

American Military Culture from Colony to Empire

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Abstract: Until World War II, the peacetime Army's primary job was not to be ready to fight instantly, but to provide a core of military expertise that would enable a wartime force of citizen-soldiers to be built up after war began. Wars were infrequent. Since the end of the Cold War, the Army has become a force that deploys and fights on a regular basis. The true citizen-soldier – who serves for only a few years and remains, at heart, a civilian – is no longer with us and is not likely to return in the foreseeable future, despite nostalgia for his passing. In the midst of a civilian society that is increasingly pacifistic, easygoing, and well adjusted, the Army (career and non-career soldiers alike) remains flinty, harshly results-oriented, and emotionally extreme. The inevitable civil-military gap has become a chasm.

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In 1963, Theodore R. Fehrenbach published a magisterial, and in many places poetic, history of the Korean War. Nearly fifty years later, his book remains the seminal treatise on limited frontier wars and the American national psyche. Fehrenbach addressed the incompatibility of America's changed strategic circumstances after World War II with the traditional American view of the purpose of an army and how it should be manned. For such limited wars, he maintained, the United States needed "legions":

However repugnant the idea is to liberal societies, the man who will willingly defend the free world in the fringe areas is not the responsible citizen-soldier. The man who will go where his colors go, without asking, who will fight a phantom foe in jungle and mountain range, without counting, and who will suffer and die in the midst of incredible hardship, without complaint, is still what he always has been, from Imperial Rome to sceptered Britain to democratic America. He is the stuff of which legions are made.

His pride is in his colors and his regiment, his training hard and thorough and coldly realistic, to fit him

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for what he must face, and his obedience to his orders. As a legionary, he held the gates of civilization for the classical world; as a blue-coated horseman, he swept the Indians from the Plains; he has been called United States Marine. He does the jobs – the utterly necessary jobs – no militia is willing to do. His task is moral or immoral according to the orders that send him forth.¹

In this essay, I argue that the United States has finally created Fehrenbach's legions, and that in doing so we have transformed American military culture to a degree unprecedented in American history.

The United States' geostrategic situation and the military practices and capabilities it has required have determined American military culture to a much greater extent than our political institutions and social attitudes. For the purposes of this analysis, I define *culture* as the most significant internal attitudes and mindset of the collective membership of the armed forces. It can be argued that one should differentiate between officers and enlisted, or career and non-career, personnel; in fact, a recent convergence of the two is one of the central points in this essay. I posit that there has been only one decisive change in the country's geostrategic situation since American independence from Britain, gained during the Revolutionary War, was ratified by the War of 1812; that our political institutions have been fundamentally constant since the adoption of the Constitution in 1788; and that the actual effects of changing American social attitudes on the nation's military culture, particularly with respect to the inclusiveness of hitherto excluded groups, have been remarkably small.

The Army, at the fore of American military culture and its relationship to the

larger society, receives the greatest emphasis in this essay. The Navy, attached to the shorelines of North America or at sea, has had comparatively little cultural interaction with the general population on a sustained basis. The Marine Corps is small and did not establish its current image among Americans until, at the earliest, after World War I. The Corps's image is vivid, but its culture has, arguably, changed little if at all since the turn of the twentieth century. The Air Force is new, and its culture blends that of the Army from which it sprang in 1947 and the technological circumstances that lead to comparatively few Air Force personnel training and preparing for, or engaging in, direct combat. The Army expands the most in times of major mobilizations; sustains by far the heaviest casualties; and always comprises the vast majority of forces deployed for war. In both public and private discussions since the Revolution, it is the Army infantry soldier who has instinctively come to the mind of the American people whenever "the military" has been under consideration.

From 1815 through 1989, the professional outlook and doctrine of the Army involved preparation for periodic conventional wars, although Indian wars occupied much of the Army's time and energy throughout the nineteenth century. The actual need to wage conventional wars, however, did not occur very often. The Mexican War of 1846 to 1848, the Civil War of 1861 to 1865, the Spanish-American War and subsequent Philippine Insurrection of 1898 to 1902, World War I (1917–1918), World War II (1941–1945), the Korean War (1950–1953), and the Vietnam War (1965–1973, in terms of major American involvement): all involved an intake of vast numbers of citizen-soldiers by a tiny, peacetime, all-volunteer Army. When the country was not

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at war, the Army had minimal contact with Americans because so few soldiers were on active duty. During the century or so that preceded the nation's entrance into competitive international politics between 1898 and 1917, most soldiers were stationed in the thinly populated frontier as it moved steadily west.

The contrast with European armies – and others based on the European model, such as the post-Meiji Restoration Japanese Army² – is striking. In countries with large armies manned almost entirely by conscripts in peacetime as well as during war, tactical units were dispersed throughout their territory. The “garrison town,” with constant contact between soldiers and civilians, was the norm.³ In general, this has not been the case in the United States. Throughout American history, the average American civilian has lived his or her life with minimal to nonexistent interaction with soldiers; and soldiers, whether in the service for a few years or for a career, have had comparatively little day-to-day contact with civilians other than those in small, isolated towns adjacent to bases.⁴ This civilian-army separation was true both before and after brief periods of peacetime conscription: namely, from 1940 to 1941; from 1948 to 1950; and the twelve-year period from the end of the Korean War in 1953 to the beginning of major U.S. ground combat in Vietnam in 1965. The American enlistee and draftee have, in most cases, trained and served in remote areas, far from the major population, economic, and cultural hubs of American life. The small size of the American military also contributed to this isolation. Not until the post-1945 era was the U.S. Army more than an insignificant fraction of the total U.S. populace, except in times of total mobilization such as the Civil War and both World Wars.

