Commentary & Reply

Jeffrey Record

Allan Millett

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**JEFFREY RECORD REPLIES
TO ALLAN MILLETT'S REVIEW**

To the Editor:

Allan Millett is one of our nation's finest military historians, and I have been pleased to assign his work to students at the Air War College. His review of my latest book (*Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo*, reviewed in *Parameters*, Winter 2002-2003) mystifies me. The foundation of his critique seems to be that, alas, I am not a professional historian but rather a defense policy "guru," and that, by virtue of this unpardonable defect, I cannot credibly write about presidential reasoning and mis-reasoning by historical analogy when it comes to using or not using military force.

This judgment is shared by neither the several professional historians and others to whom I vetted the book manuscript before publication nor those who have reviewed it after publication. George C. Herring, the dean of American historians of the Vietnam War, calls it a "splendid up-to-date analysis of the ways history is used—and misused by policy makers in reaching crucial decisions to employ military force." He adds that it "should be required reading for those who seek to understand the value and limitations of historical analogy as a tool of decision-making." Military historian Thomas Alexander Hughes says the book "effectively blends a policy maker's ear with a scholar's eye in a serious attempt to teach about the promise and problem of historical analogy in decision-making." American foreign policy historian Warren I. Cohen, in the *Los Angeles Times*, calls the book "superb" and believes that President Bush "would be well advised to read [it] before he takes the country into war with Iraq."

The scholarly journal *Choice* declares: "No other published work provides this kind of synthesis of the impact of the past on the present." Military strategist Eliot A. Cohen, who reviewed the book for *Foreign Affairs*, believes it reveals "just how shallow an understanding most [US political leaders] had," and that the book's "central point— that wars must be understood on their own terms, even though a broad knowledge of history is vital to the creation of policy judgments—is eminently sensible and clearly put."

Millett's judgment that "Record's effort to grasp the issue of policy-by-historical analogy is well-intentioned and worth reading . . . even if he produces no convincing evidence that either the problem or the solution really exists" is no less puzzling. Why would one wish to waste time writing or reading a book that examines a nonexistent problem? I agree with Millett that most American Presidents are not well-educated in the humanities and social sciences. Yet, as my book documents profusely, they nonetheless do reason by historical analogy as a means of interpreting new events; historical illiteracy has never stopped Presidents from engaging in such reasoning, however poorly they do it.

Moreover, the fact that many Presidents have publicly employed historical analogies to garner public support for a use-of-force decision does not mean they themselves did not believe in them. Harry Truman decided to fight in Korea for several reasons, but it is preposterous to suggest, as does Millett, that the influence of the Munich analogy was not one of them. To be sure, Truman used the analogy for policy purposes. However, the evidence is overwhelming that he and other key policymakers, Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk among them, genuinely believed the Soviet-sponsored North Korean attack on South Korea in June 1950 represented a challenge analogous to that posed by Hitler to the Western democracies in the 1930s, and that US inaction would invite further communist aggression. Whether or not Truman "needed" Munich in 1950, he nonetheless believed in the analogy's validity.

The Munich analogy's powerful influence on subsequent disastrous American decisionmaking on Vietnam is also incontrovertible—as my book documents in detail via decisionmakers' public and private remarks during and after. As Bernard Brodie noted in his *War and Politics*, "People who do not remember the events leading up to World War II find it difficult to recapture the tremendously traumatic impact of the Munich Agreement on the thinking of the postwar world, especially in the United States."

No less undeniable has been the influence of the Vietnam analogy on post-Vietnam use-of-force decisionmaking. The Weinberger-Powell Doctrine, which encouraged a premature US cessation of hostilities against Iraq in 1991 and crippled American responses to almost a decade of Serbian atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, is the professional military's distillation of the "lessons" of Vietnam. Those lessons, seemingly revalidated in Beirut and Mogadishu, exerted a chilling effect on American statecraft for three decades. In fact, there never was another Vietnam lying in wait for the United States in either Iraq or the Balkans.

