
Interview: Brig. Gen. James B. Smith

The New Face of War In the 21st Century

Brigadier General James B. Smith is the officer in charge of the Millennium Challenge 2002 joint forces experiment. He was interviewed on Aug. 1, in his office at the Joint Warfare Center in Suffolk, Virginia, by Carl Osgood.

EIR: What is your role as the officer in charge?

Smith: We've been putting this together for two years, and it runs the gamut of working technical integration, our experimental architecture, if you will, for command and control, being close to the integration of the models, working with the services so that we can bring together service experimentation as a part of the joint experiment, and working through the everyday challenges of how to take a monster of this size, and shape it so it works. So, it's been kind of a hands-on experience for the last two years.

EIR: So you've been working on the planning of this almost from the beginning. Can you give me a notion as to how you arrived at these concepts, a little bit of the history behind this?

Smith: With a clean sheet of paper, you have to ask yourself what's fundamentally changed in the last decade that would suggest a transformation is due. What would you say is the answer to that?

EIR: The world has changed tremendously in the last ten years.

Smith: Yes, that's the first one. The world has changed. The second is, technically, the information revolution. So, with a clean sheet of paper, you ask yourself, how would I leverage the information revolution, to improve the way I make decisions and plan and execute military campaigns? So, if you start with that as a baseline, you say, "Well, the first thing I'd like to do is know more about the adversary than we've ever known before." And, in a perfect world, know more about an adversary than he knows about himself. Now, that may be a stretch, but if you look back in the last year, in the global war on terrorism, our adversaries know more about us than we know about them. And you might even be able to make the argument that, on 9/11, they knew more about us than we knew about ourselves. So, I don't know if that's a stretch. That's the first thing I'd like to do, know more about an adversary than we've ever known before, which leads you to this idea of information superiority

or the ability to migrate towards knowledge, from just information.

So, if I'm going to do that one, then I run an experiment to figure out how I would do that, so that takes us kind into the first concept, which is operational net assessment. If I can understand the adversary—and it's a cliché—as a system of systems. . . . I can understand his military structure, the joint intel preparation of the battlefield, we do that pretty well; but now, if I can lay over the top of that, his infrastructure, his political system, economic, social, cultural, economic, information infrastructure, if I can lay those systems on top of each other and understand the dynamic of all of that, and see where those nodes cross and influence each other, then I've come pretty close to knowing as much about as an adversary as you can know. So, that would be the first thing I would experiment on, and that is the first piece of the experiment.

So, if you can do that (and I say "if," because when you're doing an experiment, you're trying to stress the "what could be" instead of "what is"), if I could see an adversary as a system of systems, and where those nodes cross, how would I use U.S. national power against him? Instead of just dropping bombs or, what we call "kinetic solutions," how would I bring together our diplomatic, our information, our military, economic, and all the other pieces of U.S. national power, or coalition power against him? How would I know in what sequence to do different things? How would I be able to influence him, to shape an environment, to dissuade him, instead of just reacting to him?

That takes us to our next concept, which is effects-based operations. So, if I can understand him, and I can leverage all of our power against him, that takes us to the first two, and you stand back from that, and say, "If I can do those two things, what kind of organizational changes do I need to make to be able to effect those?"

Well, the first one is, I can't do this on the fly. I'm going to need some sort of entity that's building this database and operating in peacetime, and influence not just after a crisis starts, and that's where we get this idea of a standing headquarters. Early on, we realized that the way we stand up joint task forces, today, doesn't really work, because a crisis hits, and that's when we start bringing national power together, in an ad hoc fashion. That's when we start planning military plans, and it takes a long time for that organization to form, to figure what it's going to do and then to go execute, and the world is operating much too fast, in the information age, to be able to do that. So, the standing headquarters is that entity which is doing that all the time; and then, as a crisis starts to evolve, to get larger than that entity, which is at the combatant commander's headquarters, larger and more complex, that's for the joint task force, which follows on top of it, and enables it. So, that's the third piece. An observation that we can't do these two things and make it really work, unless somebody's doing it.

And that takes us to the fourth piece, which is: You can't fundamentally change the way we do military operations, unless you take another look at the way our nation makes decisions, which is bringing the interagency together. There is no such thing as a strictly military operation. There never really has been, and there certainly is not, today. So, to be able to bring to bear national power, you've got to reorient the way the interagency works with the military to influence a crisis, to operate in that crisis, and in the transition to end-state development. So, that's where we get the joint inter-agency coordination group.