But it was the psychology of a cadre-mobilization model that affected the fun-

damental self-image of the Army probably more than anything else. Certainly, the Army at times engaged in ongoing missions – principally, the Indian Wars – other than training and preparing for conventional conflict. The Army's consistent view of itself as a conventional force preparing for battle against a comparable foe was integral to the development of military professionalism in the United States.⁵ However, the Army was so small that for *any* sustained conflict against an organized state-based force, huge numbers of volunteers and/or conscripts had to be enlisted or inducted. Even the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War (and subsequent Philippine Insurrection/Philippine-American War) required large numbers of wartime volunteers to augment the tiny Regular Army. Such a mobilization, especially in an egalitarian democracy, required that the conflict be cast in terms of an ideological crusade. Campaigns included Manifest Destiny in 1846 to 1848; preserving the Union and ending slavery in 1861 to 1865; freeing Cuba and “remembering the *Maine*” in 1898 and its aftermath⁶; making the world safe for democracy against the Central Powers in 1917 to 1918; and crushing Axis totalitarianism in 1941 to 1945. After each spasmodic mobilization, the citizen forces were demobilized en masse. The Army reverted to a small cadre force, and a prolonged period of peace ensued.

The results were twofold. First, the Army was not only physically isolated from the citizenry in terms of basing structure and domestic deployment, but was functionally isolated as well. In peacetime, the Army needed little from the citizenry: it did not conscript or require many volunteers. Second, the Army learned to think of itself as a force with the primary mission of training for infrequent mobilizations for ideological cru-

sades based on popular interpretations of democratic principles. Its primary peacetime job was *not* to be ready to fight instantly, whether on North American soil or overseas, but to provide a core of professional military expertise that would enable a large wartime force of citizen-soldiers to be built up after wars – fairly infrequent events – began. Under this rubric, the Army career force, officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), developed a culture of austere professionalism; cultural introversion; and preparation for war rather than frequent engagement in war.⁷ Men commonly joined the career force, either as officers or NCOs, and retired without ever serving combat duty. This norm prevailed especially during the long peace between 1918 and 1941, when the Army was engaged in no combat whatsoever.⁸ Wartime service was expected to occupy only a small portion of a military career.

The first major change in this culture emerged immediately after the end of World War II, when, for the first time in American history, the United States maintained a large force in peacetime. Millions of Americans served in the armed forces, primarily the Army, as part of the first true peacetime draft in American history.⁹ With its public profile raised enormously, the military became a much more salient institution in the minds of the American people. Nonetheless, the cadre-mobilization model still governed the military, in general, and the Army, in particular. After World War II, the traditional American concept of “peace” and “war” as sharply differentiated realities continued to govern how the Army thought of itself. Notably, this attitude did not change after the abolition of conscription in 1973. Between 1945 and the end of the Cold War in 1989, the Army fought two major wars: Korea, between

mid-1950 and mid-1953, and Vietnam, which involved major U.S. combat participation from 1965 through early 1973. *Robert L. Goldich*

When the Army was not involved in a major conflict, it was almost entirely at peace, and its mission was to train for a major, worldwide conflict with the Soviet Union and its client states and surrogates – that is, a third world war. The number of minor contingency operations involving Army combat forces (as distinct from advisory functions in Vietnam from 1961 to 1965) between VJ-Day and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was remarkably low. The actions in Lebanon (1958), the Dominican Republic (1965 – 1966), and Grenada (1983) were brief and involved only light casualties. Between 1973 and the end of the Cold War, the Army remained a training-oriented force rather than one organized for immediate operations.

Nonetheless, transition to the all-volunteer force (AVF) had significant effects on Army culture.¹⁰ First, it tended to diminish – but by no means end – the diametrically opposed views and outlooks of the career force on the one hand and junior officers/junior enlisted personnel on the other. There will always be a large gap between those who command and those who obey. What has changed is that those who obey at the bottom of both the officer and enlisted chains of command have freely opted into the institution and its characteristics. While most may not plan on having a military career, they are not unwilling participants who seek to satisfice rather than succeed. The junior officer and enlisted ranks are no longer composed primarily of draftees or draft-motivated volunteers who, more or less, did not want to be in uniform, even if they accepted their lot and tried to do their best.¹¹ As historian Andrew J. Bacevich has noted in his sadly underused study of the Army of the 1950s, the nature of the

Cold War Army, “far larger than any previous peacetime force, composed largely of short-service draftees, and dependent on frequent rotations to man large overseas garrisons – virtually ensured that its ethos would be centralized, bureaucratic, and impersonal.”¹² Under the volunteer force, the average length of service in the Army rose considerably, decreasing the rapid turnover in the ranks. The emphasis on rebuilding the Army after Vietnam greatly increased the opportunity and emphasis on systematic professional education and training for NCOs. Pay, benefits, and housing quality went up.¹³

Finally, while scarcely the intimate organization that it was before World War II, the post-1973 Army was nonetheless much smaller than that which gave rise to the conditions Bacevich describes. Massive and bureaucratic it may have been compared to just about any other American organization, public or private, but it was less so than the pre-Vietnam force. The pre-Vietnam Army of about one million soldiers remained at about 780,000 between 1973 and 1987; shrank slightly to about 750,000 at the end of the Cold War; contracted to 480,000 for most of the 1990s; and currently stands at about 570,000. All these developments have contributed to decreasing the width of the officer-enlisted gap in terms of common motivations.