Thus the problem of presidential mis-reasoning by historical analogy *exists*. As for the solution to this problem, I offered none because I do not believe there is one. Constitutional eligibility for the presidency doesn't include the ability to read and write, much less possession of a Ph.D. in history. I have no objection to Millett's proposed placement of a professional historian in the White House or on the National Security Council staff. But even we non-historians know that history is pretty much what historians say it is, and that historians disagree more often than they agree. An exception is the public commentary of professional historians on *Making War, Thinking History*, where—so far—Millett finds himself a minority of one.

Jeffrey Record
Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

The Reviewer Replies:

Professor Record's dismay at my review of his *Making War, Thinking History* is understandable, and I am comfortable at being a minority of one among his reviewers.

My central point is that Record has not yet produced convincing evidence (nor has anyone else) that historical analogies have done much to shape presidential war-peace decisionmaking. Moral assumptions, maybe. A personal sense of political betrayal, maybe. Bureaucratic politics, probably. Economic impact, probably. Electoral

politics and public opinion polls and media approval, almost certainly. Conceptions of national security and interest, almost certainly. Historical analogies most often appear in post-decision memoirs and contemporary speeches, but in innermost thoughts? Who knows? I have lived with Harry S. Truman and the Korean intervention decision for a decade, and Munich was not a major factor *at the time*. In fact, Truman thought very little about Korea at all, 1945-1950, until Dean Acheson's fateful call. Fortunately for the South Koreans, the State Department had.

A more powerful case—as Record himself inadvertently reveals—is that organizations have institutional memories that may be analogy-based and transmitted or carried by individuals who have long institutional associations like admirals and generals. No 20th-century President fits this description except Dwight D. Eisenhower. I would argue that Presidents, journalists, and defense analysts are the last anarchists when organizational loyalty is at issue.

Now historians and political scientists love to think that great ideas, even historical analogies, shape events, since ideas are their business. As Professor Record surely knows, historical analogies may help sell policies, provided the analogy-user and the audience agree upon what the analogy means. Perhaps that is the question when one invokes "Munich" and "Vietnam."

Professor Record betrays his own a-historical bent ("history is whatever happened that makes my case") when he says "that history is pretty much what historians say it is," which most certainly it is not. What history *means*, or what causes change and continuity over time, may be at issue, but there are canons of evidence, context, and causality that may not be "scientific" or "objective" in the Rankian sense, but are still observed by most professional historians. Personally, I would prefer Presidents who would deal with historical issues related to a policy problem in a systematic, staff-oriented way, not as an exercise in self-deception or group-think. Fortunately, presidential decisionmaking doesn't appear to me to be history-driven one way or another.

The study of presidential decisionmaking, however, is certainly worthwhile, so perhaps Professor Record's book has some small utility, even if Bernard Brodie, Richard Neustadt, and Ernest May remain better guides.

Allan R. Millett

THE MILITARY, THE MEDIA, AND DECEPTION

To the Editor:

In her article, "The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk?" (*Parameters*, Autumn 2002), Lieutenant Colonel Margaret H. Belknap proposes that the news media be enlisted "to execute effective psychological operations (PSYOPS) [and] to play a major role in deception of the enemy." She immediately recognizes that her proposal may be "anathema to the press" and there "may be instances where the media would rebel at any involvement."

That is understating the case. This proposal should be resolutely resisted by the entire Department of Defense and particularly by the nation's uniformed leaders, for two reasons. Using the press to deceive an enemy with misinformation and disinformation also means deceiving the American people that soldiers have sworn, at the

risk of their lives, to defend. Lying to the press is not so important in itself but lying through the press to the citizens is the surest way to destroy the already fragile trust the people have in their government. Further, in this age of nearly pervasive and almost instantaneous communications, lying to the press means lying to your own soldiers, to the Congress that controls the military budget, and to America's allies and friends around the world. Of the myriad lessons to come out of the agonizing experience of Vietnam, surely the consequences of lying to the press and people should be close to the top of the list.

