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## STRATEGIC LIEUTENANTS

# Educating Strategic Lieutenants at West Point

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Scott A. Silverstone

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**ABSTRACT:** This article argues West Point responded to the changing strategic environment from the end of the Cold War through the post-9/11 period by innovating its curriculum. Over the past several decades, however, the academy's educational model has remained remarkably stable, rooted in an enduring commitment to a rigorous liberal education as the best preparation for officers confronting the inherent uncertainties of future wars.

The United States Military Academy has been developing commissioned officers for the US Army since the academy's founding in 1802. While the objective has always been to produce second lieutenants prepared for a career in uniform, West Point's approach to its leader development mission has changed dramatically over the past two centuries, and much of that story has been told elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on the decades since the end of the Cold War, a period of profound shifts in the strategic landscape, and the changing expectations at home about the strategic problems our military leaders must be prepared to tackle. As a result of these factors, the past three decades have been marked by deep reflection among academy leaders over whether the curriculum is adequately preparing our cadets for the professional demands placed on their shoulders after graduation.

This article emerged from a joint project that began in 2015 among a group of faculty members from different North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military academies who met periodically to discuss their respective academic curricula. Our initial goal was to share best practices for officer education at the precommissioning level. Even though our graduates have been working together in Afghanistan for years, and they share a stake in NATO's reinvigorated focus on territorial defense after Russia's annexation of Crimea, each academy knew very little about how its counterparts were preparing young officers for service, particularly in collective security initiatives.

Over the course of numerous meetings, we identified profound differences in how NATO members approach this task. This discovery led to a new set of comparative questions for discussion. First, how have changes in the international strategic context since the end of the Cold War shaped each academy's educational model, if at all? Second, how

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1 Lance Betros, *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond* (Abilene, TX: State House Press, 2004); and Lance Betros, *Carved from Granite: West Point since 1902* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012).

has the domestic political context of each member state shaped the way its military academies responded to the changing security environment?

This article contributes to the larger comparative study of strategic context and NATO military academies, and it addresses these questions for the United States Military Academy (USMA). This analysis is not the official position of the USMA, but rather my personal assessment after nearly two decades on the faculty. My goal is to pull back the curtain a bit to explain how this institution has wrestled with the fundamental questions of educating future US Army officers within a broader domestic and international strategic setting.

The article focuses on the impact of changes in the global distribution of power at the end of the Cold War that created new opportunities American leaders sought to exploit and the changing perceptions of the twenty-first century threat environment. Together, these threats and opportunities invariably expanded the mission of the US Army and forced USMA leadership to confront a central question: What capabilities do graduates need to carry into the field? Real-world events, including the Persian Gulf War and the subsequent focus on preparedness to fight major regional conflicts, in Korea and the Middle East; humanitarian intervention in cases like Somalia and Kosovo; nation-building and counterinsurgency missions in Afghanistan and Iraq; and a renewed emphasis on readiness for high-intensity conflict against near-peer competitors such as Russia and China, suggest the answer to this question is simply “more.”

Further, domestic sentiment, favoring an activist foreign policy and continued investments in America’s global reach, created a strategic culture that encouraged expanding the capabilities of the US Army. This article pulls these elements of strategic context together to explain the academy’s response to the most basic questions of education and leader development in recent decades. In the end, it shows that despite changes in the international environment and in Army operations, West Point’s educational model has remained remarkably stable, rooted in an enduring commitment to a rigorous liberal education as the best preparation for a career of service as a US Army officer.

### **America’s Strategic Context**

We begin our assessment of America’s strategic context by bluntly acknowledging a few, perhaps obvious, facts: among the 29 member states within the NATO Alliance, America stands out in several ways—its power, its geography, and its self-defined role in the international system. While the United States and Canada share strategic benefits offered by geographic separation from most of the world’s hot spots, the magnitude and global reach of American economic and military power in support of its enduring, post-World War II interests puts the United States in a unique strategic position relative to its NATO partners.

