduing the rebellious states would be too high.[67]

He explains further:

Preoccupation with fissures within the wartime South arises from an understandable tendency to work backward from the war's outcome in search of explanations for Confederate failure. Historians begin with the fact that the North triumphed.[68]

What makes the fashionable theory of a lack of national will in the Confederacy so compelling is, of course, the fact of defeat in April 1865 (strictly, only the surrender on 9 April by Robert E.Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, which was taken generally to mean the defeat of the Confederate States). When the course of strategic history is explained in terms of its outcomes, the role of contingency is apt to be an early victim of neglect. Those historians who succumb to the 'road to…' syndrome need to remember that human affairs are notably, though certainly not wholly, nonlinear.

THE MAKING OF A GREAT DEBATE

My attitude towards RMA is that, as befits an intellectual construct, it is more or less useful rather than true or false. In point of fact, the RMA postulate can be useful even when it is not empirically persuasive. For example: the RMA postulate of a moment or a period witnessing a radical change of state—say the alleged early modern European and Napoleonic RMAs—promotes careful study of the process of change in the periods preceding, even long preceding, those purportedly revolutionary eras. The result is that proponents of the RMA idea unintentionally spur research into innovations in periods of supposedly (by RMA definition) non-revolutionary change.[69] As a consequence, we learn more about

the warp and woof of the course of strategic history writ large, and arguably revolutionary and other episodes. Serendipity triumphs yet again.

Although unenamoured of the RMA concept per se, I am impressed by the use to which it can be put, both deliberately and—more often and more significantly— otherwise, to shine light in dark places. Although several scholars have ventured insightful comments about, and have ventured some modest accounting for, the RMA debate of the 1990s, no one yet has sought to overfly the whole terrain of the subject in time and space.[70] Whatever the quality of debate about RMA topics, the raising of the RMA flag mobilised a wide variety of perspectives and skills, enabled some long antecedent ideas and streams of analysis to play significantly in a contemporary debate, and generally triggered a nonlinear intellectual and even (probably) policy event. Whether or not the RMA idea is empirically sound, as well as being useful, it is perhaps ironic that there is no room for argument over the discontinuity in strategic discourse effected by the advent of RMA debate in the United States in the early to mid-1990s. While the reality of substantial and varied items of intellectual (and some material and policy) provenance is readily conceded, between 1991 and 1995 RMA moved from the wilderness of little recognition to the dizzy status of ‘acronym of choice’ in the US defence community and far beyond.[71] The apparent novelty, as well as the imperial reach of the concept, much assisted its ready acceptance. The US defence community, indeed the strategic studies community more generally, is not known for its historical literacy.[72] The notion of irregularly periodic discontinuities in modes of warfare, which is to say the idea behind RMA, may be ancient history, but it did not seem so to theorists, officials, and commentators in the United States in the 1990s.

The modern history of American strategic debate bears some resemblance to the fashion industry. Scholars and institutions succeed by being fairly bold market leaders. The industry of defence analysis prospers through its ability to attract funding for the study and exposition of new or, more usually, refurbished ideas.[73] Just as the world’s fashion houses strive competitively in their seasonal collections or novelty that will sell, so the defence intellectual community in its many institutional forms competes for market share in respect, official access, and cold hard cash. As fashion houses need new designs, so defence analysts and strategic theorists need new, or at least new-sounding, ideas.

A debate can become an apparently great debate as much for structural sociological as for substantive reasons. No matter how merit-worthy the RMA idea, a country like Britain has too few active strategic theorists, too few publication outlets, and offers too little genuine dialogue between those inside and those outside government to catalyse or sustain a great debate. In the United States, in sharp contrast, even a poor idea can threaten to become a serious contender for fashionable status, largely because of the size of the community of debaters. An idea begins to look serious when dozens of publications and

conferences honour it with careful attention. These slightly sceptical comments are not intended as pejorative judgement on RMA theory. They are intended, however, to help explain how it is that a big-sounding notion, a 'high concept', can achieve take-off so rapidly. The US defence community provides the critical mass of accessible public interest, money, and therefore numbers of players, from which great strategic debate can emerge like a comet appearing suddenly above the horizon.[74]

The relationship between threat perception and RMA dynamics is too complex for treatment at this early juncture. We shall return to it later, both in specific historical contexts with respect to the case studies, and in the concluding chapter. Suffice it to say for now that the real-world catalyst of the RMA debate, the Gulf War of 1991, was waged by the West with a military instrument forged in and for the conduct of the Cold War (and, ultimately, for a third world war). The subsequent decade of American RMA debate was a context unguided by plausibly dominant threats or, consequently, by any higher direction of defence worthy of the honourable label, 'strategy'.[75] If the nuclear revolution was made during the Second World War (as the Napoleonic and First World War revolutions also were made in conditions of extreme duress), most essentially in response to the scientists' fears about possible German weaponisation of atomic science, in contrast the 'threat set' for the information-led RMA is opaque, contestable, and in no small measure indeterminate.[76]

