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# THE IMPACT OF SOCIETAL CHANGE ON THE US ARMY

by

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*(What is the impact on the Army, especially in regard to its manpower policy, of current trends in American Society? What are the near term strategic implications of this impact? How can the Army best retain mission readiness in such a situation?)*



There is a tendency on the part of many professional soldiers to believe that the status of the Army has "bottomed out" and is on its way up again. The basis for this optimism is an assumption that loss of status has been caused by public association of the military profession with the politics of the Vietnam War, and an inevitable but short-lived tendency of the American people to become anti-military in postwar periods. When the war is finally over, and the armed services have had a chance to catch their breath and get back to fundamentals, the crisis will presumably pass.

This sort of optimism, unless combined with continuous realistic appraisal and vigorous action, could be the ruin of the United States Army. We must adjust our thinking radically if we are to fulfill our mission of national defense.

## THE SITUATION IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES

In the first place, the United States has not "won" in Vietnam in any way remotely resembling the victories of World Wars I and II, or even of Korea. As our forces withdraw, the war in Vietnam continues. Even if the eventual result is an independent and non-Communist South Vietnam, the perception of the American people will probably be that the war's outcome little merited its sacrifices. We are not, therefore, entering a typical postwar period.

Secondly, in the allocation of national resources, emphasis has shifted from foreign policy matters to domestic problems. The plight of the central cities, inter-racial violence, youthful dissent against governmental and business "establishments," environmental pollution, expanded welfare demands by disadvantaged groups, burgeoning educational and transportation requirements—all these forces in our society clamor for political attention and tax dollars. At the same time, there is growing popular belief that the Cold War is a phenomenon of the past, that the world has entered a period of relative international stability—regardless of the fact that the power of potential adversaries is on the rise. To be sure, tensions are high and blood is being shed at various points on the globe, but American vital interests do not appear to be immediately threatened and American troops are not directly involved. This broadly held perception of America's position in the world is, in a modern sense, a new phenomenon. Never since the 1930's have the American people, rightly or wrongly, held so domestically-oriented a system of priorities.<sup>1</sup>

Third, there is a social revolution going on in America. It has been described by a number of astute observers in various terms,<sup>2</sup>

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but always with the conviction that it is a new experience for American society. It is more fundamental than the mere manifestations of racial, political, ecological, and socio-economic protest—it is a challenge to the concept of authority itself. The impact upon the traditionally hierarchical and authoritarian armed services, the lifeblood of which is young manpower, promises to be enormous.

Finally, there is a disturbing trend in public attitudes which has little or nothing to do with anti-military feeling. There was a time, not so long ago, when the armed services were regarded by the older generation—the parents and teachers of the young—as a wholesome, if in some respects disagreeable, way of life for their sons and students. This is largely no longer the case. Public airing of our problems has painted a lurid picture of racial violence, drug abuse, and unethical behavior in the armed services, especially in the Army.<sup>3</sup> Whether the image is true or false is not the point. It is the perception which influences the counsel given to the young by their elders. If the perception is unfavorable, as may well be the case, the counsel is likely to be negative.

The impact of this shift in attitudes is compounded by steeply rising costs of both military equipment and manpower. The former is a result of inflation and the increasing technological complexity of warfare; the latter a consequence both of rising wage levels in modern society and of the need to attract men to a military life in the face of countervailing public attitudes. There is no indication, however, that military budgets will be increased significantly in the near future, especially in expenditures for general purpose forces. One may speculate that this is a reflection of popular distaste for the sorts of forces which, once employed, involve the United States in a manner which makes extrication difficult. But whatever the cause, we may reasonably expect an approximately "steady-state" Army budget for some years. The same amount of money, unfortunately, will probably buy less and less over that span of time.

This situation does not call for panic, but it

does demand a recognition that what the Army is experiencing today is not just another temporary postwar dip in public attitudes. We may indeed have hit bottom, but we are not yet on our way up. Lean years lie ahead.

### THE IMPACT ON THE ARMY

The most far-reaching result of this situation will be the end of the draft, an occurrence which bids fair to change the whole military "life style." The first and most obvious effect will be that the armed services will have to relax nonessential disciplinary practices and provide more amenities in order to attract young men from an increasingly liberalized society. This has already begun, in anticipation of an end to conscription. And there is already a predictable reaction to this loosening process, even with the crunch—the end of the draft—more than a year away. The armed services will have to determine, by high-level decision in order to take the pressure off commanders, the necessary balance between liberalization for the sake of recruiting and authoritarianism for the sake of combat effectiveness. There is no point in arguing which way the Army ought to go, for compromise is inevitable. Americans are no more likely to stand for an Army which cannot fight than for a highly disciplined organization with empty ranks.