America’s distinctive strategic context, characterized by the relationship between its power and its geography and its strategic culture,

directly influences the USMA program. Scholars have been working with the concept of strategic culture for decades, highlighting how ideas, identities, “patterns of habitual behavior,” assumptions about the way the world works, and assumptions about “what strategic choices are the most efficacious,” shape the decisions states make.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Berger defined “political-military culture” as the ideas and identities that shape “how members of a given society view national security, the military as an institution, and the use of force in international relations.”<sup>3</sup> In the United States, a distinctive strategic culture gives purpose to its great power, and in turn reinforces military and economic investment in sustaining that great power while geography creates the conditions for many of the operational features of American power abroad.

The key ideas and identities that constitute America’s strategic culture can be summarized through a few statements that reflect a deeply engrained and widely shared perspective on national security:

- Despite the continental scale of its landmass and its rich natural resource base, American prosperity, and the national strength that prosperity makes possible, depend on unfettered access to key regions of the world, primarily western Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East.
- Historically, America’s political leadership has been highly sensitive to perceived security threats in distant lands that could be projected to the American homeland or disrupt access to key geographic regions in other parts of the world.
- Power projection with forward-deployed military forces makes it possible to defuse, deter, or defend against these threats at great distances from American territory, thereby greatly reducing the risks to American interests.
- America as an uncontested leader in multilateral political, economic, and military endeavors is a core identity, but not a guaranteed state of affairs for the twenty-first century.
- Historically, Americans have seen themselves as problem solvers, willing and able to take on the challenges many states cannot, or are not willing to, take on without US leadership or assistance.

The roots of contemporary American strategic culture are found in the early twentieth century, as the pressures of a changing international system made it impossible for the United States to maintain the largely isolationist grand strategy it had pursued since the founding. After suffering through the pain of the Great Depression and being drawn into World War II, American leaders increasingly came to believe fixing the problems that had spawned such a violent period in human history was essential for securing future American interests. In essence, if the United

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2 Alastair Iain Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 36, 46.

3 Thomas U. Berger, “Norms, Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan” in *The Culture of National Security*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 325–26.

States could not remain detached from the dangerous dysfunctions of the old world order, then it had no choice but to transform the character of political, economic, and security relationships within the international system into a more congenial environment. John Ikenberry describes this new world order as an open order that allowed for liberal trade across continents, a friendly order free from hostile revisionist states, and a stable order in which institutions help facilitate cooperation across multiple issue areas.<sup>4</sup>

The Cold War helped cement this new strategic perspective and America's emerging identity as a global leader. This emergent globalist, problem-solving impulse was evident in 1950 in the most important strategic document of the early Cold War. National Security Council Report 68, which contains an alarming assessment of the Soviet threat, evaluated the strategic options available in response and presented a strong case for containment as the only viable way to confront the new threat environment. But in a largely overlooked passage, NSC 68 distinguished containment from what it called "our overall policy," which can "be described as one designed to foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish." While containment was one "subsidiary" element, NSC 68 declared "the policy of striving to develop a healthy international community is the long-term constructive effort which we are engaged in." And it was an effort America would "probably pursue even if there were no Soviet threat."<sup>5</sup> President John F. Kennedy captured this global problem-solving spirit and what it meant for America's Army officers during his West Point commencement speech in June 1962:

Whatever your position, the scope of your decisions will not be confined to the traditional tenets of military competence and training. . . . The nonmilitary problems which you will face will also be most demanding—diplomatic, political and economic. . . . You will need to know and understand not only the foreign policy of the United States, but the foreign policy of all countries scattered around the world who 20 years ago were the most distant names to us.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the best evidence these strategic ideas and this identity had become deeply embedded in the political fabric of the United States came with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There was great enthusiasm in the early 1990s for reaping the benefits of a so-called peace dividend, the potential for significant reductions in the costs of global leadership made possible by a dramatic decline in the Soviet threat. But the end of the Cold War did not lead to a wholesale drawdown of America's global commitments. Instead, American leaders quickly pivoted on the axis of US strategic culture to engage new threats and embrace new opportunities

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4 G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 166.

5 National Security Council, *United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*, National Security Council Report 68 (NSC 68) (Washington, DC: NSC, April 14, 1950), sec. VI a.

