

Things Students and Political Scientists Might Consider about our Military

In *Just and Unjust Wars* Michael Walzer (1977) argued that in a democracy the citizen is responsible for the kind of military the state possesses and how it is used. Osama bin Laden says the same. My proposition is that political scientists have a responsibility to prepare students to make sound judgments about what elected authorities decide about and do with our military.

We need to consider with our students the kind of relationship a society committed to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness should have to a subgroup holding antithetical values; values which support the taking and sacrifice of life, which cherish duty and hierarchy, and which pursue neither riches nor power but something called honor. We charge this “un-American” subgroup, the military, with our protection and expect it to take direction from us through our elected officials. It does, although in many countries militaries are the government, give orders to the government, or are largely independent of the government. I

argue that two questions must be continuously addressed: 1) Are civilian authorities giving the military wise direction, and 2) Are we citizens responsibly

weighing the quality of that direction?

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The Military is Merely a Means

Militaries are just one of three instruments (the others are economic and foreign policy) used to fulfill a security strategy defined by the executive. A strategy requires a clear goal and the selection of the available means most likely to achieve it. Even during the Cold War when U.S. strategy was relatively simple—containment of the Soviet Union and of the People’s Republic of China—military professionals were keenly aware that the United States did not have the capacity to meet every commitment made. We were over-committed. But what about today? And is today’s strategy even a strategy?

In his Second Inaugural Address, President George W. Bush stated that our policy is “to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture.” In his September 17, 2002 National Security Strategy document he added the goal of preventing the emergence of any “competi-

The October, 2006 issue of *PS* (923–4) published a quiz on the U.S. Military alongside a call for submissions on what we should be teaching students about our military. The essays here represent a fraction of the response. Other proposals have been incorporated in several panels that will be presented at the APSA Annual Meeting in Chicago this fall. Still others have been incorporated in a volume contracted to Palgrave Press and provisionally titled *Inside Defense*.

tor” and almost in passing announced the preemptive use of force as an appropriate means.¹ Additionally, he has declared that Iraq, Iran, and North Korea must be denied nuclear weapons.

Even if these goals have some clarity, no strategy exists if there is no connection to the available means likely to achieve them. At present, strategists seem to have neglected the fundamental task of selecting appropriate means. The military does play an important role in security, but even if it performs its assigned tasks well the strategic goal will not be reached if the military is the wrong means or used in the wrong way. In his essay in this symposium, Steven Biddle, a former instructor at the U.S. Army War College, goes further when he argues that strategy is more than choosing ends and means. It must also function on a variety of levels, each of which requires careful analysis.

Setting expansive goals is not strategic in a second way. When goals are overly broad, it is obvious that not all commitments will be met, that we will act selectively. This causes allies to doubt our reliability and others to judge us hypocrites. They ask: Why support democracy in Iraq but not in Saudi Arabia? Why suppress violence in Bosnia but not in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Why pursue terrorists with aircraft? What has been learned about fighting terrorism from similar efforts in Italy, Spain, and Northern Ireland?

What Can Our Military Do?

Our military can destroy anything, anywhere.

In his essay in this symposium on the nation’s arsenal, Colonel Isaiah Wilson III

describes the capacities of fighting forces—troops, equipment, and weapons—and compares the importance of their coordination with that of instruments in an orchestra. He also stresses that strategy dictates the weaponry and troops required. It is not, in fact, a matter of everything everywhere or of anything anywhere. It is a matter of fitting the means to the goal.

In acknowledging that much of today's weaponry was designed for the doctrine of LandAir (discussed by both Biddle and Wilson), Wilson suggests (which is all an Army officer can delicately do) that many high-tech, high-cost weapons cherished by the Navy and Air Force are no longer critical to our defense—that purchases might cease. Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld thought so too; he saw new procurement choices and procedures as an important part of his mission, but it was a goal he was not able to achieve. For example, Congress, whether because of pressure from the defense industry or because of uncritical support for anything military, this year put \$4.6 billion for the F-22 stealth fighter (the Raptor) in the budget against the wishes of the Department of Defense. The Air Force already possesses 74 of these fighter jets and has been promised more than 100 more. It wants 381. With development costs included, the cost is \$350 million per plane (*New York Times*, September 28, 2006). Would knowledgeable citizens support this? Similarly, do we need five times the aircraft carrier acreage of all other nations combined? Are we engaged in over-kill as well as over-commitment?

"Full-spectrum dominance" reflects our astonishing capacity, but is it necessary to our security? What is "necessary" should be defined by the threat, and vary with its nature. In fact, it may be that charm and economic entanglement which have the potential to reduce a threat are more important to security than is potent weaponry which tries to "meet" any and all threats. Spending on more and more capacity, on more and more intricate systems, on more and more armaments may be counter to good strategy.