Actual strategic history, that is to say real strategic behaviour, serves as oxygen to strategic intellectual combat. If strategic behaviour is quiet, so strategic debate becomes ever more enervated as it exhausts its existing event-fuel. The wars of Yugoslavian succession, and especially NATO's war conducted against Serbia in 1999, had only minor significance in reanimating RMA debate. Notwithstanding the ultimate success achieved by NATO with its campaign of aerial coercion, the deeply contested course and conduct of that campaign served usefully to remind people that strategy is a difficult art to practise.[77]

Despite the additional oxygen to the RMA debate supplied by the extra-ordinary nastiness in the Balkans in 1999, the great RMA debate—as distingished from the real-world activity to which the debate refers—was fired into life by the Gulf War of 1991, picked up velocity in 1991–94, peaked in 1995–97, and aged with predictable rapidity in 1998–99. There is a natural life-cycle to all great strategic debates, the course of that over RMA included.[78] The dust had barely settled over Kosovo when the US defence community embraced the conceptual successor to RMA, 'asymmetric threats'. The real-world evidence of global terrorism made manifest in New York City on 11 September 2001 only served to accelerate the popularity of the idea of 'asymmetry' in strategic affairs.

The idea of RMA as a grand theory of strategic history may be novel, but the concept of qualitative change in the terms and conditions of warfare has to be as old as perception of its apparent existential reality. Sharp changes in military practice away from traditional methods cannot help but elicit complaint, scepticism, variably enthusiastic endorsement—in short, debate. People did not need a formal theory of RMA in order to know that a favourable discontinuity in relative military advantage might be achieved through managed change. Some historians today believe that they can identify many past RMAs, all or any of which, if judged worthy of the revolutionary label, would have been effected without benefit of the clergy of grand theory. In addition to a common lore of strategic experience which bequeaths appreciation of the possibility, though not necessarily the desirability, of radical change, defence analysts in the 1980s and 1990s could find some explicit conceptual guidance in a century's worth of strategic theory.

For a leading example, would-be RMA theorists in the last two decades of the twentieth century could find inspiration in the title of Jean Colin's 1912 work, *The Transformations of War*.[79] If Commandant Colin's analytical tour de force is unduly antiquarian for modern taste, how about the leading initial theorists for the nuclear era? In 1946, three small books of exceptional merit collectively laid down a marker difficult to miss. In *The Revolution in Warfare*, Basil Liddell Hart advised—in words drafted prior to his knowledge of the atomic bomb—that 'While the far-reaching effects of a superiority in mechanical forces have not yet been fully grasped, this qualitative evolution in warfare is already being overtaken by developments of an automatic nature [referring particularly to the use of such more or less guided missiles as Germany's V-1s and V-2s] that foreshadow a revolution in warfare.'[80] Also in 1946, William Liscum Borden began his treatise, *There Will Be No Time: The Revolution in Strategy*, with the grim observation that 'Atomic energy is so revolutionary that its full impact upon strategy may not become evident until after another war, if there is such a war.'[81] Still in 1946, truly a vintage year for strategic fore-sight, Frederick S.Dunn wrote in *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, that 'to speak of it [the atomic bomb] as just another weapon was highly misleading. It was a revolutionary development which altered the basic character of war itself.'[82]

This discussion simply illustrates the point that the idea of revolutionary change in war, certainly in warfare, has long been commonplace. If anything, the revolutionary ascription has descended into cliché, as with overuse of reference to the 'nuclear revolution'. Bold and skilful theorists did not need to invent the idea of RMA; in its bare essentials, at least, it has been lying around forever.

METHOD AND TRAJECTORY

This text is organised to consider and answer a series of discrete, but closely connected, questions. Chapters 2 and 3 provide detailed discussion of the RMA concept, rival RMA theories, and the evolving state of play in RMA debate.

Chapter 2 presents critically the leading theories of RMA (and associated concepts), gathering them for systemic review under the rubric of contested and contestable ‘patterns in history’. The discussion provides ample warning against the siren calls from rival intellectually and intuitively appealing ‘wave theories’ of historical transformation.

Chapter 3 develops the basic architecture for the study of RMA. A nine-phase RMA life-cycle is proposed, which should have a universal writ. The analysis identifies an end-to- end historical process of RMA, which is likely to lack clear breakpoints, or nonlinear events. Given the central significance of the concept of revolution to RMA, this chapter continues to expose the difficulties posed by historical data that generally are inherently ambiguous vis-à-vis their possible meaning as evidence for theory. Although history