6 John F. Kennedy, "Remarks to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, 6 June 1962" (speech, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, June 6, 1962).

to exercise leadership “abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.”<sup>7</sup> The absence of a peer competitor simply broadened the geographic scope for extending American influence and ambitions. A draft version of the Bush administration’s 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, for example, bluntly called for sustaining a one-superpower-world to prevent allies like Germany and Japan from challenging America’s leadership of the existing order, extending America’s European defense commitments further eastward to include former Warsaw Pact nations, and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons by such states as Iraq, North Korea, India, and Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> Less than a year later President George H. W. Bush delivered his farewell address to the cadets at West Point. In it, he acknowledged,

The United States should not seek to be the world’s policeman. . . . But in the wake of the cold war, in a world where we are the only remaining superpower, it is the role of the United States to marshal its moral and material resources to promote a democratic peace. It is our responsibility, it is our opportunity to lead. . . . Our objective must be to exploit [this] unparalleled opportunity . . . to work toward transforming this new world into a new world order, one of governments that are democratic, tolerant, and economically free at home and committed abroad to settling inevitable differences peacefully, without the threat or use of force.<sup>9</sup>

When Bush delivered this speech in January 1993, American forces had been in Somalia for just one month, executing the first major humanitarian relief mission of the post-Cold War period. President Bill Clinton quickly embraced this general trend of expanding America’s global commitments such as promoting democracy and market economies, deterring states that might oppose these trends; promoting the liberalization of these same states, and advancing a humanitarian agenda.<sup>10</sup>

Over the years, public support for American engagement abroad has certainly had its highs and its lows. And during the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump successfully tapped into a more restrictive view of US military and diplomatic intervention abroad held by a percentage of American voters. But despite President Trump’s challenge to long-standing beliefs about America’s role in the world, the general consensus on American global engagement, particularly among elites, has been resilient. This consensus is clearly reinforced by enduring support within the broader national security community, and by the leadership of the Department of Defense and the US Army, which expects America’s military forces to be fully prepared to sustain global commitments and grapple with a wide range of problems in all regions of the world. In

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7 John Quincy Adams, “An Address to Congress” (speech, United States Congress, Washington, DC, July 4, 1821).

8 Patrick E. Tyler, “U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Ensuring no Rivals Develop,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992.

9 George H. W. Bush, “Address at West Point” (speech, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, January 5, 1993).

10 Anthony Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement,” (speech, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, September 21, 1993).

this broader story, NATO clearly remains a top priority for the United States. But the Alliance is just one part of a larger global picture that keeps American leaders focused on multiple priorities.

While this relatively stable strategic culture has sustained basic expectations that America's Army and its officers must be prepared to engage globally on behalf of America's diverse strategic objectives, expectations for the specific types of problems they must confront have changed since the late 1980s. Changing expectations have followed shifts in the global power structure, America's problem-solving ambitions, and the character of threats that have flared and receded over time. Taken together, these variables provide tremendous insight into how the leadership and the faculty at West Point have thought about the academy's program for developing each class of new second lieutenants.

### **West Point's Adaptation**

In many ways, West Point now resembles a typical four-year American undergraduate academic institution, with a core curriculum and academic majors that result in each graduate being awarded a bachelor of science degree. Military and physical development programs are woven throughout the cadet experience, as is a character-building program designed to develop ethically grounded leadership. For much of the post-World War II era, and into the 1980s, the West Point curriculum remained relatively stable. All cadets took the same set of courses, with just a few elective options introduced in the 1970s, while much of the core curriculum reflected the legacy of West Point's distinction as the first engineering school in the United States. While cadets could select fields of study or academic majors by the mid-1980s, the intellectual experience for every cadet was highly standardized with academic majors not becoming a graduation requirement until 2005.

As the Cold War was winding down, two external sources of pressure forced the academy's leaders to think more critically about cadet education. Abroad, the Persian Gulf War and the Somalia intervention demonstrated in rapid succession just how broad an Army officer's professional skill set needed to be. The Persian Gulf War was a victory for the post-Vietnam US Army. It provided dramatic, made-for-television proof American prowess in the realm of high-intensity conflict was unmatched. Through the 1990s, American defense priorities and force structure remained anchored in the threat of renewed conflict against Iraq or Iran in southwest Asia and in the enduring potential for war on the Korean peninsula.

Readiness for large-scale conventional combat operations in these two major regional conflicts, and perhaps fighting them nearly simultaneously, supported the notion that continuity in officer education was necessary despite the end of the Soviet threat.<sup>11</sup> And the Gulf War victory could be read as indisputable confirmation the

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<sup>11</sup> John M. Shalikashvili, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America*, 1995 (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 1995), ii.