Even before the current war in Iraq we were spending nearly as much on our military as all other nations combined. Since George W. Bush took office, the Defense Department's budget has doubled. Even when war costs and personnel increases are set aside, next year's budget will be increased by \$40 billion (*New York Times*, February 6, 2007). Some argue that the Soviet Union's collapse was occasioned by its over-spending on armaments. Could we follow its lead by competing against ourselves, by over-spending on an over-kill capacity which decreases rather than increases our security? To effectively query officials about the Pentagon's budget, citizens need to be able to analyze that budget—the full budget, and the "black" budget too.

Even if we can do "anything" we cannot do "everything." Even if we have a third of the world's GDP we have only 5% of the world's population. It might be well to model ourselves after cooperating Norway rather than Imperial Rome.

Who Is Our Military?

The citizen soldier has long been seen as the foundation of republican government. David Leal discusses the philosophy of the citizen soldier and provides an account of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in his contribution to this symposium. Other "non-regular" military organizations include 1) the National Guard, which is associated with the separate states and in the past has had a primarily domestic role, and 2) the Reserves, which has been considered just that—so much so that even at the height of the Vietnam conflict it stayed home. Today members of both organizations are serving multiple tours in Iraq.

These changes derive from the end of conscription in 1972. While recruitment was successful enough until recently, Larry

Korb and Sean Duggan lay out in their article in this symposium the recent difficulties the Army has had in recruiting for a war which lacks citizen support. It might be argued that this is not really a problem, but an appropriate check on officials' decisions about going to or continuing war. However, that check is being circumvented by an expansion of the amount and the kind of services the military is contracting for profit. Deborah Avant, in her essay for this symposium, describes the greatly increased role of private security services in U.S. military operations.² The state's monopoly on the use of force has been dissolved in some "failed" states. It is also being bartered away in a "successful" state. Should it be? Is giving up the monopoly on force a portent of our becoming a failed state and/or of an uncommitted citizenry?

Issues about the importance of the representativeness of our troops (racially, religiously, politically, geographically, and more), about whether they have become citizen mercenaries, about whether every officer should first serve as an enlisted troop, and whether policy makers and opinion leaders believe that a link between citizen and soldier is still important (i.e., would they encourage their children to join the Army?) merit informed debate.

What Does a Citizen Need to Know?

The curious citizen has two information problems. First, there is a lot of information about the military available, but accessing and making sense of it is challenging. We need to help students navigate data bases and web sites. The second problem is that the military has secrets. Secrets related to an imminent or ongoing operation may be legitimate, but republican/democratic governments are not based on "trust me"—quite the opposite. Students may be savvy enough to know that Congress has not declared war since World War II, but they may not appreciate the discretion granted and taken by the executive. Sometimes executive-directed action is public as in the invasion of Grenada, but citizens also need to know about actions which are secret or just unannounced. For example, our Special Forces have been greatly expanded and their mission extended beyond reconnaissance and rescue. What are they doing and where are they doing it? The "enemy" under attack or pressure knows, but do we? In January would you have known that U.S. troops were in Ethiopia?

Let us assume that we subscribe to the adage "Know Thy Military." Periodically we probably also remind ourselves that it is important to know our enemy—and not just his military capabilities, but his way of thinking, his values, his priorities. My Scotch Presbyterian grandmother would have added Robert Burns' admonition to: "see ourselves as others see us."

If the media were truly globalized, we could literally see ourselves as others do. We beam TV and radio into other countries but lack routine access to foreign media apart from the BBC. Below I perform a mental exercise to describe what others may note about us.

We have thousands of nuclear weapons ready for use at any time on land, in the air, and at sea.

We reject the authority of the International World Court.

We reject the International Treaty to Ban Landmines.

We kidnap people and lock them up without trial.

We selectively apply the Geneva Conventions.

We have hundreds of military installations in more than 100 countries.

We are acquiring more installations.

We regularly train hundreds of foreign officers in our military schools and colleges.

We regularly train foreign troops in their own countries.

We are developing new nuclear weapons.
We are building an anti-missile system.
We have a space policy requiring U.S. “freedom of action” but opposing negotiations for a treaty intended to keep space free of weapons.

All top U.S. intelligence posts are now in the hands of former military officers.

Although she is surrounded by nuclear China, Pakistan, India, and Israel, we deny Iran’s right to such weapons.

Much of the above is not necessary to our own security. Its justification is our role as a protector of others. The problem is that one nation’s protector is another nation’s threat. As we ratchet up our ability to protect, we inevitably raise others’ perception of us as a threat. Truly strategic thinking would go beyond thinking about meeting threats to thinking about how to reduce them.