So really, those four pieces evolve from a clean sheet of paper, from saying, "Okay, what would you do now, given that the world is changing? . . . Two years ago it hadn't changed as radically as it did last September, in some ways the thought process of how do you leverage the information revolution, bore out. . . . 9/11 did nothing to deter the thought process, except to accelerate the idea that this kind of transformation is important. Just a long-winded way of where we got to that.

There's a lot more detail and professional concept development work that went into it, from the J9 [Joint Experimentation Center] and the concept developers, but we started with a clean sheet of paper and said, "How would I leverage the information revolution to improve the way I do military planning and operations?" Those are the four pillars we get to.

And then, what falls out from that, the whole plethora of problems we had integrating the military, how we plan by deconflicting the services, we need to evolve to integration. We need some standardization in our command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance, how we've got to bring together the intelligence community—again, a lesson of 9/11, we've already been working with that one. How you bring together information that's not technically intelligence, but is certainly important to understanding an adversary. That's how we started.

EIR: You're saying that everything that you're doing with this is new?

Smith: I said, it came from a clean sheet of paper, but I don't mean we need to throw out the baby with the bathwater. We targetted 2007 for the scenario for a reason, because that's inside the FYDP [Five-Year Defense Plan], inside the budgeting cycle. The focus of this was not buying new equipment, like tanks or airplanes. The idea was, let's take everything we've got and everything that's planned to be funded within the next five years, and see how we can use that better. The next step might be to look at force structure, but you know, twice in the last decade we've gone through a painful QDR [Quadrennial Defense Review] cycle, which is focussed on force structure. We didn't want this experiment to be another QDR debate, and it hasn't become that. It's an issue of, "Okay,

with all the equipment, our organization and manpower, today, how can you improve the way you can use that?" and then, start collecting information about where the holes are, and what we need to do with the next step.

EIR: If we just look at the military piece of this, how does it change the way you would actually conduct an operation, as opposed to the way you might have done the same kind of operation ten years ago?

Smith: Well, I happened to be in that one, ten years ago. In the notional thing, where you have a freedom of access problem, how would you traditionally have done that? We would have done it—and we did do Desert Storm in the same planning process that we did Overlord [in June 1944]—which is, we do . . . rehearsals, we do buildup, ISPs, en route support bases, force buildup, and then we set up lodgements, Omaha Beach, Utah, Sword, Gold—and from that you go out in a phased campaign plan: This is D+7, D+14. You're using air power to hit some key strategic targets, but essentially, you draw a line and move in that direction. It's mostly kinetic. It's mostly bombs, and you measure your advance in terms of days and the phasing.

What's happening in Afghanistan? Have you been in a Pentagon press corps briefing, or seen anything in the paper where you've seen lines: "The enemy is here, and our line is there?"

EIR: No, I haven't seen anything like that on Afghanistan.

Smith: That would be a good question to ask. Why have I not seen that in this operation? I have seen every operation and captivity, but I haven't seen any lines. What we're saying is that, using Afghanistan as an example, "I don't need lines." What I need to do is attack quickly, and decisively, bring enough force to bear at certain key points, with military, with information, economic information—so, if you think of all this as fires, it could be kinetic/non-kinetic, it could be lethal/non-lethal, and you attack the coherence of an adversary in a fight, not just go line by line, like we did in Normandy.

That is actually what you've been seeing in Afghanistan. Clearly, the limitation of using Afghanistan as an example for the future, is enemy strength. We had freedom of access. Airplanes could fly almost at will, and we didn't have the kind of problem we would face with an adversary who had operational-level advantage or parity. You have to think about how you're going to attack. . . .

So, this experiment takes an Afghanistan model, and gives this guy [the opposing force] a lot of combat power; and what you've been looking at, there, in Afghanistan, is very explicit. You say, "Okay, can I do that against somebody who really can fight back?" That's the concept that we're looking at. It's actually pretty exciting.

Now, I see no lines. Except for Afghanistan, every time you go into an exercise, whether a real world operation or an

exercise, what's the first thing you see up on the wall?

EIR: A map.

Smith: Right, a map. Now, when we put lines on a map, why? Maneuver Control System is the Army's battalion and above command-and-control system. Tactical Control Operations is the Marines' command-and-control system. Do you think they talk to each other?

EIR: Probably not.