Army's programs for developing combat leaders were getting the job done. On the other hand, Somalia and the string of messier post-Cold War military interventions that followed in other places, convinced many that American military leaders had to develop a much broader range of competencies, beyond the capabilities needed to prevail in conventional warfare.

At home, a 1989 review by a reaccreditation team from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education set the stage for a fresh look at West Point's educational model. In a blunt finding, the commission's assessment team asserted "the institution lacked any discernible justification to describe why students were required to complete a particular set of courses." According to one academy official responsible for addressing this finding, "We . . . leveraged this accreditation concern to transform the West Point experience."<sup>12</sup>

By the late 1990s, the guiding document for West Point's academic program, aptly titled *Educating Future Army Officers for a Changing World* (known locally by the gangly acronym EFAOCW), reflected the changing missions—in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, and Kosovo—that were redefining the very purpose of America's armed forces. In a way, this document was another manifestation of America's deepening strategic culture embracing with evermore enthusiasm the notion of America's natural role in the world as liberal hegemon. America the problem solver was, in Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's words, the "indispensable nation," a force for progress destined to shape the international system and repair broken states that were sprouting up in greater numbers as the decade wore on.<sup>13</sup> And with this embrace of liberal hegemony in a one-superpower-world came the belief, as articulated in EFAOCW, America's Army officers must be prepared "to anticipate and respond effectively to the uncertainties of a changing technological, social, political, and economic world."<sup>14</sup>

It is fair to point out technological, social, political, and economic change was not a historical phenomenon introduced by the 1990s. But the pace and the scale of the changes occurring in this decade, along with America's expanding strategic ambitions, begged West Point's leaders to reconsider the right education for future officers who would be ordered to take on missions, to serve highly complex strategic objectives in complex political and social settings, and to apply a rapidly evolving set of technological tools. The EFAOCW answered this question by reaffirming the value of a liberal education at the core of the cadet experience, rather than tailoring cadet education to meet the specific needs of peace enforcement or nation-building missions

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12 Bruce Keith, "The Transformation of West Point as a Liberal Arts College," *Association of American Colleges & Universities* 96, no. 2 (Spring 2010). See also G. B. Forsythe and B. Keith, "The Evolving USMA Academic Curriculum: 1952–2002," in *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond*, ed. Lance Betros (West Point, NY: 2004), 370–89.

13 "Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Interview on NBC-TV 'The Today Show' with Matt Lauer," U.S. Department of State, February 19, 1998.

14 United States Military Academy (USMA), *Educating Future Army Officers for a Changing World* (West Point, NY: USMA, 2002), 6.



that American political leaders embraced in this decade. As the larger Army was debating, and introducing, changes in force structure and training to prepare and equip soldiers for these unique tasks, West Point was recommitting to an educational model better suited for complex and ambiguous problems.<sup>15</sup> This effort sought to develop critical and creative thinking skills that could be applied to whatever specific tasks its graduates would face in the years to come.

The academy's commitment was reflected in the rigorous, standardized core curriculum that cut broadly across the sciences, humanities, and social sciences and remained a requirement for every cadet. But the academy also introduced diverse academic majors and concentration fields to the curriculum. The idea was to harness the benefits of disciplinary depth as part of the academic experience, which would not only diversify the academic backgrounds available within each graduating class, but also help stimulate deep learning, rather than just broad learning. The intent was to inspire a commitment to lifelong learning that comes from intellectual exploration of a field the individual cadet found most interesting.

This broad liberal education aligned with the advice offered by Sir Michael Howard, one of the preeminent military historians of the twentieth century, in a lecture he delivered in 1961. As Howard noted, "Wars are not tactical exercises writ large. They are . . . conflicts of societies." While the military-technical aspects of warfare are essential components of military expertise, as the *Army Profession* doctrine asserts, Howard emphasized, "The roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield, in political, social, and economic factors." As a result, he argues, military professionals "must study war in context."<sup>16</sup> H. R. McMaster expanded on this point by arguing any use of military force must be "understood in [its] social, cultural, economic, human, moral, political, and psychological contexts." And these fields must be part of every cadet's education.<sup>17</sup> This appreciation for studying the context of the deployment of military armed force reflects the three other domains of military expertise in the Army profession: political-cultural, moral-ethical, and human-leader development.<sup>18</sup>

### Long Wars' Impact

Despite the firm commitment to liberal education already in place as the academy entered the twenty-first century, its self-conscious link to

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15 Nina M. Serafino, *Peacekeeping and Related Stability Operations: Issues of U.S. Military Involvement*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report RL33557 (Washington, DC: CRS, January 24, 2007).