The end of conscription, combined with an acceleration of long-term social trends, meant that the moral, ethical, and philosophical outlooks of everyone in the armed forces – not just career personnel – tended to be more sharply differentiated from those of civilians.¹⁴ The armed forces, both in peace and in war, are now composed mostly, if not almost entirely, of people who accept the social legitimacy of violence and the infliction of pain, suffering, death, and anguish on other

human beings. In contrast, civilian society increasingly takes the attitude that physical coercion of, or exertion of influence on, human beings by other human beings is morally wrong.¹⁵ Even the open expression of remarks considered psychologically, as opposed to physically, harmful – such as verbal “bullying” in schools – is subject to administrative and, in some cases, statutory penalties. The medicalization of, and requirement to forcibly change, personality characteristics that do not fall within a fairly narrow range of acceptable behavior, such as Asperger’s syndrome, is an example of the societal tendency to control behaviors deemed disruptive. In addition, absolute pacifism has increased steadily in the West (albeit much less so in the United States than in Western and Central Europe), an important component of which is a theological reassertion among various Protestant and Catholic components of the early Christian pacifist tradition. (Judaism, symbolically but not demographically important, has tended to morally eschew violence throughout the two thousand years of the Diaspora.)¹⁶

The military remains hierarchical and, ultimately, authoritarian (although there is much more give and take, especially in combat units and environments, than most civilians might believe). It emphasizes organizational and collective effectiveness, discipline, and commitment rather than individual rights, prerogatives, and liberties. Given that life is infinitely less harsh in the industrialized world than it was in the past, the individual who enlists in the armed forces enters a lifestyle and environment that has become far removed from the civilian world. Before the nineteenth century, the average individual was much more accustomed to having insufficient or inadequate food, living without adequate shelter and little temperature control, and

facing the omnipresence of death from disease, from infancy onward. He or she was commonly confronted with more frequent day-to-day civil disorder and low-level interpersonal violence than is the case in the modern world.¹⁷ With most of these premodern rigors of everyday life gone, comparatively unpleasant and rigorous physical environments in even peacetime military training and service – especially on the ground – heighten the contrast with civilian life. In combat, the variance from the civilian norm is enormous.¹⁸ Furthermore, everyday speech in the services, particularly in the ground combat arms, is extreme. Aggressive males are constantly testing one another through verbal altercations and insults. Disagreements are still sometimes resolved through barracks fights. This behavior reinforces cohesion and, in fact, has been fairly normal among men, particularly young men, in groups. However, such physical and verbal aggression is increasingly not tolerated in gender-integrated civilian society, where harmony and agreement are accorded a higher priority than any other governing principle.

This distinction relates to another difference between the military and civilian worlds. That is, despite the vastly increased proportion of women in uniform, the military remains an overwhelmingly masculine-defined institution, to which military women must, and do, adapt. Compare this situation with the developed world in general, where gender segregation, social or occupational, has largely died out.

In passing, it should be noted that although members of the reserve components of the armed forces are, by definition, “citizen-soldiers,” their very presence in the military implies their acceptance of the entire panoply of military-institutional characteristics described above, making them, in psychological and

moral outlook, more like active-duty military personnel than their fellow civilians in the communities in which they work and live.

The most profound change in American military culture, however, has taken place since 1989. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact; the drastic reduction in Soviet and Russian military power, particularly its conventional forces; and the retreat of Russian borders to where they had been in approximately 1500 created the largest transformation in the American strategic situation since 1917. No longer did the U.S. armed forces have a primary mission of planning for war against peer adversaries. At the same time, the end of the Cold War released forces inimical to American national interests and influence from the iron lock of U.S.-Soviet nuclear stalemate. The result? Over the past two decades, the paradigm of long periods of peace interspersed with apocalyptic mobilizations for war, involving the accession of huge numbers of draftees into the force, has been replaced by one of fairly continuous operational deployments. Though some engagements involve more casualties and forces than others, all place constant demands on the Army to provide units and soldiers for expeditionary warfare.

It is impossible to overstate how much this development has changed the entire set of expectations both officers and enlisted personnel bring to Army service. Continuous operations against current enemies have replaced training, planning, and education for periodic operations against future ones. Preparations for raising a citizen force and activating large numbers of new units, using the active Army as a cadre, are apparently not undertaken at any level within the Army staff. More broadly, although planning for both industrial and manpower mobilization beyond the existing force struc-

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ture was an integral part of the George H.W. Bush administration's post-Cold War defense paradigm,¹⁹ when the Clinton administration came to power in 1993, this component also vanished, and has remained officially buried ever since. Therefore, the true citizen-soldier – who serves only during the spasmodic, totalistic, ideological conflicts that last a few years, and who retains a fundamentally civilian outlook on life – no longer has any place in the Army's consideration of how it must prepare for future war.

Although nostalgia for the conscripted citizen-soldier persists, that soldier is gone – at least for the foreseeable future. We have indeed transitioned to Fehrenbach's legions. In my view, the Army's outlook is beginning to resemble that of the Marine Corps, whose ethos was best described in *Harper's* in 1914. Commenting on the American occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico, the author observes: "Just an order issued . . . and one regiment after another are on their way to Cuba, or Mexico, or the world's end. Where they are going isn't the Marine's concern. Their business is to be always ready to go."²⁰ One might also say that American soldiers are becoming more like "soldiers of the Queen [or King]": that is, without immediate ideological concerns.²¹ This development enables frustrating and lengthy counterinsurgency campaigns, or others without immediate gratification, to be conducted with much less regard for public opinion in the short term. As French international relations scholar Etienne de Durand puts it, "Mobilizing the population generally comes with a heavy price tag attached to it; the non-negotiable need to show quick results."²² A professional force that does not require situation-specific ideological mobilization is much more suited to these kinds of military operations.