Unfortunately, citizens may not want to know what they ought to know. Elsewhere (Stiehm 1996), I have described civilian’s “willful ignorance.” That ignorance includes the cost of war, the approved and unapproved, public and secret means of war, the certainty of atrocities, friendly fire and civilian deaths, the disconnect between war’s justification and its product, and war’s inevitable, negative unintended consequences (NUCs). The military is schooled in such matters and may not be surprised when, after a military campaign has been well launched, a now-attentive citizenry says “This is not what we expected and we don’t like it.” When this happens, the military is, essentially, betrayed, whether by citizens who didn’t know that they didn’t know, or by officials who were either ignorant themselves or who failed to educate the public. No, it is not necessary to have firsthand experience of war to understand it, but our public’s thinking about war is almost certainly warped by the fact that we have fought most of our wars in other people’s countries. There is real information to be had about the consequences and limits of the use of force. Citizens need it even if they do not ask for it.

Reason: The Weapon of Choice

Many strategic thinkers pride themselves on being rational analysts who weigh evidence, apply logic, and faithfully report their findings even if they are not the findings anticipated or desired. But there is a difference between being rational and reasonable. Plato’s *Republic* represents rational thinking; Aristotle’s muddled *Politics* represents thinking that is reasonable. Even Thomas Hobbes, after rationally deducing that life is “poore, nasty, brutish and short,” saw reason and reasonableness as the means to the best life possible. In reasoning about the use of our military we must incorporate thinking about risk, about economic and foreign policy, and, by no means least, about justice.

Life involves risk, though parents and elected officials would like to deny that this is the case. Rather than over-kill preparation, reason requires acknowledging that “things happen.” It also requires a calculated rather than a vengeful response to injury.

Notes

1. The National Security Strategy was updated on March 16, 2006. It reasserted the possibility of using force before attacks occur as self defense and proclaimed that “We fight our enemies abroad instead of waiting for them to arrive in our country.”

Our principal use of economic policy is punitive. Too often we do not evaluate the actual effect of sanctions and use them more because they are something we can do rather than because they will have a particular effect. We should probably reflect more on how economic policy can be used as an inducement and also on how we are affected by our own policies. Who do we owe and how much? How do our policies affect current workers and those of the next generation?

The State Department may still enjoy stature but does it have resources? Or has it been the victim of the Defense Department’s policy of having “no competitor”? With the ever-increasing emphasis on “military to military” relations, how can State retrieve its responsibility for winning hearts and minds, for negotiating, educating, offering assistance, promoting the rule of law, of learning? For playing the central role in the development of security strategy? Should State’s budget be pegged to, say, one-fifth of the total of the Pentagon’s?

Writing during a civil war, Hobbes made a powerful argument for the state’s monopoly on the use of force. Having done so, and while continuing to acknowledge that a most important tool for analysis was *cui bono?*, he pronounced a series of “natural laws” which sound a good deal like the Golden Rule, Miss Manners, and the Boy Scout Creed rolled into one. If we so cherish justice and the rule of law among ourselves why do we not prize them between nations? Isn’t justice important in any set of relations? Does not reason support the importance of moral behavior? Isn’t just war theory still relevant?

Shouldn’t we assure that our wars are begun only by constituted authority—that of the U.S. Congress? Shouldn’t we insist that they be waged with “right intention,” i.e., for the stated reason not, for instance, as a demonstration project? And shouldn’t we fight only when success is likely and the public believes the cause to be “just”? Once war has begun don’t we need to debate the “necessity” of, for example, the harsh treatment of prisoners? Don’t we need to discuss “proportionality,” the relationship between the end accomplished and the means? Don’t we need to thrash out what is meant by “discriminating” between combatants and civilians? Most of all, don’t we need to determine whether just war theory constrains, as the theory would suggest, or whether, in fact, its chief use is to justify whatever is done.

Conclusion

We need to help our students think carefully about that deviant subgroup which is willing to kill and to risk dying for us. They (and we) would do well to consider the value that group places on cohesion, on the group, on the suppression of individuality. If members of the military are willing to offer their life and liberty for honor, it behooves us to ensure that they are, in fact, honored by giving them only worthy missions, missions which can be accomplished and which can be accomplished in a just manner. Just as our military is pledged to refrain from politics and to follow the direction of civilian officials, so too must those officials take care that they do not use the military recklessly or inappropriately, and that they neither politicize it or use it for political gain. Overseeing officials is, as Walzer argued, the responsibility of we citizens.

2. The growth of contracting in every area of government is reminiscent of the Jackson Era’s spoils system.

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