

THE MILITARY IN AMERICA

They Must Serve the Broad Purposes of the National Life

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The President's Reorganization Plan for the Defense Department, so much in the news these past few months, brings before us a fundamental issue that every democracy must face anew in times of threat and crisis. The issue—the role that the military shall play in our society and in the making of our national policy—is familiar. What makes it compelling is the siege the Soviet Union has laid to the United States and the Western world and the peculiarly fearsome dangers of war fought with missiles and thermonuclear warheads.

So long as the nations of the world must rely for their security principally on themselves, they will continue to establish armed forces for their protection against outside threats. But every democratic society faces the danger that these forces of arms and of men trained in their use will be used against the society that created them. One or the other party or political faction may gain control of the army and use it to gain power or to prevent the transfer of power to rivals who have won it by constitutional means: a popular general, a "man on horseback," may use the army to put himself in control of the state. Or the military as a group may set itself up as a state within a state which can veto or dictate the nation's policy.

History abounds in examples of all of these. Caesar and Napoleon were both men on horseback, as Nasser has been more recently. The Bolsheviks subverted the loyalties of the naval garrison at Kronstadt to help them into power and have used the army against rivals even within their own party. And for the state within a state, there is the classic example of the Prussian army. Here was an officer corps that tried to sit apart, almost disdaining direct political power, but regarding themselves as the true repository of the national ethos and not hesitating to try to dictate policy whenever they felt it in the interest of the "higher" state they conceived themselves as representing.

It is these threats that the principle of civilian supremacy over the military is designed to meet. That civil power shall be supreme means only that the use of a nation's armed might shall be determined by constitutional processes. If constitutional

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processes are observed, a military leader cannot usurp power; no single political faction can subvert the military for its own purposes; and the military as a group will be unable to dictate policy from their essentially parochial view.

Whether a nation is successful in establishing the principle of civilian supremacy depends on many things. It depends in the first instance on the civilians. If there is to be civilian supremacy, the people must cherish their constitution and insist on rejecting any man or party who violates it, even in the name of a good cause. Secondly, success in establishing the principle of civilian supremacy also depends on the military—on whether they are loyal and conscientious civil servants and, most importantly, on whether they are woven into the fabric of national life or stand apart.

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America is fortunate in its civilian population. By and large, the American people have been willing to abide by both the written and unwritten rules. We have a democracy that somehow works, even though the political scientists are not entirely sure why. When a very popular general like MacArthur disputed with the President, even those who disagreed sharply with the President's policy still upheld his right to order MacArthur's dismissal.

But America is also fortunate in its soldiers. Now and then a military hero has become President, but the armed forces as such have never been the instrument of his gaining the White House nor have they enjoyed any special influence after he arrived there. The military has not had the determining voice on questions of when it should be used in domestic disturbances, nor has it had any compelling identification with a particular region or class. At the time of the Civil War, for example, a somewhat larger proportion of the officer corps came from the South than from any other region. But those who could not loyally support the Federal Government resigned. It was the individual and not the army as such that was identified with the South.

There are several reasons why the behavior of the professional American soldier has been so exemplary. In America, the officer corps is drawn mainly from the lower middle classes. These are themselves anti-

militarist, opposed to any suggestion that war is an end in itself to be gloried in, and to the inhumanity of the martinet's love of discipline for its own sake. The officer recruit does not acquire a new basic philosophy on joining his new profession; he carries over his old one. In this respect, America's good fortune has been that it had no aristocracy that could have sustained an effective effort to monopolize the officer corps. The end of the plantation system in the Civil War restricted the development of the Southern aristocracy, who did indeed have a tradition of military glory; and the other potential aristocracies have largely turned to commerce and finance.

Then, too, administrative practices in the armed forces themselves have helped in avoiding ties to a class with particular interests or to a particular region. West Point has never provided more than about forty per cent of the officer corps, and it provides much, much less than that today.

But undoubtedly the most important of all the reasons for the professional American soldier's respect for the principle of civilian supremacy is the long-standing tradition in the services that the officer corps should be apolitical. Their indoctrination in this tradition is both formal and informal. The point is made in the training of a young officer. But it is informally, in the endless expressions of approval and disapproval of the acts of fellow officers, superiors, and historical forerunners, that the young officer builds up a set of criteria about what kinds of behavior are appropriate in what kinds of circumstances.

The conclusion one can draw from all this is that America has no reason to fear that its military will produce a man on horseback, that the military will easily be subverted by any one political faction, or that they will attempt to set themselves up as a state within a state.

But though we are free of the grosser threats of militarism, many in America today are uneasy about a more subtle threat. In these times of crisis, when so much of our national substance is going into military preparedness and so much of foreign affairs necessarily concerns overseas bases, alliances, and other matters of military and strategic significance, they see the military playing a larger role in the making of our national decisions than ever before. At the same time, they remember with misgivings the old charges against the military of extreme conservatism, of being nationalistic and aggressive, and especially of being power-oriented and simplistic, tending to meet the complex problems of diplomacy by a resort to crude force.

Many, even among ardent anti-militarists, would admit that such a picture is a stereotype, a crude exaggeration; but many also fear that it contains some truth. One has only to glance over either the

popular or the scholarly literature of the past few years to see that the reality of the "military mind" has been widely accepted by responsible people. Yet one wonders whether this kind of generalization is as useful as it is dangerous.

If the American military tend to be conservative, this fact probably points to the conservatism of the lower middle classes from which they spring. Since these lower middle classes constitute the bulk of Americans, one might argue that the problem here is not so much the "military" mind as it is the middle class American mind. When a narrow, specialized class and the profession of arms become one, as with the Junkers, the goals of both will be reflected in the techniques of child training, and one might be able to speak of the inevitable conservatism of a "military mind." But in a society in which the military are recruited in adulthood from a wide base it seems doubtful that the act of putting on a uniform would make a man more sympathetic to one basic political philosophy than to another.