The difference from the popular conception of the American soldier that dominated the draft era of 1940 to 1973 is clear. The pre-1973 image of the American soldier at war, dating all the way back, arguably, to the Revolution, and certainly to the Civil War, was perhaps best exemplified by cartoonist Bill Mauldin's Willie and Joe characters. They were infantrymen who were unshaven, possessed good combat discipline but uneven administrative discipline, were not overly obedient to uniform regulations beyond what was required of them, and, in general, represented well what they were: men who would rather not be there, but either felt a call to serve or realized they had no choice and would therefore do their best. The last words in Mauldin's immortal collection *Up Front* superbly evoke the American draftee's attitude:

They are big men and honest men, with the inner warmth that comes from the generosity and simplicity you learn up there. Until the doc can go back to his chrome office and gallstones and the dogface can go back to his farm and I can go back to my wife and son, that is the closest to home we can ever get.²³

While Mauldin's view of the infantryman at war is timeless,²⁴ the concept of the citizen-soldier who will serve for only the duration, then return home, is obsolete. So, too, for that matter, is the traditional U.S. Army combat uniform, which displayed far fewer insignia, decorations, and accoutrements than those of European armies well into the 1960s, and which was draped without much tailoring on the popular cartoon images of Sad Sack, Beetle Bailey, and their fellow soldiers. The pre-hyperpower American military image of Willie and Joe has been replaced by combat uniforms with unit insignia and American flags; close-cropped haircuts; the variety of equipment on load-

bearing packs and vests; and the goggles and flip-down night vision devices on angled helmets, all of which betoken a tough, hard, cold, isolate professionalism.

Although the Army's career force always maintained a rigid professional image and an accompanying set of attitudes, its citizen-soldier enlisted ranks did not. Conscripts typically did not internalize the norms and psychology of the career force; rather, they accepted them, externally and reluctantly, and adapted as best they could. Today, broadly similar attitudes permeate the entire force, from private to full general, although naturally they are stronger in those who have been in service longer. The enlistee and junior officer, as well as the career force member, voluntarily subjects himself or herself to military values, which vary considerably from those of the civilian culture, rather than accommodating them because of events beyond his or her control. This shift is particularly telling for enlisted men in the ground-combat arms of the Army and Marine Corps. Like all enlistees, they choose their military occupational specialty upon enlistment; thus, they have volunteered not only for military service generally, and for their particular armed force, but for that proportion of the force that undertakes the most arduous and dangerous tasks in peace and war.

What other effects has the transformation to a force of legions had on American military culture? It has created a force that has immense expertise in the conduct of combat operations – and one that is well aware of this advantage. The high casualties due to simple inexperience, lack of rigorous training, and thinly spread professional military knowledge that marked American performance during both World Wars, Korea, and, to some extent, Vietnam, no longer occur.

Several facts account for much of this improvement: in the counterinsurgency wars we are now fighting, troops in combat are in smaller and more dispersed units; the enemy does not have artillery with a high rate of fire; and we have provided first-rate equipment to our troops. But the key factors are probably the high quality of the people and the unprecedented realism in unit training that have been enabled by investment in training facilities and courses and much lower personnel turnover.

The opportunities for disasters at the platoon and company levels, though present, have rarely materialized in Iraq and Afghanistan compared to the carnage of past twentieth century American wars, particularly in their initial stages.²⁵ The bumbling incompetence of commanders not used to wartime stresses and, equally, the superficial training, in frenetic wartime situations, of hastily conscripted soldiers by trainers with scarcely more practical experience than the conscripts have been greatly diminished. (I do not address the issue of bumbling incompetence among the high-level political leadership of the country, or the sluggish and reluctant adaptation of senior military leaders, accustomed to a long peace, in adapting to war, in general, and irregular warfare, in particular.) The post-1973, post-Vietnam all-volunteer force is much less tolerant of tactical and operational failure than its predecessors, a result of vastly enhanced training as well as a deepened ethos of physical and mental toughness.²⁶

The downside, perhaps, is that if our legions are always deployed fighting the barbarians on the frontiers, there is less time for their officers to think, reflect, and educate themselves in their profession, particularly in higher-level strategy. The career officer corps, by all accounts, is a much less contemplative institution,

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largely (although not entirely) because the constant press of deployments and operations has left much less time in a military career for not only civilian graduate education, but even, increasingly, for the professional military education that has always been an outstanding part of the American military system. The inevitable decrease in the tempo of operations post-Iraq, and then post-Afghanistan, will certainly restore this situation somewhat, but the long-term consequences could be pernicious.

Notably, American military culture has moved sharply from a Cavalier to a Roundhead conception of social mores. The hard-drinking, chain-smoking, womanizing “Alpha male” has, to a considerable degree – especially in the officer corps – been replaced by the teetotaling, nonsmoking, family-man paragon of virtue. (Indeed, a drunk-driving arrest and conviction will ruin an officer’s career.) The absence of drinking and smoking relates to the need for constant readiness to go to war and the associated need for physical health and endurance, which mirrors similar trends among the more educated classes in American society. The change in sexual mores seems to have more diffuse causes. The increased proportion of women in the force, with the exception of all-male ground combat arms units, is one. Another is the considerable rise, over the past several decades, of open religiosity in the force, especially, but not limited to, evangelical Protestant Christianity, which has encouraged heterosexual monogamy.²⁷ Much of the latter development simply tracks the steady increase in the salience of religious commitment throughout most of American society over the past several decades. But it also reflects the split between the increasingly antiwar, anticoercion, and socially liberal mainline Protestant denominations;

some Catholics with an affinity for (to use a Protestant term) the “social gospel”; and Reform Judaism on the one hand, and the willingness to use force for patriotic American purposes and social conservatism of evangelical Christianity, conservative Catholicism, and Orthodox Judaism on the other.²⁸