16 Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 14 (italics in original).

17 H. R. McMaster, "The Need for a Coherent Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of War and Warfare at West Point" (unpublished paper, 2012), 2. Also see H. R. McMaster, "Thinking Clearly about War and the Future of Warfare," introduction to *US Army Operating Concept: Winning in a Complex World*, by Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: HQDA, October 31, 2014), 9.

18 See HQDA, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1 (ADRP 1) (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2015).

the new kinds of missions young leaders were confronting in the post-Cold War world, Afghanistan and Iraq rattled the confidence of many at West Point. The interventions of the 1990s were a poor comparison to what the academy's graduates faced at the turn of the century. Previous missions had relatively small footprints, few resources were devoted to the problems, and they were of short duration and limited ambition.

Afghanistan and Iraq became all-consuming problems at the center of American foreign policy for years on end. In each case, young officers were given increasingly more complex counterinsurgency and nation-building missions, tasked to pursue immensely more ambitious strategic goals that included, at least initially, nothing less than the wholesale political, social, and economic transformation of these foreign lands. In turn, junior officers had to grapple with a complicated mixture of political, social, cultural, and economic variables affecting the behavior of adversaries, allies, and neutral actors alike. And to be effective, Army officers had to figure out how to manipulate these variables to achieve the strategic goals set by higher policy—and do so without simply resorting to the brute force at their disposal.

As the 2007 version of EFAOCW declared,

The intellectual demands placed on the modern Army officer are unprecedented in our history. Today, more than previously, our graduates must deal with complex technologies, rapidly developing situations in complicated multicultural scenarios, and a host of non-traditional missions that demand innovative solutions. This reality requires graduates to be informed, responsible, self-directed learners who can anticipate and respond effectively to challenges that we can predict only imperfectly today.<sup>19</sup>

But was West Point actually offering an adequate program to help our graduates manage the tasks they were given in these two post-9/11 operations? As the Army's strategic challenges in Afghanistan and Iraq mounted, recent graduates and former academy instructors launched a steady stream of feedback on the nature of these missions to faculty and staff at West Point. And it seemed the existing developmental program might not meet the exacting demands of strategic thinking and action the young officers were being expected to exercise.

The Army's formal endorsement of mission command—"the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations"—in 2013 reinforced the imperative to ensure academy graduates were prepared to take on these tasks.<sup>20</sup> In introductory remarks, then US Army Chief of Staff General Raymond T. Odierno observed this concept was implemented out of operational necessity in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was then codified as a formal leadership philosophy with significant implications for leader development, unit training, and warfighting.

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19 USMA, *Educating Future Army Officers for a Changing World* (West Point, NY: USMA, 2007), 1.

20 HQDA, *U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy FY 13-19* (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2013), ii.

Army leaders have since recognized widespread adoption of the mission command philosophy require a cultural shift because commanders must “become comfortable with *decentralizing control* in order to foster *initiative* and *adaptation* by allowing subordinates the greatest freedom of action in *determining how best to accomplish the mission*.”<sup>21</sup> To make this concept work, it is critical commanders have confidence in decentralization of control. They must be convinced it will not lead to disaster. But more importantly, they must be convinced junior officers have the intellectual competence across the fields of military expertise to deserve to be granted the authority to exercise initiative and adapt operations to best achieve strategic ends. *The US Army’s Operating Concept* of 2014 explained effectiveness depends on the ability to innovate under conditions of ambiguity and “innovation is the result of critical and creative thinking and the conversion of new ideas into valued outcomes. Innovation drives the development of new tools or methods that permit Army forces to anticipate future demands, stay ahead of determined enemies, and accomplish the mission.”<sup>22</sup>

Understandably, the feedback from officers in the field inspired a range of initiatives at West Point to fill the perceived gaps in the cadet experience before their first deployments. The faculty and staff engaged in drawn-out debates about cultural literacy and language training. Programs to cultivate diplomatic and negotiation skills and increase cadet exposure to the political and economic problems associated with counterinsurgency and nation-building operations were introduced. Academic departments added more language classes and new elective courses tailored to the changing missions. Additionally, summer military training now included role-playing scenarios meant to replicate the peace enforcement and counterinsurgency problems the cadets would face as officers in the field. The number of cadets sent to foreign universities for a semester abroad swelled after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Hundreds of cadets were sent abroad for cultural immersion experiences each summer to learn and to work with diverse local communities in Africa, Southeast Asia, central Asia, and Latin America.