A second major effect of an end to the draft may be a need for a disproportionate expansion of training facilities. At first blush, the reverse might appear to be the case. If the Army became attractive enough to fill its ranks with volunteers, it is reasoned, it would surely be able to achieve a rate of about 20 percent first-term and 85 percent career reenlistments, not significantly higher than present rates for volunteers. This would mean, in turn, a decreasing need for original enlistments.<sup>4</sup>

But even assuming that the Army can get the enlistment rates it needs, it is probable that educational levels will decline. Most economists foresee the 1970's as a period of major economic expansion; however attractive the Army may become, it is not



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likely to be the career of choice for very many well-educated young men, given other opportunities and the probable climate of public opinion. At the same time, political commitments to hold down unemployment and public desire for the Army to provide "relevant" service to society will probably require continued acceptance of a number of poorly educated (but educable) men. As a result, Army basic training may well have to be broadened to include remedial education for many of its trainees, and MOS schools will have to provide their students with mathematical and mechanical fundamentals which are today largely taken for granted. The manpower impact will thus be twofold—more training time and more trainers.<sup>5</sup>

A third impact of an end to the draft, which will affect both lifestyle and manpower, will be a higher standard of living for the soldier. Large amounts will have to be spent—are already beginning to be spent—on improving enlisted men's quarters, training, and recreation. It is unrealistic to believe that men will be attracted by higher pay alone, in a prosperous and somewhat anti-military society. More cash in the pocket is no remedy for the disincentives of living in open-bay wooden barracks and spending the day in boring lectures or in raking leaves. But replacement of existing billets with dormitory-style quarters will be an expensive proposition, meaningful training is costly, and expanded recreational facilities and civilianized installation maintenance will require large funding increases. Such expenditures, moreover, do not fall into the category of "nice-to-have," nor do they "coddle" the troops. Vigorous and realistic training is an indispensable prerequisite to good discipline and to mission readiness; a decent life on post is the only alternative to an increased degree of soldier misbehavior and dissipation (especially with higher pay) in the honky-tonks and "crash pads" of neighboring towns. It is hardly far-fetched to visualize an annual expenditure for operations and maintenance double the current figure of around \$2000 per man.

A fourth impact will probably be a

requirement for improved systems of personnel administration and military justice. Part of the cause could be a somewhat higher incidence of misfits and troublemakers among those whom the Army is able to attract. Whatever the character of young men recruited into the Army, however, the fact remains that today's youth increasingly demands individual treatment by the organization. This will probably require more military lawyers, judges, and professional administrators and counsellors; and these specialists, as is the case currently with doctors, may have to be offered higher monetary incentives in the absence of a draft.

As mentioned earlier, the cost of military materiel is also rising sharply. There is probably no turning the clock back on this trend; our potential enemies are advancing rapidly and our forces must try to stay not just abreast but ahead, especially if we must compensate for lower manpower levels.

The manpower we are able to attract will at some point match what we can afford. If one considers all of these factors together—higher pay, higher materiel costs, higher operating and maintenance costs in both dollars and manpower, but steady-state budgets and greater difficulty in recruiting—it can be assumed that the Army may become significantly smaller than it has been at any time in recent memory.

Two questions come to mind as one views such a prospect. First, would a smaller Army, having lost the economies of scale of a larger organization and having acquired the heavier non-tactical manpower requirements discussed earlier, have anything left with which to fight? Second, to what degree can such a reduced force rely on the mobilization of reserves to augment itself in time of crisis? These questions will be discussed in the next section.

## **STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES**

Before we can address whether the Army will be able to fight, we must examine the likely pattern of conflict in the foreseeable future. To begin with, it is generally acknowledged that large-scale, sustained,

conventional warfare is an extremely unlikely option for American forces. The most likely theater in which such a scenario can be visualized is Western Europe, and there are some who believe that conventional conflict there would almost surely escalate into tactical nuclear warfare, and thence possibly into a strategic nuclear exchange. This may in fact be considered the central assumption of the American deterrent in Europe. Even if NATO general purpose forces were not able to stop a determined Warsaw Pact onslaught, American forces are strong enough, in conjunction with allied forces, that their destruction would be a time-consuming and bloody process. The size of the American contingent is such that its loss, especially if delayed long enough to become highly visible in the American consciousness, would probably precipitate general war.