Second, the liars are almost certainly going to be caught and exposed. And when the liars are discovered, their credibility and capacity to lead will be destroyed. Maybe not right away and maybe not for weeks or even months. But in our open society, sooner or later the lies will come out. On a grand scale, witness the lies in the Pentagon Papers; the lies of President Johnson, who was in effect forced to abdicate; the lies of President Nixon, who was forced to resign; or the lies of President Clinton, who was impeached but survived in office. Any self-respecting correspondent who discovers that he or she has been used to deceive the enemy and therefore the readers of his publication or viewers of his TV broadcast will do his level best to blow the liar out of the water.

It is for these reasons that the noticeable trend in the military services to lump together information operations, psychological warfare, and public affairs should be stopped in its tracks, for sound practical if not idealistic reasons. Colonel Belknap is clearly on solid ground in suggesting that "the military use the media as a conduit to accurately and honestly convey information to the American people about the operations in which their military is engaged." That is the responsibility of public affairs, which should be walled off so that it is not contaminated by the black and gray propaganda of psyops or information operations. This is fairly easy to work out on an organizational chart in headquarters, tougher to execute in the field.

Sun Tzu told us 2,500 years ago: "All war is based on deception." It is a valued principle tested by time and experience. A corollary to the principle says, however, that American soldiers do not seek to deceive the enemy by lying to their own people, their fellow soldiers, and their allies.

Richard Halloran
Honolulu, Hawaii
(Editor's note: Richard Halloran is a former military correspondent with *The New York Times* and teaches an elective course on the press and security at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu.)

The Author Replies:

I never suggested that the military lie to the media. My article urges the military to work toward improving relations with the media because we both share important common objectives with the American people. Obviously, lying would be discovered and would work against such improvements to the detriment of the American public that both institutions serve faithfully.

In a 24/7 global news environment, the media cannot avoid some role in deception plans. Deception plans are part of warfare. If the press reports on troop formations and exercises that are part of a deception plan, they are no more being

duped than those who report live sports. Would anyone label a football coach as a liar because his team lines up to kick an extra point and instead passes the ball for a two-point conversion? Are American football players being asked to lie because they play a role in such a deception?

Psychological operations (PSYOPS) are not strictly about lying, either. The media can choose to report information provided by the military or not. For example, demonstrations of overwhelming power and superiority are not lies. Asking the media to report this, and then doing it, is not a lie. Yet, these operations can be decisive, as they were in the Persian Gulf and in Haiti. Moreover, PSYOPS may save lives on both sides in a future conflict with Saddam Hussein's regime.

Regrettably, Mr. Halloran has distorted my words to raise the specter of the dysfunctional Vietnam-era relationship between the military and the media. Accusing me of suggesting that American commanders and soldiers should lie is precisely the type of hot-button rhetoric that serves to widen the gap between the media and the military. My article chronicles the lessons since the advent of television that the military must learn and makes the case that we should try to understand one another better. So, let's try to do that. We're on the same team.

Lieutenant Colonel Margaret Belknap

FAITH IN TECHNOLOGY

To the Editor:

In Colonel John Gentry's article "Doomed to Fail: America's Blind Faith in Military Technology" (*Parameters*, Winter 2002-2003), much of his criticism regarding the emphasis now being given to technology seems to be based on its limitations in fighting guerrillas. Such criticism ignores the fact that the preponderance of US military force structure is devoted to winning conventional conflict. Moreover, by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of conventionally oriented forces, technology should make it possible to devote more resources to threats created by guerrillas.

But my main concern is his recommendation that the United States should "abandon the notion that military objectives may be won or made easy and costless through the use of technology." To begin with, it appears that he uses the word "costless" rather than the phrase "far less costly in terms of US lives" in an effort to make the notion seem as extreme as possible. In any case, his endnote 46 makes it clear that he assumes those who believe in this "flawed" notion on the value of technology, especially when it is in the form of airpower, are primarily airmen and the Department of the Air Force as a whole.

It may surprise him, but soldiers who have been on the receiving end of US air attacks also believe that technology in the form of airpower changes the fundamental nature of military conflict. These soldiers seem to have a far more realistic appreciation of how much technology in the form of airpower is changing warfare than some American soldiers and marines. One of these soldiers on the receiving end was Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Seeing the impact of Allied airpower in North Africa, he wrote, "Anyone who has to fight, even with the most modern weapons, against an enemy in complete command of the air, fights like a savage against modern European troops, under the same handicaps and with the same chances of success." In

Normandy he wrote, "During the day, fighting troops and headquarters alike are forced to seek cover in wooded and close country in order to escape the continual pounding from the air."