The advent of the all-volunteer force has also created an attitude among military personnel that they are, in a variety of ways, “better” than, or “superior” to, civilians. To a considerable extent, soldiers have always had such an attitude. They contrast the courage and resolution their profession demands with a softer, less austere, and less rigorous civilian world – even if they are conscripts eager to return to it. This outlook can be traced to ancient times. However, what is new is the extent to which military personnel view themselves as superior because of the intrinsic human qualities they bring with them to military service, in addition to those they acquire while serving. Although human motivations are difficult to pinpoint, there appear to be two reasons for these feelings of superiority. First, service members are constantly made aware, through both internal communications and through media reportage, that most young Americans cannot meet enlistment standards. This fact understandably makes them feel that they are, in some ways, superior to peers who could not be accepted into military service regardless of desire. Certainly, the quantitative data support this belief. Most first-term enlistees (like most Americans) do not come from the more affluent sectors of American society, but the conventional wisdom that military service is a last resort for the substandard, however dubious in the past, is utterly wrong in the modern American military. Military personnel are much less likely to be ill-educated²⁹; are more intelligent

(or at least show more aptitude when measured on a standardized test)³⁰; generally come from higher-income households; and are infinitely more physically fit,³¹ much less likely to have encounters with the criminal justice system, and much less likely to use illegal drugs than their civilian counterparts, both in general and when age, race, and gender are controlled for.³²

Second, there is an utterly unquantifiable set of attitudes that may be even more important in propelling young men and women who enlist, or who seek appointments as junior officers, to view themselves as superior to their civilian peers (again, regardless of socioeconomic status). The young person who enlists knows that he or she is opting to leave behind the comfortable, perhaps complacent, atmosphere of family, friends, and local environment. Even before young enlistees are sworn in, they believe that they have opted to enter a more dangerous and demanding institution, one that is held to higher standards than civilian society, well-regarded among civilians, and more exciting and realistic than the humdrum world of daily civil life they left behind. They are, in a sense, internal immigrants, emigrating from their familiar surroundings to find more opportunity (economic and psychological) in the new and, in many ways, utterly alien institutional terrain of the armed forces. Whatever their socioeconomic status in civilian life, young men and women who choose military service believe that in doing so, they demonstrate that they are taking a harder, more arduous, and utterly different path from their contemporaries who lack the moral and physical courage to choose differently.

This situation is remarkably anomalous compared to the image of soldiers who manned professional armies in the past. In AD 69, when for the first time

in a century Roman soldiers tramped through present-day Italy en masse during the yearlong civil war that marked the “year of the four Emperors,”³³ the peaceable civilians remarked on how barbaric, unlettered, and savage they looked and acted.³⁴ Two thousand years later, American legionaries, while as capable on a modern battlefield as those who wielded the *gladius* (the Roman short sword), appear to march through a civilian population that in some ways is more barbaric, less educated, less physically fit, and less disciplined than they are.³⁵ Where this meritocratic isolation from civilian norms of conduct will lead is unclear; nonetheless, it is unprecedented, at least as far as the large non-career force the United States now maintains is concerned.

Some have suggested, understandably, that this sense of superiority could lead to a greater willingness among service personnel to challenge civilian control of the military.³⁶ Do these attitudes indeed presage a possible increased tendency toward “putsches and caudillos and the Freikorps and Fasci di Combattimento” in the United States?³⁷ Theoretically, the answer is yes; practically, probably not. The much larger military we have maintained since 1945 has, without question, maintained a correspondingly higher profile in American life, and in American politics, than ever before. Nonetheless, the conditions for such an extreme development are almost entirely absent from the United States. We have lost no wars in which the slaughter or wounding of huge proportions of the male population was followed by mass economic depression (putsches and Freikorps and Italian Fascisti); we have no culture of intensive military involvement in partisan national politics (caudillos and putsches); and we do not face a major breakdown of civil order due to the previous two conditions.

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Finally, occasional attempts by members of the career officer corps to justify a greater degree of military autonomy vis-à-vis political leadership in the United States are not new, and have rarely, if ever, obtained a coherent following. American career military personnel may grumble – and have always grumbled – about the alleged character deficiencies of the society on whose behalf they bear arms, but their disdain for such shortcomings inclines them to recoil from involvement in broader political matters rather than press toward it. First-term enlisted personnel and junior officers may indeed share these attitudes, but they do not guide the institution and are not, at least in the context of the developed world, fruitful ground for serious military repudiation of civilian authority. This is not sub-Saharan Africa, where sergeants become presidents or prime ministers.

I have made almost no mention of how conventional wisdom defines *culture* in terms of today's identity-oriented intellectual discourse. Why? I think the diverse distinctions of race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity that are present in the U.S. armed forces have little or no effect on the more fundamental aspects of American military culture I have discussed. The admission of African Americans into a desegregated military fifty-five to sixty years ago and the steady accretion of modern immigrant groups – such as Hispanics and Asians – have done nothing to change the austere, isolate, self-referential traditional masculinity of the force. Nor has the increased presence of women, who have had to adapt to these underlying characteristics in order to serve. For that matter, there is little indication that the recent repeal of the statute (it was not simply a “policy”) banning homosexuals from serving openly

(known colloquially as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” or DADT) will cause a decisive shift in the psychological and emotional underpinnings of the military. Gay men and lesbians who are out of the closet will, as have gay men and lesbians in the closet, conform to the larger culture.³⁸

The changes in American military culture over the past few decades, and the extension of the attributes of the career officer and NCO corps to the entire force, are caused not by superficial traits such as gender, race, or ethnicity, but by the adaptation of the American military, particularly the Army, to a changed American strategic situation. The exertions of largely drafted American military forces in peace and war during most of the twentieth century have provided American society a long period of extended internal peace and prosperity. Without an apparent immediate need to endure the burdens of compulsory military service, the majority of American civilians have been unwilling to enlist, and the public has begun to question the practical necessity and moral legitimacy of institutionalized violence. The U.S. military has become the shield behind which civilian society can hold fast to its pacifist views about the absolute supremacy of kindness and compassion. The entire military, in turn, not just the career force, has become a refuge for those who question the basic orientation of civilian society and do not wish to live within many of its central boundaries. There appears to be a gap – if not a chasm – between an increasingly sensate, amiable, and emotionally narrow civilian world and a flinty, harshly results-oriented, and emotionally extreme military, for career and non-career personnel alike.

