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Daniel P. Bolger

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Two Armies

DANIEL P. BOLGER

Colonel Raspeguy, veteran of Dien Bien Phu: "I'd like France to have two armies: one for display, with lovely guns, tanks, little soldiers, fanfares, staffs, distinguished and doddering generals, and dear little regimental officers who would be deeply concerned over their general's bowel movements or their colonel's piles: an army that would be shown for a modest fee on every fairground in the country.

"The other would be the real one, composed entirely of young enthusiasts in camouflage battledress, who would not be put on display but from whom impossible efforts would be demanded, and to whom all sorts of tricks would be taught. That's the army in which I should like to fight."

Colonel Mestreville, veteran of Verdun: "You're headed for a lot of trouble."¹

— Jean Larteguy, *The Centurions*

When Jean Larteguy first published those bitter lines in 1960, experienced French soldiers had employed almost every stratagem of conventional combat to grapple with determined insurgents in Indochina—and failed. When a similar situation arose in Algeria, some hard-eyed French paratroopers, like Larteguy's character Colonel Raspeguy, discarded their army's schooling in regular European warfare. They created the sort of army needed to fight and win savage little wars. But the ponderous weight of the conventional French military tradition and the deep cleavages in the French political landscape derailed and stifled the reform effort. France kept the display army and lost Algeria.

In the United States, Colonel Raspeguy's sardonic dream has come true. Today, America fields two armies, one for show and one for real fighting. Unlike Raspeguy's satirical prescription for a complete divorce between the show troops and the combat elements, America's pair of ground forces exist in uneasy tandem, the result of a shotgun wedding between what worked

yesterday and what is needed now. Both armies claim certain common traditions, regulations, and battlefield methods. Both armies share a solid mass of competent soldiers. Both armies practice for their tasks. But only one has the capabilities needed to fight and win America's present and future wars.

Although the two forces exist side by side, they have been diverging since 1945. In the Second World War, a single United States Army met and bested the the Germans, the Japanese, and the minor Axis forces. This army's world view was simply summarized: it fought a war to the death, aimed at the utter subjugation of America's enemies.

A power-drive operational style followed logically from that world view. America took advantage of its vast oceanic moats to marshal its substantial resources of manpower, machinery, science, production facilities, and popular enthusiasm. It took time, but once the mighty US forces began their offensives, they rolled relentlessly toward the enemy homelands. The GIs who landed at Normandy, the jungle fighters slashing their way across Luzon, and the flying soldiers who battered the Nazi Reich all shared the same ethos. They were mostly conscripted civilians, in for the duration (plus six months) of a national crusade to destroy the Axis powers. Their road home lay through Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo. Every weapon from grenades to atomic bombs, every tactic from sniping to aerial city strikes, every trick from codebreaking to electronic eavesdropping, every shortcut from island-hopping to the assassination of enemy commanders helped to speed the way to final victory. The armed forces were means to that end. What happened after demobilization interested very few serving soldiers.

Is the mission of the Army to deter war—or to fight war? Or can the issue even be framed thus simply? Much ink has been devoted to these questions over the last couple of years. Colonel Walter E. Mather, USA, supplied particularly spirited answers in his article "Peace Is Not My Profession; Deterrence Is Not My Mission" in the June 1988 issue of Armed Forces Journal International. Now, in the present article, Major Daniel P. Bolger continues in the same vein. His pungent advancement of the primacy of the warrior ethos may offend some, but the issue shows no signs of going away. Those who disagree with Major Bolger's views are invited to reply. Parameters will air their opinions in a future Commentary & Reply feature.

— The Editors

The war ended with twin atomic blasts over Japan. Few thinkers in 1945 guessed that any armies would be needed again. Even if the Soviet Union caused trouble, America's monopoly on nuclear weaponry rendered large-scale conventional forces unnecessary, or so it was thought. America's new killer bombs would keep the Russians at bay. The huge wartime array of United States forces dwindled rapidly down to a skeleton crew of A-bomb caretakers and occupation constabularies.