If the European scenario is an unlikely one, the deterrence which makes it so still requires sizable ground forces. Just how large these forces need be to constitute such "conventional deterrence" is undetermined. Assuming, however, that a major drawdown in the near future would be viewed as politically destabilizing, and assuming further that the force must be tactically and logistically self-sufficient until reinforced, it is hard to conceive of a force significantly smaller than that presently deployed.

This European force requirement can be considered to pose three concomitants. First, it must be fully manned and equipped, for its deterrent value lies in its potential to defend. Second, it must be reinforceable in the event of conflict, so that the deterrent is confirmed by Soviet knowledge that a quick victory could not be won. It is faintly conceivable that, without the capability to reinforce, American attitudes might accept the defeat of our Europe-deployed force if the only alternative appeared to be nuclear holocaust. But if reinforcements were available, it is unimaginable that our troops in Europe would not be augmented and the United States thereby inextricably committed. So we may further assume a requirement for a second balanced force, based in the continental United States but earmarked for Europe.

Third, neither a European force nor its earmarked reinforcement can be considered deployable to another part of the world. This brings us to consideration of the kind of ground conflict, other than in Europe, in which the Army might find itself involved. It is almost inconceivable that conventional forces will soon again be deployed in a counterinsurgency. Whether properly so or not, the Vietnam experience has so conditioned American attitudes that only an overt attack, across a clearly defined border and against a country whose survival is commonly deemed to be in our vital national interest, would surely commit US forces in the near future. But if history teaches us anything, it is to expect the unexpected. If such a situation as that described did arise, or if an insurgency was publicly recognized as the equivalent of overt attack, it would probably be accompanied by general international tension of such a nature as to preclude diversion of Europe-committed forces. So a third balanced conventional force would be highly desirable.

The purpose of this brief analysis has been to illustrate the rationale for an Army with a balanced force structure not significantly smaller than at present. This would appear to be a modest proposal, until one considers that the active force structure designed for the requirements just discussed must be a balanced one, to include matching support increments.

It may be argued that it is not necessary to have immediately deployable support units, that mobilization of reserves will serve the purpose. In the case of general war, this assumption might be valid. The Vietnam experience has surely taught us, however, that we should not assume public acceptance of mobilization for anything short of general war. This is likely to be all the more true in an all-volunteer environment, wherein the public may look to the standing army to play the role for which it has been "hired." Even if this changes someday, as the dust settles from Vietnam and the American people achieve a new level of political sophistication, there is some doubt that reserve units can be maintained in anything like their current numbers and manning levels in the absence of

a draft. For the near future, in any case, the Regular Army will probably have to fight with the forces on hand at the beginning of a war.

It is a subject of some debate whether or not the United States is entering an era of "neo-isolationism." Current trends and announced policies certainly indicate some degree of retrenchment. We are withdrawing from Vietnam, we have reduced our forces in Korea, and we shall surely phase down military activities all around the Asian rimland as the support needs of conflict diminish. Even in Europe, as alluded to earlier, we may reduce forces marginally. But to assume that the United States, with its vast worldwide diplomatic and economic interests, and with its principal adversary rapidly developing truly global power, can retreat into "Fortress America" is nonsense. And although present trends indicate greater reliance on sea and air power, involvement in international affairs will continue to require land forces and the ability to use them, if necessary, in the national interest.

The real danger is that we shall so weaken the readiness of our ground forces that, in the event of a sudden crisis but one not apparently serious enough to mobilize reserves, active forces will have to be withheld or withdrawn from an expanding conflict. This sort of situation really could create neo-isolationism, if the general public came to believe—rightly or wrongly—that America had ceased to be a world power, and should therefore reduce risk and save resources by dismantling its general purpose forces. Thus an occurrence which had the immediate effect of embarrassment for the Army might have a longer-term impact on the entire national strategy. In short, we may stumble into a neo-isolationism that we never planned.

What is vitally needed, then, is the ability to respond to crisis situations which lie somewhere between general war and the case of the Marines evacuating American nationals from revolutionary strife. The question boils down to one of—how do we meet these force requirements with severely constrained manpower resources? The subject of the next section of this paper will be how we might go

about modifying Army organization and practices in order to maintain a combat-ready force.