Smith: Probably not. So, when you're putting together a campaign plan, and you're deciding, "Army on this side of the line, and Marines on that side of the line," we're going to say, "We're coming into here," so you've got Army on one side, and Marines on the other side. Ah, the maneuver control systems won't talk to each other, so, the simplest thing to do is just draw a line: "You stay on that side, and you stay on that side." That's called "deconfliction." We fixed this. In the last year, we found a technical solution that has those two command-and-control systems talking to each other.

So, now, we expect this ground commander not to draw a line, but to integrate. Huge change. Why? Current doctrine for joint force land component commander, which is draft, says, "I'll stand up this organization called a JFLCC, joint force land component command, if I have to deconflict." So, our systems and our thinking are all oriented towards drawing a line. Then we draw this other line, here, and we say, "Air Force, you stay on that side, and, Army, you stay on that side," and they fight over that line, every day, because terrain is like . . . important.

But again, in Afghanistan the lines go away. In order to make that work . . . these guys got have to be interoperable, and the command as a whole has got to be interoperable. Does that make sense?

EIR: Yes.

Smith: Fundamental change in the way that we think about the employment of forces into deconfliction, which is what we do today, into integration. If you look at the thought process in Afghanistan—I was looking at it as an outsider, just like everybody else, but I characterize it as the four A's: air power, [Special Forces] A-Team, alliance, and agency. The integration of our intelligence, in terms of the CIA, both as an intelligence entity and an operational entity, using our SOF forces, bringing air power to bear, and the alliance structure within the Northern Alliance. A coherent strategy based on the integration of all those. Not based on one service, as the dominant service, but based on the integration of that capability. I think that's not an unrealistic construct to explain how that integrating concept might reflect the power of what Millennium Challenge might bring on a much larger scale.

EIR: Obviously, information seem to be a big part of this—it seems to be what brings everything together. What I asked

Joint Forces Command commander Gen. William B. Kernan about, when he came up to the Pentagon, was getting into the mind of the enemy, which seems to me not just a matter of information. How do you view that? How do you get to know the enemy?

Smith: First thing you've got to do, is walk a mile in his shoes. You've got to understand what motivates him. You've got to understand culture. . . . You really have to understand in a strategic construct what the conflict is all about. Clausewitz had an expression: "First the grandest, most decisive act of a soldier, a statesman, is to rightfully understand the war in which he is engaged." He argued that warfare takes on a character all its own. When you start shooting, you lose the memory of why it started. So, the first piece is to understand what the conflict is all about, and to keep it from taking a character all its own. If you look at the current challenges we face in the world, and you've got an adversary who has a fundamentally different view of culture than you do, you have to separate those things that are cultural differences: What's religious, and what is just an individual who may be an egomaniac using these things to his advantage? How do you separate all of that, and focus on what the problem is? I call that looking at strategic, then operational, then tactical, rather than putting together a plan to execute and look for victory militarily with no follow-on of what that means.

So, you have to know as much about him as you can, and some of that is going to come from your classic intelligence. Some of that is other information: scholars who understand religion and culture, political science. Now, how do you tap into that, and have a picture of understanding, knowledge? Sun Tzu said, know your enemy as yourself, and in a thousand battles you won't be defeated. That's really what we're trying to get at.

EIR: But the flip side of that is knowing yourself, because all of these things that you're looking at, these cultural, religious, and other factors, are factors in your own behavior as well. How do you prevent that from prejudicing your own actions?

Smith: Well, you've actually started to wade into some of the shortfalls that we've got in the way that we do training and modelling. In the military, all of the models that we use, in our computer-based simulations, are what we call attrition models. They're tank on tank, airplane on airplane, airplane on tank and ship; and you go out and run either a training event or simulation and you look at attrition, and from that you determine who won.

When you get into effects-based operations to find the effect you want to achieve, you've got to go to an order of thinking much higher than that, which is, "Yes, I may be destroying his tanks, but what am I doing to him?" So, if you look at some of the new work that's being done on effects modelling, you've got to get past what I call mirror imaging. In other words, doing something and assuming the effect on the adversary is going to be the same as I would interpret it.

It might not be that way, and there's some work that's being done by DARPA [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency], as well as JWAC, the Joint Warfare Analysis Center, to start looking at how an adversary interprets your action through the lens of his own culture.

You said the world's changing. Tell me how you think the world's changed in the last decade, and what it means for us?