Once the Soviet Union created its own atomic arsenal, the United States could no longer play its nuclear cards with impunity. Indeed, since 1949 or so, nuclear combat has become unthinkable, conflict doomed to yield only brutally wounded losers. With nuclear warfare so dangerous, even conventional clashes between the superpowers became too dicey to contemplate. Who could guarantee that things would stop at the conventional level? Although both sides have continued to probe and test, they prefer to employ surrogates or piggyback onto peripheral disputes to fight for advantages in this oddly cold war. So it has gone under the shadow of the fateful mushroom.

If the threat of nuclear exchanges frustrated American and Soviet pressures for a finish fight, the strategic stalemate bred a new concern for conventional forces. American military leaders worried that the Soviets might well decide to fight at middle or lower intensities, always staying just below the nuclear threshold. Spurred by the formation of NATO and the near-disaster at the outset of the Korean War, US generals urged the creation of a traditional expandable army, based upon a sizable regular contingent reinforced by strong reserve components. The thinking, as summarized by such Army leaders as General Maxwell Taylor, was that America needed the ability to fight a mid-intensity nonnuclear war, or else our leaders would be faced with "two choices, the initiation of general nuclear war or compromise and retreat."²

Despite flirtation with a thin screen of troops as a tripwire element and the ill-considered plunge into the pentomic division experiment, the conventional force buildup during the 1950s and early 1960s produced an army to defend Europe against the Soviet tank hordes. Heavy with tanks, mechanized infantry, self-propelled guns, nimble helicopters, sophisticated electronics of all designs, and fleets of fuel and ammunition trucks, this army stands guard to this

Major Daniel P. Bolger is a student at the US Army Command and General Staff College, having recently completed a tour as an instructor in the Department of History at the US Military Academy. He is a graduate of The Citadel and holds an M.A. in Russian history and a Ph.D. in military history, both from the University of Chicago. His assignments have included command of an infantry company and battalion staff officer duty with the 24th Infantry Division (Mech) at Fort Stewart, Georgia. He is the author of two books, *Dragons at War: 2-34 Infantry in the Mojave* (Presidio Press, 1986) and *Americans at War 1975-1986: An Era of Violent Peace* (Presidio Press, 1988). Major Bolger emphasizes that the views expressed in this article are his own and not necessarily those of the Army War College or any other government entity.