It will be argued that this whole problem statement rests on an assumption of diminished public support. That is so. The chances are excellent that the draft *will* expire in 1973. The Army's budget *will* probably stay at around its present level for the next five years or so. The public, especially the young, *will* probably stay soured on the Army for some years. And the American people will continue to demand that the Army provide a high degree of national security *with the resources allocated*.

### WHAT WE MUST DO

We must quit hoping for some miracle to rescue us from this situation. The Russians are not likely to help us out of our internal difficulties by misbehaving internationally. The inclination of the Western world is for *detente*, and the Soviets appear either to share that mood or to be eager to exploit it for the time being. And there is no use to hope for a significant change of heart by the American people, for the reasons discussed earlier. It is sometimes said that the public "has to support the Army." But we should well know that the public doesn't "have to" do anything at all. It is we, the Army, who must—within allocated resources—provide for the security of the American people and our democratic institutions.

We must keep centrally in mind that what we are trying to maintain is the capability to project ground combat power internationally. Given the present mood of the country, however, striving for such a capability may easily be misinterpreted as an intention to use it. The principle that the military does not make national policy—of which professional soldiers are aware—is not generally appreciated by the public. Even in highly sophisticated circles, there is a widely-held belief that military institutions tend to push their own employment with optimistic promises, and that political leaders are more tempted to "foreign adventure" if they have the means at hand. So it is important that any

reorganization of the Army not be advertised in terms of seeking international capability, but as insurance against unforeseen contingencies in a dangerous and unruly world.

The purpose of this paper is not to argue for specific reforms or even for certain types of reform. It is rather to urge that we acknowledge the seriousness of the situation facing us, and resolve to examine our own organization in an analytical and unemotional manner, to determine how we may maintain true combat capability. Any procedure or organization which does not contribute directly or nearly directly to combat power should be a candidate for economy.

The first area to explore is non-tactical organization, starting with those elements farthest from the rifleman on the ground. The Army cannot unilaterally reduce the size of OSD and the Joint Staff, but we can certainly take another hard look at our own Secretariat and General Staff, including Class II agencies. So many studies on where and how to reduce have already been done that there is probably little benefit to be gained by more studying. Instead, we should assume that the relative sizes of present suborganizations fairly represent their current relative importance, and consider an across-the-board cut for all. Such a cut should probably be assigned by *grade*, lest the result be an organization of all chiefs and no braves. The same searching look should be taken at CONARC, USAREUR, USARPAC, AMC, CDC, etc., and the same sort of arbitrary cut by grade considered. The overall reduction would have to be assigned a target date a few years hence, to avoid excessive hardship on individuals and to give commanders and agency heads a chance to restructure their organizations for maximum effectiveness with reduced numbers. This would also permit a change of commanders and agency heads before the target date, avoiding the tendency of some incumbents to feel that reduction of their organizations reflects personally on themselves.

The process should be repeated for higher-level tactical organizations, but with a scalpel rather than a meat ax. An element of ruthlessness will be required, however, for we

have acquired some habits which we have come to take for granted. For example, we still have essentially the same triangular division with which we fought World War II. Surely that is not the best organization for all conceivable tactical scenarios—including counterinsurgency. One would think that aerial resupply, advanced communications, and automatic data processing would have permitted an increased span of control, fewer headquarters, and greater decentralization. The contrary appears to have been the case in Vietnam, as any comparison of size and number of headquarters staffs will reveal. We need to question seriously whether brigade commanders should be able to monitor in detail the progress of platoons, and division commanders the progress of companies.

Next, we must be willing to impose a major degree of austerity upon the way we do business. Exhortation would be useless for this purpose, for austerity is such a relative matter. So, distasteful as it may seem, Headquarters Department of the Army will probably need to prescribe the upper limits of: the manner in which field and garrison headquarters are furnished and decorated; the elaborateness of briefings; the extent of public relations activities; the creature comforts of officials and visitors; and the numbers of aides, special assistants, orderlies, personal clerks, and the like. We should probably also question whether we can afford, in the lean years, current levels of military manpower support of open messes, post exchanges, commissaries, and other such activities on well-groomed posts. Or perhaps we should question the very nature of the Army post itself—might it not be vastly more economical to maintain such installations only for combat troops, with on-post housing and facilities as necessary for troop morale and to compensate for remoteness, and move non-tactical activities into urban warehouses and office buildings? Domestic political considerations, the rationale for which may be just as valid as exclusively military factors, will of course constrain the Army's ability to execute such measures.