A U.S. Marine infantry lieutenant recently observed, “For better or worse, real or imagined, the military is one of

the few organizations that still attracts people looking for an alternative to the 'world of clerks and teachers, of co-education and zo-ophily, of 'consumer's leagues' and 'associated charities,' of industrialism unlimited, and feminism unabashed," as philosopher William James described it in his classic essay "The Moral Equivalent of War."³⁹ However, if this alienated shield fails, the demilitarized civil society may have neither the

means nor the psychological will to defend itself. The shield itself may turn directly or indirectly on those whom it is supposed to defend, out of disgust for their failure to step up and contribute, either directly or with moral support. This has been an eternal conundrum in large societies facing threats that are far away since at least the days of the later Roman and Han Chinese empires, and it is with us still today.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Theodore R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: Korea, A Study in Unpreparedness* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 658.

² See Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853 – 1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Naoko Shimizu, *Japanese Society at War: Death, Memory, and the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Richard J. Smethurst, *A Social Basis for Prewar Japanese Militarism: The Army and the Rural Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

³ For an in-depth discussion of this interaction in one major European country, see David M. Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture, 1766 – 1870* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press and Royal Historical Society, 2003).

⁴ See Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784 – 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Edward M. Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898 – 1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵ The literature on this phenomenon is vast. See the still-unmatched Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 144 – 292; and William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784 – 1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

⁶ Many of the men who in 1898 volunteered to free Cuba, avenge the *Maine*, and punish the supposedly brutal and dastardly Spaniards instead found themselves engaged in a very different war of colonial pacification in the Philippines; the cognitive dissonance could be considerable. Rather than liberators (or after they liberated), they were cast in the role of imperial conquerors. Because they were not regular soldiers, their orientation was situation-specific rather than professional and organizational; they were often quite bitter, though they performed well in combat throughout their deployment. For a vivid example, see Kyle Roy Ward, *In the Shadow of Glory: The Thirteenth Minnesota in the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, 1898 to 1899* (St. Cloud, Minn.: North Star Press of St. Cloud, Inc., 2000).

⁷ For a vivid example of this isolation, see John M. Collins, "Depression Army," *Army*, January 1972, 8 – 14. In particular, see Collins's telling remark, "Intercourse with civilians was just that."

- ⁸ The small, irregular wars in Central America and the Caribbean to which American forces were committed between World Wars I and II were waged entirely by the Marine Corps.
- ⁹ The peacetime draft was the first in substantive, not technical, terms. The draft law enacted in September 1940, fifteen months before Pearl Harbor was attacked, was clearly ratified in response to, and designed to prepare for, possible American participation in World War II, which had erupted in Europe on September 1, 1939. The reenactment of Selective Service in mid-1948 – after the armed forces were unable to recruit sufficient personnel through voluntary enlistment once the World War II draft expired at the end of 1946 – did not result in the enlistment of many draftees because the pre-Korean War military was relatively small. The measure was, in social and cultural terms, a seamless continuation of the World War II draft. See George Q. Flynn, *The Draft: 1940 – 1973* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 88 – 109. This volume is invaluable for those investigating American military recruiting and manpower from World War II to the present.
- ¹⁰ Three works are essential to a study of the shift from a draft-based Army to the AVF: Bernard D. Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2006); Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); and Robert K. Griffith, Jr., *The U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force, 1968 – 1974* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1997).
- ¹¹ I have never heard an Army or Marine officer with personal experience commanding or serving with both draftees and volunteers in combat in Korea and Vietnam state anything other than that the performance of the men in both categories was indistinguishable. Indeed, I have frequently heard that during the peacetime post-Korea, pre-Vietnam years, officers found the quality of draftees to be higher than that of volunteers. However, because many of the latter were draft-pressured into enlisting, disaggregating the two groups is difficult. I am especially indebted to the insights of the following now-retired officers on these particular subjects over the years: U.S. Army General Volney F. Warner; U.S. Army Major General John A. Leide; U.S. Marine Corps Brigadier General Thomas V. Draude; U.S. Army Colonel John D. (Scot) Crerar (an informal manuscript written by Colonel Crerar was particularly useful); and U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Donald Bowman.
- ¹² Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1986), 119. Professor Brian McAllister Linn of Texas A&M University is currently preparing a study of the post-Korea, pre-Vietnam Army, titled *Elvis's Army: Transformation and the Atomic-Era Soldier, 1946 – 1965*, which will be a needed contribution to the literature on post-1945 American military history.
- ¹³ The best comprehensive discussion of the post-Vietnam reconstruction of the Army remains Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: The United States Army in the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Office of the Chief of Staff, 1993), 1 – 39.
- ¹⁴ The essence of this divergence in attitudes is captured by Azar Gat, *Victorious and Vulnerable: Why Democracy Won in the 20th Century and How it is Still Imperiled* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).
- ¹⁵ A discussion of the changing meaning of the word *imperialism* over time seems appropriate here. Scholar Mark Proudman observes in the term “a fastidiousness, even a squeamishness, about power or influence, however attenuated or even consensual”; Mark F. Proudman, “Words for Scholars: The Semantics of ‘Imperialism,’” *The Journal of the Historical Society* 8 (3) (September 2008): 425. Another interesting example is a Stanford University course in management science and engineering entitled “The Ethical Analyst,” in which “questioning

the desirability of physical coercion and deception as a means to reach any end” is mentioned in the course description; *Stanford University Bulletin*, 2008–09, 608–609.