Today, almost 60 years after Rommel made his observations, technology has made this "pounding from the air" much more precise and far less limited by darkness and bad weather, as Taliban and al Qaeda forces recently discovered. It is a fact that, thanks to developments in technology, the effectiveness of American airpower against land forces is increasing at a dramatic rate. For example, not only do developments in technology now allow enemy vehicles moving within a large area to be reliably detected and accurately located, but also precisely targeted, even in darkness and bad weather. These developments should make it possible for the United States to defeat opposing land forces with even fewer and lighter land forces than have been required in the past.

Unfortunately, in Operation Enduring Freedom it seems that key American soldiers (and perhaps even some airmen) were surprised by airpower's increased effectiveness against fielded land forces and thus were not prepared to exploit its successes with an energetic pursuit (using precision air attacks closely coordinated with the maneuver of SOF and airmobile forces). It is quite possible that had such a pursuit been made it would have resulted in the death or capture of Taliban and al Qaeda leaders, preventing them from escaping to fight again in Anaconda.

Lieutenant Colonel Price T. Bingham, USAF Ret.
Melbourne, Florida

The Author Replies:

The Defense Department suffers from "technophilia" in pursuit of victory in a narrow range of "Goldilocks wars" that are not too hot, not too unconventional, but just right—medium-intensity conventional conflicts against weak opponents. Technology enables risk-averse "warriors" to attack enemies who cannot effectively shoot back. To some degree, this is good; "fair fights" are bloody and often inconclusive. But from Douhet, airpower partisans have extolled real and imagined virtues of military aviation. Rommel's debacle in the desert is one of many bureaucratically useful but not universally applicable anecdotes.

The US military's technical infrastructure tightly controls the scope and conduct of operations. But the range of recurrent missions demands capabilities far broader than accurately delivering munitions in Goldilocks wars. Technology did not help much in Vietnam, Beirut, Mogadishu, Haiti, or Bosnia. It did not defeat the Yugoslav military in 1999. The assessment of operations in Afghanistan by the Army War College's Stephen Biddle indicates yet another middling performance—not a triumph of technology.

The most insidious pathologies of technophilia are cognitive and moral. When stand-off weapons seem to work, we want more of them; we want to fight the last campaign again, not use efficiency gains to fund other programs. When winning with technology is safe and easy, we avoid dangerous and time-consuming jobs, even if civilians and mission accomplishment suffer. When enemies refuse to stand and die by precision munitions, we call them "asymmetric threats" and continue comfortable conventional programs that assure that our asymmetric vulnerabilities remain. When operations do not go as planned, we dismiss them as anomalies.

Airpower is the most obvious example of this syndrome, but technophilia is pandemic in all services and most military functions. Intelligence may be afflicted worst. When intelligence is reduced to "ISR" (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), we rely on sensors, communications pipes, and computers that provide narrow pictures of physical things and discrete events; but we lack historical and political contexts essential to good decisionmaking. We denigrate human intelligence and analytical skills because, implicitly, technology will think for us. When we fail to anticipate implied tasks, we blame "mission creep," not bad analysis. The department's new task-post-process-use (TPPU) paradigm for intelligence makes explicit the notion that large volumes of data on the web alone will improve operational performance. Because it purposefully ignores the ways people process information, this doctrine of immaculate perception is a step backward.

Well-conceived technology, including airpower, can dramatically improve the performance of military forces. Unfortunately, dependence on fragile technologies, further constrained by culture and doctrine, limits our operational sophistication and effectiveness. Moreover, the technically dependent operational paths the US military follows are obvious. Potential enemies can predict, avoid, and, with planning, defeat them.

Debate will not resolve this issue. Given its importance to national security, the department should for the first time objectively assess the operational strengths, limitations, and vulnerabilities of US military technology, then adjust doctrine accordingly. Relying on engineers' promises and partisans' faith is a formula for disaster.

John A. Gentry

Commentary & Reply Submissions

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