As these piecemeal initiatives accumulated, by 2013 the dean of the academic board decided it was time for a comprehensive review of the academic curriculum, the first since the 1980s. The goal was to ensure the academy was keeping up with best practices in higher education and producing the flexible and adaptive leaders needed to work toward the complex strategic objectives of post-9/11 operations. But even as this review was underway, the strategic environment continued to change dramatically. In August 2010, President Barack Obama declared America’s combat mission in Iraq had ended. And by December 2011, the last American troops serving in Iraq were home, meeting the withdrawal deadline negotiated by President George W. Bush in 2008. Likewise, the American forces who had surged into Afghanistan during

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21 HQDA, *Mission Command Strategy*, 4 (emphasis added).

22 TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 20.

2010, gradually transitioned from a large, direct combat mission to a small force serving primarily as advisors for Afghan security forces.

Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 sparked an eastward push for NATO that resulted in new roles for American forces. Army offers rotated through many of the newest, post-Cold War NATO member states, participating in presence missions and exercises that until recently had seemed like a relic of Cold War history. American priorities signaled a stark shift in December 2017 with the release of President Trump's *National Security Strategy*, which stated bluntly that readiness to deter and fight near-peer competitors, rather than counterinsurgency, was now the most important task for the American military. When the long-standoff on the Korean peninsula flared dangerously in 2017, Army leaders once again designated high-intensity land warfare as the top priority and the lethality of US forces the most important measure of readiness.

Back at West Point, which continued to deliver about 1,000 new second lieutenants to the Army every year, the comprehensive curriculum review came to an end, and the discussion of the value of a rigorous, broad liberal education had come full circle. The core curriculum was adjusted in places, the academic goals were refined, and additional elements were added to the cadet experience for the class of 2019 and beyond. But completing the process, the academy's leaders had reaffirmed one essential claim: a rigorous, broad liberal education is the best preparation for officers serving in an inherently uncertain future, on any mission, and in any part of the world.

### The Future's Complexity

Eighteen years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 sparked the initial invasion of Afghanistan, West Point has moved beyond worrying about the distinct demands of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and nation building, and how the responses to these types of operations must shape the curriculum. The vision for the academic program released in June 2018, *Educating Army Leaders*, recognizes the reality that flows from America's strategic culture. As long as Americans see themselves as forward-engaged problem solvers with diverse global interests, "the roles, responsibilities, and missions of the Army [will] continually shift, requiring graduates to have deep disciplinary knowledge as well as the agility and imagination to work in a variety of venues and across any number of disciplines."<sup>23</sup> But beyond reaffirming the importance of a broad liberal education that "teaches cadets how to think about problems in varied and adaptive ways as they learn to navigate and succeed in an increasingly complex world," West Point as an institution continues to lean forward with an emphasis on innovation, both by its faculty and its cadets.<sup>24</sup> The curriculum increasingly emphasizes independent student research and an enhanced

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23 USMA, *Educating Army Leaders: Developing Intellect and Character to Navigate a Diverse and Dynamic World* (West Point, NY: USMA, 2018), ii.

24 USMA, *Educating Army Leaders*, 13.

writing program, along with new threads that tie several courses together on the study of war, region-culture, and gender, sexuality, and respect. Moreover, West Point is now home to the Army Cyber Institute, and the academy more broadly supports cadets preparing to join the Army's new cyber branch. The capstone MX400 Officership Course is now formally embedded in the core curriculum and includes a new "Integrative Challenge" designed to give cadet teams complex problems to solve that depend on their ability to draw from across the academic program, and across other aspects of the West Point experience as well, just as they will be expected to do as military officers grappling with the complex challenges of an unpredictable future.<sup>25</sup>

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25 USMA, *Educating Army Leaders*, 15.