Monarchies, aristocracies, bourgeois democracies, fascist and communist dictatorships have all produced successful armies. One would therefore conclude that the military are not a thing apart, but are a reflection of the society from which they spring. It was Marx and Engels, after all, who long ago discovered that there is nothing to prevent a socialist state from having a socialist army—that there is nothing, indeed, to prevent an army from becoming an instrument for creating that socialist state.

As for intellectual rigidity, an excessive emphasis on discipline, and other such personal qualities attributed to the military, it does indeed seem reasonable to suppose that practicing the military art would encourage a man to develop in himself qualities of decisiveness, energy, loyalty to the decisions of higher authority, disciplined teamwork, and the other virtues necessary to large organizations engaged in implementing, rather than evolving, ideas, policies, and programs. By this very concentration, the soldier would tend to neglect the virtues of the thinker and writer—subtlety, qualification, and habits of probing the assumptions behind our goals and way of life.

But how in this is the soldier different from the engineer or the industrialist or the business executive? Modern war calls for the orchestration of a wide range of specialized functions. Men must be trained, supplies and equipment provided for, and all these transported great distances to arrive at particular times. War is a large-scale enterprise, and like other large-scale enterprises it has been bureaucratized. The skills of the officer are those of the executive and administrator in any large bureaucracy, of planning and of coordinating the efforts of teams of specialists. But if the officer has the skills of the executive, he can also be expected to have his bureaucratic rigidities. And there is no question that the business executive does have bureaucratic rigidity.

ties. After all, it has been the businessman and not the soldier who has been dubbed "the organization man."

But even if the stereotype of the arch-conservative rigid militarist were completely false when applied to the American military and even if we can reject the concept of the "military mind" as being more confusing than it is helpful, there may still be a danger in the increased role the military play in the making of our national policy. It seems reasonable to expect that anyone, civilian or soldier, who is given responsibility for a nation's security would become preoccupied with the power aspects of policy problems. In this sense, any Secretary of Defense, if he does the job he is given to do, would also develop a "military mind." But we are concerned here with the professional soldier, with the members of the corps of officers. The question is how a nation can prevent the inevitable preoccupation with power problems of its professional military from giving its national policy an excessive emphasis on force.

One suggestion is to confine the military very strictly to technical military problems, to isolate them in a kind of military quarantine where they can have no effect on diplomatic and policy problems. But surely this is both a sterile and a dangerous course. We are today facing an enemy as ruthlessly ambitious as any we have ever faced in our history, including Hitler's Germany. What is more, this enemy is potentially more powerful. In population, in resources, and in economic potential, the Soviet Union is more formidable than Germany ever was.

But what gives the task of meeting this threat an almost exquisite complexity is that it is posed concurrently with a technological revolution, involving missiles and electronics as well as the release of nuclear energy, so fundamental as to cast the entire structure of strategic doctrine into disarray. As this revolution in strategy goes forward and increases its tempo, it will create new relationships among all the elements of international relations. It seems obvious that no statesman will be able to develop effective foreign policies without continuous advice from military specialists.

Rather than try to exclude the military from the policy-making arena, it would therefore seem to be the wiser course to ensure that both the military and the civilians are equipped to put military considerations in a proper perspective. To help in accomplishing this, two things at least can be done.

The first is to see that the officer has an understanding of political and economic matters as well as military ones. By and large this need is already being met in the service schools, not only at the undergraduate level in West Point and Annapolis but also in the post-graduate Command and General Staff schools and War Colleges of the different services.

The purpose is not to equip the officer to make the political and economic judgments rightly belonging to civilians but to enable him to understand the context in which his advice on military matters must be judged and so to be more effective in adapting military means to the political necessities laid down by higher authority.

To equip the civilian to put military considerations in a proper perspective, it is not so much education that is needed as instrumentalities. Both the Rockefeller Report on national defense and the President's Reorganization Plan have called for increasing the power of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Yet to anyone who has watched the course of military policy over the last five years, this seems a strange irony. For it was Charles E. Wilson, the Secretary, and Admiral Radford, the Chairman, who instituted the "new look" strategy of relying principally on nuclear air power at the expense of naval and especially ground power and who did so over continued opposition from two of the three Chiefs and at least intermittent opposition from the third. Certainly there has been no lack of power in the hands of the Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; the difficulty has been that instead of a scalpel to make discriminating strategic choices they have had only the meat axe of a manpower and budget ceiling to make gross ones.

The purpose of increasing the Secretary's power still more is apparently to reduce interservice rivalry. But there would be less bickering over defense cuts based on a balanced strategy that equalized the risks of different kinds of wars than over cuts based on a single-weapon strategy. The joint planning staff for the Secretary and the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided for in the President's plan is an example of the kind of instrumentality that is needed. Since it would bring together planning officers from all three services and be responsive primarily to the needs of the Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, such a staff would enable the Secretary to work out considerably more subtle choices than are now open to him.

In the past most Americans have had little understanding of the military and little incentive to acquire more. But today the military can no longer be ignored. Inevitably, they will play an important part in the events that still lie ahead. But what kind of part they play, whether it is creative and flexible in adapting to the goals of foreign policy or rigidly insistent on the dominance of military means, is not yet clear. The only certainty is that what does happen will depend in large measure on whether the United States lets a blindly doctrinaire anti-militarism determine the pattern of civil-military relations or encourages a more sophisticated and responsible understanding of the role of the military in a free society today.