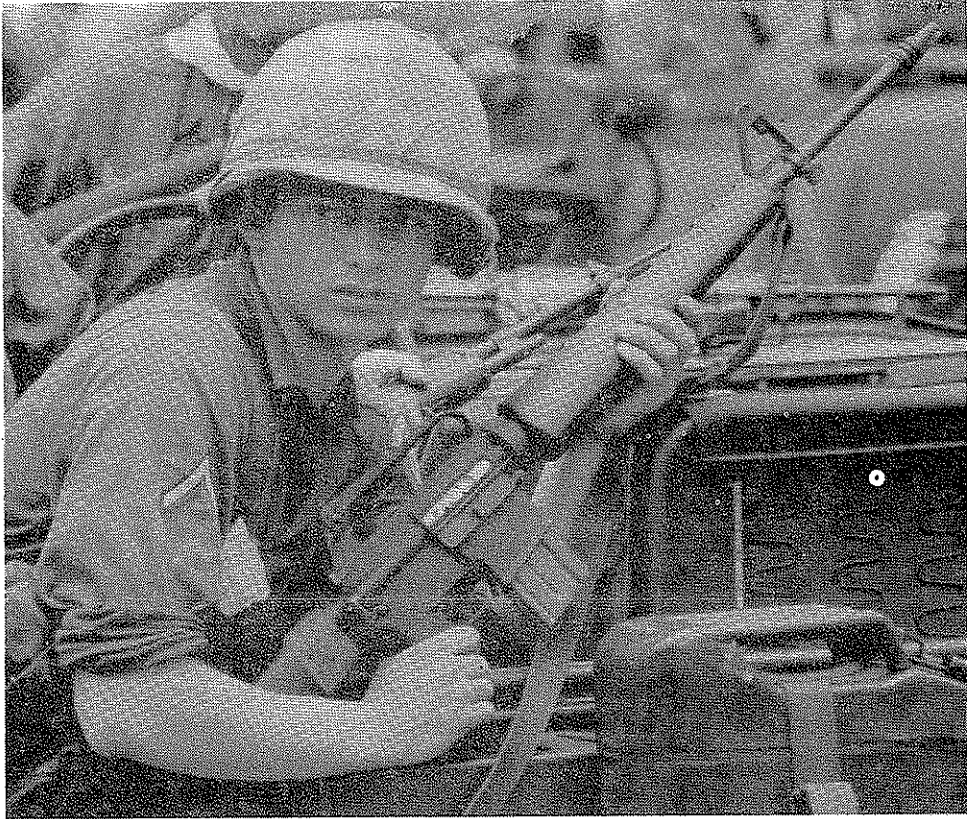
day on the European frontiers. A smaller brother waits on the Korean Demilitarized Zone. Yearly REFORGERS and Team Spirits exercise and refine America's ability to mobilize reserves, enlist civilian assets, transport units, and prove resolve. This is America's demonstration army, and if the *Wehrmacht* should resurrect, these units are ready. But under the threat of radioactive death, they are strictly for show, a role currently capsulized in the word *deterrence*.

The real fighting since 1945 has been done by the other US Army and its Marine Corps brothers who together form the expeditionary army. It is a regular force, infantry-based, readily deployable, often (but not always) well trained, writing doctrine by the seat of the pants or not at all, having to unlearn the lessons of World War II in preference to the harder lessons of World War III. These are the grunts of Korea, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, the *Mayaguez* incident, and Grenada. They are the leftovers of the NATO buildup, a nod to paratroopers like General Matthew Ridgway or Lieutenant General James Gavin, and a recognition that now and then there might be a half-war or limited war somewhere beyond Europe. The expeditionary army has done its best work when it operates independently of the display army, much as Colonel Raspeguy wished. But because the divorce is not complete, the expeditionary elements hobble along with borrowed display army doctrine, organizations, and weaponry. Worse, in the interests of personnel management, soldiers are transferred indiscriminately from the display troops to the fighting forces, as if they're all the same.

Of course, they are not all the same. About the only idea the two armies share is one over which they have no control: an American-Soviet nuclear war cannot be won. But from that point onward, the pair are not complementary, but contradictory. America's two armies differ greatly in world view, operational style, and institutional ethos. The soldier's understanding of such concepts makes all the difference when United States forces go into combat around this treacherous globe.

The display army reflects the world view held by most Americans. This view proposes that the Soviet Union is America's principal adversary, but that deterrence will prevail. The most important battles to be fought involve the yearly contests for money in Washington. Readiness is a key buzzword, although it is assumed that myriad intelligence assets insure that there will be a good bit of time to mobilize for the big one when it comes. Enemies outside the Warsaw Pact, other than the implacable North Koreans, do not merit much consideration. Such possibilities were judged worthy of a miniscule four pages of coverage in FM 100-5, *Operations*. The display army, in sum, is prepared to fight World War III as if it were a bigger, noisier, flashier version of the 1944-45 campaign in western Europe.