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- ¹⁶ For the Christian component, see Charles C. Moskos and John Whiteclay Chambers II, eds., *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Peter Brock, *Against the Draft: Essays on Conscientious Objection from the Radical Reformation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). For insightful remarks on the complex relationship of Diaspora Judaism and sanctioned violence, see Martin van Creveld, *The Culture of War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 376–394. Modern Israel, of course, is a state, and harbors a culture, in which the military has extraordinary influence, probably more than in any other developed democratic society. However, this does not invalidate the overwhelmingly pacifistic and anti-interhuman-violence attitude that has existed in Judaism worldwide since the Romans crushed the Bar Kochba revolt of AD 132–135. In addition, in recent decades a substantial reassertion of the pacifistic Jewish tradition within Israeli Jewish society has resulted from internal controversy about the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories since 1967.
- ¹⁷ A good summary of all these conditions is in Patricia Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (1989; repr., Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003).
- ¹⁸ This distinction could not always be made. What Victor Davis Hanson has said about ancient Greek citizen-soldiers would apply to virtually any soldier, conscript or volunteer, before the Industrial Revolution removed a substantial part of the population of some countries from farming: “Bloodletting, the art of tearing apart flesh and breaking bone, was no strange sight to farmers who butchered their own meat and hunted game”; Victor Davis Hanson, *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 265.
- ¹⁹ See Robert L. Goldich, *Defense Reconstitution: Strategic Context and Implementation*, Report 92-832 F (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, November 20, 1992).
- ²⁰ Cited in Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (1962; repr., Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1991), 164.
- ²¹ I am indebted to Australian Army Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen (ret.) for this observation, made in an unsaved email message circa 2005. However, see British military historian Richard Holmes’s telling observation regarding the Iraq War: “The British army goes on operations. . . . But the U.S. army is at war”; Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), 111.
- ²² Octavian Manea, “Reflections on the French School of Counter-Rebellion: An Interview with Etienne de Durand,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 3, 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com>.
- ²³ Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (1945; repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 228.
- ²⁴ I sent my original copy of *Up Front* to my son during his first tour as a Marine infantryman in Iraq in 2006. He said that he and his fellow Marines found it both hilarious and accurate.
- ²⁵ References to this issue are scattered widely throughout operational histories, but there are some accounts, frequently biographical, that zero in on it more than others. On Korea, see Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War*; Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950–1951: They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010); and Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989). On World War II, see Henry G. Gole, *General William E. DePuy: Preparing the Army for Modern War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 13–65; and Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941–1945* (Lawrence:

University Press of Kansas, 1999), esp. 49–180. On World War I, see Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Edward G. Lengel, *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918: The Battle that Ended the First World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008); William S. Triplet, *A Youth in the Meuse-Argonne: A Memoir, 1917–1918*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000). I am not aware of any monographs on U.S. tactical, as opposed to operational and strategic, effectiveness in Vietnam.

- ²⁶ It is difficult to overstate the extent of demoralization, incoherence, indiscipline, and lack of readiness brought on by the results and effects of the Vietnam War, and which in fact characterized the Army throughout much of the 1970s. For examples, see Larry H. Ingraham, *The Boys in the Barracks: Observations on American Military Life* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984); and Michael Lee Lanning, *The Battles of Peace* (New York: Ivy Books, 1992). I am also indebted to conversations over the years with U.S. Army Colonel James C. Crinean (ret.) on his initial post-commissioning service at Fort Hood, Texas, from 1972 to 1976.
- ²⁷ Consider this admittedly impressionistic but telling example of this growing religiosity: in the early 1980s, my class at the National War College included one student who was a fervent evangelical Christian. He was well liked and did not proselytize, but his open and profound religious commitment was very unusual for the times. When at one bull session someone mentioned the student's view of an issue, another officer said, "Yeah, but he has the sword of righteousness on his side," and everybody laughed. My sense – which is shared by people in and out of uniform to whom I have related this anecdote – is that thirty years later, the remark would not be made, and if it were, there would be as much criticism as laughter.
- ²⁸ Too little has been written about this phenomenon, most of which is both superficial and pejorative. An invaluable exception is Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942–1993* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996). See also my review of this work in *Armed Forces and Society* 24 (1) (Fall 1997): 169–171. The extent to which increased religious commitment shades into active religious intolerance varies sharply by service, with the Air Force having a much higher incidence of the latter than the other services. I must admit that my views on the reasons for this phenomenon are based entirely on impressionistic observations of officers of all four services. Given this caveat, I would argue that the greater degree of religious dogmatism among Air Force personnel is due to a hypertrophic military authoritarianism that derives from overcompensating for the small proportion of their service that actually serves in contact with the enemy; a lack of broader social, political, and intellectual sophistication resulting from the highly technological and managerial orientation of their service; and – I have been told this by a surprising number of individuals – the collocation of the national headquarters of several evangelical Christian organizations in Colorado Springs, the location of the Air Force Academy. For an interesting contrast between the religious atmospheres in one Air Force and one Army institution of professional military education, see Daniel J. Hughes, "Professors in the Colonels' World," and Bradley L. Carter, "No 'Holidays from History': Adult Learning, Professional Military Education, and Teaching History," both in *Military Culture and Education*, ed. Douglas Higbee (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010), 164–165, 176.
- ²⁹ For instance, in 2006 and 2007, only 2 percent of nonprior service enlistees were non-high-school diploma graduates (NHSDGs). Of the general American population, ages eighteen to twenty-four, about 21 percent were NHSDGs. While recruits were much less likely to have had at least some college, or to be a college graduate, compared to eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old civilians (7 percent versus about 39 percent), the difference is due to the fact that, by definition, if one is in the military between ages eighteen and twenty-four, one is not in

