



**A Transformation Gap?
American Innovations and
European Military Change**

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Despite being the subject of copious volumes, a succinct description of *military transformation* is hard to come by. To some, transformation is about technology; to others, it is about doctrine; and still others see transformation as a shift toward expeditionary warfare. The genius of *A Transformation Gap?* is that it provides a rubric for analyzing transformation in Europe that accounts for all three perspectives. Six essays examine the transformation records of Great Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Poland relative to the United States. An excellent introductory essay also offers a theoretical construct for examining why and how each country has (or has not) embraced transformation (and to what degree), offering explanations from literature on military innovation, norm diffusion theories, and alliance theory. A short intellectual history of U.S. military transformation provides a common backdrop for subsequent essays, tracing its roots from early innovations such as AirLand Battle, through the “Revolution in Military Affairs” of the 1990s, and into Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*.

Throughout this period, the United States has urged its European allies to adopt the major tenets of American transformation. These efforts have met with uneven success for a variety of reasons, and the authors show how both external and internal factors have affected the pace and form of European transformation. In the case of the British, a major external factor driving transformation has been a desire for technological and doctrinal interoperability with American forces. But two internal constraints have hampered the British military’s ability to transform alongside the Americans: Fiscal considerations have limited the nation’s investment in transformational technologies, and the British are culturally skeptical of the promises of new technologies, particularly when they claim to obviate the need for human intuition and innovation.

The other nations show a similar interplay between external and internal factors. For example, a major external factor driving French military transformation was reintegration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command structure. This drove a desire for interoperability with the Allies. The Spanish experienced a comparable external stimulus following their 1996 accession to NATO, as have the Poles more recently. While the Netherlands did not experience a sudden imperative for change as did France, Spain, and Poland, NATO has nonetheless spurred innovation within the Dutch armed forces. The Dutch always participate in military operations with others due to their small size, and this has driven a corresponding desire for technical and tactical interoperability with their NATO Allies.

Throughout continental Europe, however, internal factors including fiscal, cultural, and organizational constraints have precluded full emulation of the U.S. model. Defense budgets across the continent have always been constrained, and in the aftermath of the Cold War and absence of any

clear existential threat, the pressure to reduce military spending has only increased. Culturally, each nation has a unique history that affects the path of transformation. For example, the proud military traditions of France have helped motivate transformation as a means for securing a leadership role within NATO. Conversely, in Germany, a historic aversion to extraterritorial deployments has precluded the creation of a fully expeditionary force. Organizationally, the bureaucratic structures in France, Spain, and Germany all hindered transformation to some degree. In the Netherlands, a history of service operational independence and a fierce competition for limited resources had a deleterious effect as well. Finally, the Polish military establishment has had to grapple not only with the transition to NATO but also with internal reforms of its post-communist system.

Interestingly, despite the unique external and internal factors affecting each nation’s transformation experience, the European military establishments examined in this book share a common disdain for two American transformation tenets. First, the Europeans on the whole reject the American notion of network-centric warfare, favoring instead network-enabled warfare. The difference is far from semantic. In the former (American) version, the network is central to military operations, and its presence has transformed the nature of warfare. In the latter (European) understanding, the network is merely a tool that will help nations to more efficiently and effectively conduct war. Second, the Europeans generally indict the American concept of *effects-based operations* (EBO) for being overly scientific, failing to account for the human elements of war, and underappreciating the impact of fog and friction. The Europeans on the whole are much more comfortable with the *effects-based approach to operations*, which is still concerned with gaining a

strategic effect but has more in common with the whole-of-government or comprehensive approach (where nations leverage all aspects of their power to attain their objectives) than with the U.S. military’s early understanding of EBO.

These discontinuities between American and European transformation illuminate the one shortfall of this work. The authors do a superb job scoring European military transformation vis-à-vis American, and they ably identify the external and internal factors that have governed each nation’s level of success in emulating the United States. Unfortunately, they never take the next critical step and ask if the European nations *should* be trying to emulate U.S. transformation. The authors collectively identify a European concept that allows for changes in the *conduct* of war through new technology and doctrine but reject the idea that the *nature* of war can change. Conversely, the U.S. conception of transformation embraced the idea of technological-driven changes in the nature of war. Indeed, transformation advocates even claimed that technology would allow one to “lift the fog of war.”

The authors’ failure to address this underlying question leaves the reader wondering whether the transformation gap they so eloquently describe is between the vanguard Americans and lagging Europeans, or whether it is the other way around. A discussion of the external and internal factors that drove the United States to its own unique understanding of transformation and warfare would have gone a long way toward addressing this shortfall. Nonetheless, this is an important, timely, and well-researched work, and a must-read for all who are interested in either transformation or the dynamics and future of the Atlantic Alliance. **JFQ**

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