The expeditionary army's picture of the world assumes World War III is a protracted conflict already in progress. Europe is the watched pot, a Mexican standoff fraught with nuclear perils. The expensive conventional



An 82d Airborne Division expeditioner after a firefight with the rebels in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 10 May 1965.

forces are bystanders to the confrontation. After all, given a war, which side would lose, or accept bloody stalemate, without blowing a few kilotons across their opposition's bow? NATO and Warsaw Pact forces all assume as much, and have woven tactical nuclear devices deeply into their organizational structures and doctrine. The risk of any conceivable European conventional war going nuclear quickly is too great for any sane political leader to accept. Perhaps insane Soviet leaders would go atomic at the outset, but if so why are we sweating the conventional military balance? Among sober people, a war that cannot be won or even fought to a draw is already prevented. Planning to refight the Second World War over the smoking corpses of once-nervous Europeans is merely an expensive diversion from the actual struggle for world dominance. Or so think expeditionary soldiers.

The real, ongoing World War III pits America and a few grudging allies against a determined constellation of anti-American forces of varied motivation. The prize is access to Third World allies, peoples, resources, and markets. Whether incited by Islamic fundamentalism, Marxism-Leninism,

resentment of Yankee imperialism, a lucrative indigenous drug trade, or just plain bad attitudes, America's opponents all have a friend in the Soviet Union. Soviet contingents also operate and agitate for their own ends in many underdeveloped countries. Thus, American victories in this twilight struggle in the unhappy Third World certainly affect the continuing contest with the Soviets. More important, American citizens worldwide depend on the expeditionary army to bail them out when things turn ugly. The terrorists, insurgents, thugs, and tinpot Hitlers that bluster and sputter in odd corners of the world concern the expeditionary army. This fighting component is not at peace, but simply between operations, much like their grandfathers in the Pacific war with its discrete insular campaigns or their great-great-grandfathers in the intermittent Indian campaigns.

Such a grim picture would be viewed as alarmist by the display units. Their military style proceeds logically from their more orderly world view. If a major war should come, these units hope for plenty of warning as the Soviets gear up for battle. Show army planners expect ample time to formulate specific operations, mobilize reserve troops, transport reinforcements to the front, carry home dependents, reassign experienced officers to form new units, make draft calls, crank up training centers, and expand industrial production. There might even be time to declare war, like in the good old days.

Solid, secure command and control characterizes this system. In theory, the escalation of Soviet move and American countermove, made crystal-clear by technical intelligence collectors, will arrest the crisis before war erupts. The relevant examples are the 1961 Berlin episode, the 1962 Cuban showdown, and the 1973 October War alert incident. The goal always remains clear, as proclaimed in FM 100-5, *Operations*: "The overriding mission of US forces is to deter war."³

If the show of force miscarries owing to enemy miscalculation or friendly friction, then a redundantly titled process known as *warfighting* starts. Warfighting, as opposed to real fighting, exists in a fantasy world where tanks, armored combat vehicles, heavy artillery, chattering helicopters, attack jets, and a blizzard of electronic communications and intelligence systems cooperate to dazzle, sidestep, confuse, destroy, and eventually roll back the lockstep legions of the Soviet Union, all on a battleground replete with smoke, fire, screaming men, scared civilians, and whizzing shell fragments, not to mention possible clouds of nerve gas or nuclear sunbursts. It will be like World War II jacked up to 78-RPM speed. Somehow, it will feature incredibly rapid movements and gruesomely efficient slaughter, concepts that have proven to be historically antithetical. How this roiling mechanized furball will be sustained, let alone tamed without Armageddon, is rarely addressed. Maybe this is what the authors of FM 100-5 had in mind in their marvelous understatement: "Today, the translation of success in battle to desired political outcomes is more complicated than ever before."⁴

The expeditionary army has its own operational style. This approach does not embrace deterrence. Deterrence is an effect, not a mission, and implanting fear of mortal injury in the minds of enemies is the responsibility of America's powerful nuclear arsenal. The threat of immolation, not US tanks, keeps the Soviets in their own neighborhood. Nukes do not scare Soviet surrogates in the bushes at all—nor do the masses of tanks and tracks squatting in central Europe. But that is all right with the deployable grunts, because they are already at war with America's lesser enemies. Expeditionary troops are ready to go, ready to fight, and ready to win.