Those are some of the areas in which we should seek economies in order to maintain



combat capability within allocated resources. The other side of the coin will be to convince a skeptical public that the country needs the capability which we have maintained. Otherwise we shall have our forces further reduced and our savings allocated elsewhere. As we are well aware from the NATO experience, when a deterrent has succeeded there is a tendency to want to dismantle fighting forces on the grounds that the war never happened.

We must be willing to overcome, at least enough for unemotional analysis, our reluctance to seek so-called "relevant" tasks. Of course we do not want to play the tramp asking for work at the kitchen door. But there are tasks which the Army can undertake, as an Army and without losing unit integrity, which will benefit the national economy, decrease social unrest, "sell" the utility of the Army, and simultaneously improve unit cohesiveness and, indirectly, combat effectiveness.

Four criteria should govern the sorts of tasks we should seek and accept. First, the task should be an activity for which the Army is suited. Second, it should not destroy unit integrity, and should (ideally) be performable on the military installation. Third, it should not be incompatible with the unit's readiness mission. Finally, it should be of such a nature that the unit can be deployed on a training or operational mission, without either undoing benefits or crippling combat effectiveness. *Ad hoc* disaster relief is an obvious choice, various programs of working with disadvantaged youth might well repay the effort with enhanced recruiting, and certain ecological activities might combine the benefits of outdoor living and vigorous physical exercise.

The foregoing categories of reform—reduction of non-tactical overhead, decentralization of tactical control, imposition of austerity in work style, de-militarization of "fringe benefit" activities, and acceptance of appropriate domestic action tasks—all have one feature in common. All emphasize the working level of the Army over the supervisory level. So we must be willing, for the sake of national security and

in spite of our individual interests, to take a hard look at the grade structure of the Army. This is the most painful subject of all, but one without which the economies examined earlier will be impossible. The recent flurry of Congressional criticism on this subject should not put us on the defensive, for it is natural and understandable that we have not observed a gradual process which has been going on in our Army ever since World War II.<sup>6</sup> In the name of rewarding our loyal members with higher pay and privileges, we may have created an imbalance of doers and supervisors. It will be very hard to convince political leaders and the public of our concern about national security if we cannot demonstrate that concern by a visible sacrifice of our own institutional interests.

We are at the beginning of at least a decade of public indifference to military concerns. This will have a significant impact, as yet incalculable but certainly large, upon the quantity and quality of monetary and manpower resources available to the Army. At the same time, however, the requirement for combat-ready ground forces shows no signs of diminishing, and may even increase. The result may well be a serious shortfall between requirements and resources, which will necessitate major internal economies to resolve. Let us accept the probability of this situation, and make whatever sacrifices are necessary to meet the needs of national security. That's our job.

## NOTES

1. An extended discussion of these trends may be found in Brigadier General Robert S. Gard's "The Military and American Society," *Foreign Affairs*, XLIX (July 1971), 698-710. An equally penetrating but more pessimistic view is that of Colonel Richard F. Rosser, Professor of Political Science at the U.S. Air Force Academy, in "Civil-Military Relations in the 1980's," *Military Review* LII (March 1972), 18-31.

2. Daniel Bell, "Notes on the Post-Industrial Society," in Marion E. Olsen, ed., *Power in Societies* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), pp. 394-402; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages* (New York:

Viking, 1970); Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970); and Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970).

3. The most exhaustive treatment to date has been Haynes Johnson and George C. Wilson's eight-part series, "Army in Anguish," in the *Washington Post*, September 13-20, 1971; but a survey of national newspapers, including those of small towns in rural sections of the country reveals the same sort of image in a piecemeal fashion.

4. The differentials, although apparently insignificant, might well become greater when one considers that some proportion of current enlistees are "draft-induced" rather than "true volunteers." What the true proportion is has been a subject for debate ever since the Gates Commission Study in

1969. The Commission report itself glosses over this fundamental issue. See Chapter 2, "The Debate," in *The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970), pp. 11-20.

5. An excellent analysis of this phenomenon is found in Adam Yarmolinsky's *The Military Establishment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). See especially p. 325. Probably the best available treatment of all the issues discussed in this section of this paper is Erwin Hackel's "Military Manpower and Political Purpose," Adelphi Paper No. 72 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970), pp. 6-18.

6. Kurt Lang, "Technology and Career Management in the Military Establishment," in Morris Janowitz, ed., *The New Military* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), pp. 67-72.



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