EIR: Well, to begin with, the Cold War ended, which meant that you no longer had two superpowers in a stand-off, and one of the superpowers disappeared, which opened up whole regions of the world, particularly Central Asia, Eastern Europe, that we did not have any sort of access to previously, that we viewed as part of the enemy. That certainly has been a major factor in how things have changed. And I know that's one of the arguments for changing the structure of the military, because the heavy forces that were integral to the defense strategy of the Cold War are not usable in the same sense that they were before.

Smith: Well, I think that's true. Let me offer to you a much bigger challenge than just the Cold War thinking, although I think the Cold War era is hugely important. It's easy to see Cold War thinking in other people; it's hard to see it in yourself. And, I'm a history guy, so I look at things. I go back and read about dead people to find answers. But it seems to me, that for about 350 years, we've been living with a construct of what I call the Western form of warfare. And again, this is my personal opinion—it's got nothing to do with the experiment. It's the discussion of how the world has changed. The Treaty of Westphalia, 1648. There were about 192 signatories of that, and they were nation-states. The Treaty of Westphalia defined for us that warfare would be between nations. From the Treaty of Westphalia, you get the "just war" theory, we evolved the Geneva Convention and all of the pieces that we call the Western form of warfare. Now, unwritten in that, was the idea that what went on inside the borders of that nation-state was its business. Warfare was going to be between nation-states, the governments and leadership. So, for most of that time, you didn't see nation-states getting involved in the internal affairs of another nation-state. It was a war more often than not declared, until this century. And I think that's all changed.

If you look at what's happened in the last decade, the things that we've done in Rwanda and Bosnia and Kosovo and Afghanistan, it hasn't been conflict of nation-state against nation-state. There's been our involvement in human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing, which is a movement away from the classic Westphalian view of warfare, and our adversaries have preceded that movement, when you look at the Beirut [Marine barracks] bombing, the *USS Cole*, Khobar Towers, World Trade Center, you see an adversary that is attacking us, not nation-state to nation-state, but hostile participant, terrorists, against our weaknesses. So, while we would like to line up

our airplanes and tanks in one line and go against their airplanes and tanks in another line, they're not going to fight that way. So the whole construct of the Western form of warfare is not acceptable to an Eastern culture, and I think it has huge implications in the way we go about doing business, and certainly military is one of them.

I think that's a political transformation that's already taken place, and we are perhaps trying to react to it, as opposed to happily assuming we can transform and lead the future. We may be able to do so militarily, but I think in a global sense, there's a fundamental shift in the way that adversaries are going to relate to each other.

EIR: That's actually a perfect lead-in for something else I've been thinking about. Not long ago I read the memoirs of Douglas MacArthur. Looking at how he conducted the campaign from Australia, up the northern coast of New Guinea: Rather than attacking Japanese strong points, he went behind them, and cut them off, and isolated them and made them irrelevant. I'm wondering whether that kind of thinking, of outflanking the enemy in that way, still has application in this new environment?

Smith: I think so. MacArthur's an intriguing character. If you look at his grand strategy for the Pacific, it wasn't to beat the Japanese in fixed positions. It was a strategic construct of island hopping. And, like in New Guinea, he didn't care about taking all of New Guinea. He wanted a piece of that, so he could use it as a stepping-off point, back toward the Philippines and as a way point, actually to get to Tinian and Guam, to be able to have B-29 operations against Japan, and to set a base of operations from which he was going to invade mainland Japan; and for most of that time, as a kind of end-game, before we went to Okinawa, it was to operate from Taiwan and China, along that axis.

He had in mind a certain effect he wanted to create, and it wasn't to obliterate the Japanese force head-long, although tactically there were these kinds of engagements and battles, but his campaign was much different than, say, the German campaign to Moscow. It was not attrition warfare at the strategic level. It was very much maneuver warfare strategically. Interesting dynamic. I hadn't thought about that as a parallel. MacArthur always thought strategically, first, I don't think there's any question about that. And if you look at his time in Japan, magnificent, in terms of his strategic view of things. Now, at the tactical level he was frustrated, but he thought strategically first.

EIR: Do you think, then, that there is still application for that kind of thinking?

Smith: Absolutely. To use force on force against an enemy, the generals are overpromoted sergeants. But you've got to do that in more than just military. You've got to have political—all the interagency people that have a place in this, have got to be a part of the planning and execution.