The expeditionary army expects to fight with scant notice. Paratroopers might be quaffing beer at a pizza parlor near Fort Bragg one night and be in a desperate firefight in a distant hostile land the next afternoon. These regulars go into action as they are, with no mobilization. They can adapt to what they find, as in the Dominican Republic or Grenada; they can triumph over adversity and friction; and they can impose their will on America's enemies. These forces must be standing in the door at all times, schooled to respond to daring and flexible leadership, experienced in all climes and scenarios, and capable of instant innovation and improvisation.

Expeditionary units have to be ready to fight when they hit the contested ground. They can place no faith in shows of force or escalation games. Speed of commitment and lift limitations insure that the troops will arrive in marginal strength at the outset. Expeditioners thus fight outnumbered far from friendly bases, and must rely on the collective skills imparted by sound leadership, demanding training, and shared pre-battle hardship.

Expeditionary operations fall into two broad categories, neither of which shares much in common with those of the Second World War. An army built to fight in today's actions must be ready for both *foreign internal defense* and *contingencies*, two missions commonly lumped under the deceptively benign rubric of *low-intensity conflict*. Each of these operations requires distinct military approaches. Though trained to undertake only the two expeditionary missions, expeditioners modify their basic routines with a bold, flexible tactical style, thus enabling them to respond successfully to the infinitely variable conditions actually encountered on the ground.

Foreign internal defense involves US intervention in support of a friendly government's counterinsurgency effort. Here, the oft-trumpeted lessons of Vietnam come into play. In blunt terms, the locals must win their own war. Americans can help, but they cannot do it for their embattled allies. Foreign internal defense uses small picked US elements: regionally oriented military assistance advisory groups and skilled Special Forces teams. The objective is the loyalty of the populace, not killing revolutionaries. Although the Americans may arrive rapidly, their duties will not end quickly. Advisors and trainers will likely spend years tangling with wily insurgents.⁵ El Salvador offers an excellent example of this sort of expeditionary role.

Contingencies are more dramatic than foreign internal defense. In these cases, Americans deploy to repel invasion of an allied country, punish anti-American aggression, protect American citizens and property, rescue hostages, or preempt terrorist activities by outlaw nations or subnational factions.⁶ Force strength may vary, but it will seldom exceed a division of ground troops; a battalion or two is typical. Special operations contingents play a prominent and occasionally decisive role. Intervention forces must get there quickly and act boldly once on the scene. They can expect to make forced entries by landing craft, helicopter, parachute, assault airlanding, or even ground infiltration. Contingencies are almost always decided quickly, for good or for ill, freeing US units for their next mission. Grenada serves as an admirable model for this sort of operation.

Whether in foreign internal defense or meeting contingencies, the expeditionary units operate in a chaotic world of deadly danger, physical exhaustion, false and misleading intelligence, and Murphy's Law, all exacerbated by a rapid descent into the soup. The troops' tactical methods take advantage of the organizational excellence derived from their own harsh training regimen. Fighting outfits do not expect technology or numbers to win their wars, but trust in themselves and their own moral superiority.

Expeditionary troopers embrace the chaos of battle and turn it against their enemies. They move speedily and assemble quickly, day or night, under heavy loads, across all terrain and in all weather; they show up where they are not supposed to be. The habitual emphasis on speed, combined with discriminate firepower, creates shock. Getting there *now* is more important than extensive synchronization and inch-thick operations orders. These soldiers will discard tomorrow's perfect solution for today's good plan. Expeditionary forces seek enemy headquarters like sharks drawn to blood. Quick eradication of enemy command posts can befuddle and paralyze Third World opponents, and turn the struggle to the advantage of the better-trained Americans.