college. See Shanea J. Watkins and James Sherk, *Who Serves in the U.S. Military? Demographic Characteristics of Enlisted Troops and Officers*, Report CDA08-05 (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation Center for Data Analysis, August 21, 2008), 5, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2008/08/Who-Serves-in-the-US-Military-The-Demographics-of-Enlisted-Troops-and-Officers>. The key factor is that the bottom 20-odd percent who are high school dropouts are almost completely absent from the military. I have a personal impression that the proportion of new enlistees with at least some college may well be higher than 7 percent, but these recruits perhaps are embarrassed to tell recruiters why they left higher education. I have been told repeatedly that many young men (much more than young women) enter the military after a comparatively brief time in college, having flunked out due to emotional immaturity, and that they view the service as a way to attain both that maturity and the GI Bill benefits that will be available upon completion of service.

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- ³⁰ Ibid. In 2007, only 2.3 percent of enlisted recruits scored in the bottom 30th percentile of the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), the standardized aptitude test given to prospective enlistees – that is, only about 2 percent of those young men and women actually enlisted were in these lower categories, compared to 30 percent of those who took the test.
- ³¹ For a scholarly examination of the relationship of obesity to military recruiting, see John Cawley and Johanna Catherine Maclean, *Unfit for Service: The Implications of Rising Obesity for U.S. Military Recruitment*, National Bureau of Economic Research working paper no. 16408 (Washington, D.C.: NBER, September 2010).
- ³² See Adam B. Lowther, “The Post-9/11 American Serviceman,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 58 (3) (2010): 75–81. For a plethora of detailed data, see the annual publication of the Department of Defense, *Population Representation in the Military Services*, which is published on a fiscal-year basis; and Watkins and Sherk, *Who Serves in the U.S. Military?*
- ³³ See Kenneth Wellesley, *The Year of the Four Emperors*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- ³⁴ Lawrence Keppie, “The Changing Face of the Roman Legions, 49 BC – AD 69,” in *Legions and Veterans: Roman Army Papers 1971 – 2000* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 56.
- ³⁵ Recent scholarship suggests that the level of literacy, education, social status, and culture among professional volunteer soldiers throughout history may have been substantially understated by historians and contemporary observers, who have mistaken toughness and hardness for intellectual and moral inferiority. Recruiters often looked for, and tried to enlist, men with some education who came from stable backgrounds, as these individuals made better soldiers and posed fewer disciplinary problems. For example, regarding Roman imperial soldiers, see Jean-Michel Carrié, “The Soldier,” in *The Romans*, ed. Andrea Giardina, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 120–130; and Yann Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 88–89. A more recent and searching debunking of the volunteer infantryman as “scum of the earth” is in Edward J. Coss, *All For the King’s Shilling: The British Soldier under Wellington, 1808 – 1814* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 29–85. It is therefore possible that the American volunteer soldier is less unique in history in this regard than has been thought to be the case.
- ³⁶ See, for example, Andrew R. Milburn, “Breaking Ranks: Dissent and the Military Professional,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 59 (4) (2010): 101–107; and discussion of the article, particularly the response of Richard Kohn and comments on his remarks, “Richard Kohn fires a warning flare about a Joint Force Quarterly article,” *Foreign Policy* blog, September 29, 2010, <http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com>. See also David Wood, “Military Officers Chafe for Bigger Role in Policy Decisions,” *Politics Daily*, October 4, 2010, <http://www.politicsdaily.com/2010/10/04/military-officers-chafe-for-bigger-role-in-policy-decisions> (accessed October

29, 2010); and Anna Mulrine, “Can Troops Get Too Much Love? Military Struggles with a Dark Side on Veterans Day,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/342309> (accessed November 11, 2010). For an earlier discussion of such possible tendencies, see the widely circulated and controversial Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., “The Origins of the American Military Coup of 2012,” *Parameters* (Winter 1992 – 1993): 2 – 20.

³⁷ In an October 26, 2010, email message containing comments on an initial draft of this paper, David Kennedy suggested this question as a framework for this discussion, though he did not endorse the concept.

³⁸ I do not discount the possibility of some disruption of “good order and discipline” and cohesion within the enlisted ranks of the ground combat arms of the Army and Marine Corps. The combat arms’ – infantry, armor, field artillery, and special operations forces – highly self-referential masculine combative ethos rather easily tolerates known yet unacknowledged homosexuality but feels threatened and disturbed by open acknowledgment. As of this writing, however, such problems, if they have occurred at all, do not appear to be significant. Nonetheless, the lifting of the ban on enlistment of openly homosexual men and women will not take place for several more months, after a lengthy certification process. See David F. Burrelli, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Military Policy and the Law on Same-Sex Behavior,” Report R40782 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 20, 2010), esp. 1 – 2; the report is updated periodically.

³⁹ Sam Jacobson, “The Few, The Proud, The Chosen,” *Commentary*, September 2010, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/printarticle/cfm/the-few-the-proud-the-chosen-15507> (accessed September 30, 2010). William James’s original essay can be found in many places; I obtained it at <http://www.constitution.org/wj/meow.htm> (accessed October 29, 2010).