An intervention army will take and use enemy weapons as needed, much like Army Rangers who borrowed Cuban antiaircraft guns in Grenada. Even the sorriest Third World armies tend to have heaping stocks of modern weapons. Expeditionary soldiers realize that *all* equipment on the battlefield is available to whoever is fast enough, mean enough, and smart enough to grab it and use it. Every weapon torn from the enemy's grasp is one more that

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will not have to be carried in by strained American logistical resources. Enemy spirits plummet when they realize that they are being ripped apart by their own hardware.

Clever fighters also use their opponents' minds as well as their tools. Fear grips both sides in any battle, and shrewd American expeditioners can exploit enemy anxieties and turn them into panic with well-crafted deceptions and feints. Not only will such efforts confuse and slow opposing reactions, but the legions of phantom opponents thus conjured offer a very cheap way to even the numerical odds.

The most important thing about an expeditionary army, the idea that gives it purpose even under the nuclear umbrella, is its devotion to victory. These soldiers fight to win, and their triumphs are measurable things: civilian lives saved, friendly governments restored, terrorists killed, enemy forces defeated and ejected. There is no dalliance with deterrence or tripwires or escalatory firebreaks on the road to Ragnarok. Expeditions either succeed, as in the Dominican Republic or Grenada, or they fail, as in the aborted hostage rescue in Iran or the fruitless Marine efforts at the Beirut airport. But either way, soldiers know whether their work was worth it. If not, they know what must be done for the next round in this continuing Third World War.

The bold operational style of the fighting army demands a warrior ethos, and it is here that one can see the starkest difference between America's display army and its real fighters. The display army has prepared since 1945—and in earnest since the mid-1950s—for the big one. But as the years have passed and the alerts and exercises become rote, the deterrers have gradually grown conscious of the improbability of executing their primary mission. The display soldiers are dedicated, competent, and still train hard—make no mistake about that—but to what end?

Let us be clear: deterrence is a wonderful thing. Milton was correct in his insistence that "they also serve who only stand and wait." All sane-minded soldiers pray that deterrence continues and peace prevails. Soldiers who deter war are doing precisely the job their government has thrust upon them, and they can take just pride in what they are accomplishing. Mankind is truly in their debt. But let us be equally clear as to the effects on the deterrers: the deterrence mentality is at odds with the warrior ethos.

The show troopers' ethos is a by-product of their improbable mission, a mission that grows ever more improbable with each new package of concessional goodies delivered by the hard-pressed Mr. Gorbachev. Display units are not focused on imminent combat. It is peacetime for them, a modern version of *From Here to Eternity* played out in motorpools, barracks, familiar ranges, and well-worn maneuver areas. Bureaucratic routine characterizes these forces. Indeed, in certain units, preoccupation with quotidian detail has taken precedence over readiness for a war that the commanders have begun to suspect will never happen. Luckily, the soldiers in the ranks still believe

and exert their best efforts, and at least some of their high-intensity battle training does translate to real Third World combat zones. The display soldiers' readiness for service in contingencies or foreign internal defense, however, remains unknown and untested. Certainly, they sport sharp uniforms, set tough priorities, and carry their loads confidently along familiar paths. The US Postal Service can claim as much, but who would dare send them into the red maw of jungle combat?

Expeditionary soldiers must eschew bureaucratic miasma and exude the ethos of the pure warrior. That which does not contribute directly to success in battle must be ruthlessly excised. Warriorship is a way of life. This demands mental alertness, physical stamina, and spiritual dedication, all in the context of the real battlefield, not the science fiction nightmares of a great semi-nuclear fire storm in modern Europe.

Warriors need not be rocket scientists, but they must be both smart and clever. They should know their profession and understand the human nature of those who make war, both friends and foes. Above all, fighting soldiers seek study, training, and experience to develop the battlefield common sense to know when to break rules. The dispersed nature of modern tactics and the fluid, chaotic circumstances of expeditionary conflict make every soldier a critical piece of the action. Each deployable trooper carries the gold bars of a lieutenant in his rucksack. There is no room for automatons in an expeditionary force in extremis.

Physical stamina gives warriors the ability to use ground and speed in their favor. Real physical fitness is measured in miles of hard marching under heavy packs rather than pristine pushups on squeaky-clean gym floors. It is not just sweating for an hour in the morning, but sweating for many hours, indeed, many days, at the very limit of human endurance—and then beyond. The Argentinian commanders in 1982 *knew* that typical infantry could not hope to slog across the freezing, boggy hillocks of East Falkland Island. Yet British Royal Marines and paratroopers did it, because they had done it in training. That must be the standard for the expeditioner's bodily fitness.

Finally, fighting soldiers have to be spiritually dedicated to winning wars. Solid units win wars, and real warriors serve their units, not vice versa. Such soldiers derive satisfaction from duty well done, not from EERs, OERs, awards, pay, or privileges. The respect of their comrades in arms, their military family, motivates them to perform. This selfless devotion to duty necessitates a service ethic that seems very much at odds with many modern American values. Expeditionary warriors do not conform to prevailing social norms of self-serving comfort; they conform instead to the pitiless calculus of armed struggle. The cohesive unit that perseveres despite the maelstrom will prevail. For expeditionary troops, the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts.

One might well ask why America bothers with an expensive display army at all. Surely five or so light infantry divisions could just as easily hold

the line in Europe, particularly if some of the money saved by mothballing the heavy force dinosaurs went into the fielding of *effective* antitank weapons. This effort would seem a modest expenditure compared to the billions paid out for current heavy tanks and sophisticated fighting vehicles.

The infantry could use a decent portable tank-killer; lack of such a weapon speaks volumes about America's willingness to buy things for its show units at the expense of its most likely fighters. Reissue of venerable 90-mm and 106-mm recoilless rifles to supplement the TOWs and Dragons would be a step in the right direction. Purchase of light armor, readily transported by airlift, is equally essential. The combat-proven British Scimitar and Scorpion light tanks fill the bill, and they are available right now.⁷

Yet, there has been no major war, so—beyond any force reductions negotiated with the Soviets—why tinker with the current organization and structure? Similar voices made similar arguments in 1914, indeed, in 1916 as well. When the Great War did not match preconceived organizations and doctrine, tradition-bound generals attempted to bludgeon the conflict into recognizable shape. They failed at great cost. In a similar vein, America sent its deterrence-trained forces into Vietnam, where they tried mightily to recreate World War II, also at cost, and to little avail. It was as if the United States sent a fully-equipped NFL football team to play neighborhood pickup basketball, then tore up chunks of the court in frustration when the locals refused to play by the imported rules. America took its team home, and the enemy won the war their way.⁸

That, in essence, is the real danger of keeping two armies. When trouble brews, America's civil leadership may inadvisably send in the display army. Nobody would send a team of nonspecialists to secure a defended airfield and rescue hostages, yet American political authorities might do as much if they mistake deterrence soldiers for the genuine items. This "era of violent peace"⁹ cries out for expeditionary warriors. As they did on the harsh American frontier, in the Philippines, in China, in Mexico, and in a hundred hot, dangerous places since 1945, America's fighting expeditioners will respond to the call.

NOTES

1. Epigraph from Jean Larteguy, *The Centurions* (New York: Avon Books, 1963), p. 266.
2. Quoted in Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973), p. 422.
3. US Department of the Army, FM 100-5, *Operations* (Washington: GPO, 1986), p. 1.
4. *Ibid.*
5. US Department of the Army, FM 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict* (Washington: GPO, 1981), pp. 46, 274.
6. FM 100-5, p. 169.
7. Andrew R. Jones, "British Armour in the Falklands," *Armor* (March-April 1983), p. 26.
8. See Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), for a recent critical analysis of US operational performance in Southeast Asia.
9. The phrase of James Watkins, "The Maritime Strategy," in *The Maritime Strategy*, executive director James A. Barber (Annapolis, Md.: US Naval Institute Press, 1986), p. 5.