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LEADERSHIP FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONS: A REAL STRATEGIC MEANS FOR AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

As a participant this year in the Consortium on Grand Strategy, a collaboration between Temple University's Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy and the Foreign Policy Research Institute, I noticed that our discussions usually assumed that one of the principal strategic means in which the United States held a comparative advantage was in our human resources, the men and women serving in our armed forces.

In this Telegram, I suggest that while I do not disagree with that contention as often expressed in our discussions, I offer a cautionary note particularly about our ground forces which by all accounts are now, after a decade of war, utterly exhausted. Thus, it is not so clear to me that the human fabric from which we have woven our professional forces into units of effective land power will be able to hold their professional edge amidst the near-term reductions in funding and forces structure now envisioned for the Department of Defense.

THE CHALLENGE: Reductions in force and funding that dull the military's professional edge

Stated another way, there are ample historic examples indicating that our armed forces, and from here on I will narrow the consideration to the US Army -- my own object of research -- have not always gone through post-war build-downs and emerged as a professional force. Recall the performance of Task Force Smith in Korea after the WWII reductions, the "hollow army" of the 1970s after Vietnam, and in the 1990s the US Army in Somalia after the post-Cold War reductions. In each case the edge in combat effectiveness was reduced by both the size and manner in which the reductions were made, particularly in human resources.

THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL BUILD-DOWN: Retention of professional leaders

I believe the key in the coming force reductions, even more so than in those of the past, will be how well the US Army can motivate its mid-level leaders within its currently very professional forces to stick with it during the transition. The rationale for this is quite straightforward: they are the *sine qua non* of any professional, as opposed to bureaucratic, military force. Let's see why.

The causal relationship between the conception of the Army as a uniquely military profession and its leader development

doctrines and programs is often given short shrift. In fact, the Army is both strongly influenced by and in turn influences its client—the American people—by how it performs in securing their Republic and way of life. The American people need their Army to be a military profession effective in providing land combat power for their security and ethical in all aspects of its operations at home and abroad in order for it to be trusted and supported by them. Such earned trust establishes, with professional status, the necessary autonomy and legitimacy for the Army to create its awesome capabilities.

But military professions don't just appear, they have to be created out of other organizations through the lengthy process of professionalization.

Samuel P. Huntington was among the first to locate the military within a professional setting. The first chapter of *The Soldier and the State* begins: "The modern officer corps is a professional body and the modern military officer a professional man. This is, perhaps, the most fundamental thesis of this book." Huntington argues that professions share three distinguishing characteristics, and that the military officer corps constitutes a profession because it meets those criteria, to wit: (1) **Responsibility**: Military forces are an obedient arm of the state strictly subordinate to civilian authority. Professional officers use their expertise only for society's benefit. Society is the profession's client; (2) **Corporateness**: The profession restricts entrance and controls promotion. Complex vocational institutions define an autonomous subculture, characteristics include journals, associations, schools, customs, traditions, uniforms, and insignia of rank; and, (3) **Expertise**: A specialized, theoretical knowledge requiring a lengthy period of formal education for mastery. Such professional knowledge is intellectual and capable of preservation in writing.¹

In line with Huntington, more recently one very knowledgeable military historian observed:

The Army has not always been a profession in the accepted definitions of the term. The Army's corporate identity—its culture, expertise, ethos, and place in society—has evolved over four centuries of American history. Its first professional steps began in the first third of the nineteenth century, and that process of development waxed and waned over time, usually following cycles of war and peace. Moreover, the Army did not professionalize as a single corporate body. The officer corps began its professional development after the War of 1812; the non-commissioned officer corps only after World War II. The officer corps grew and matured for most of a century before its professionalism fully emerged. The NCO corps has made great strides over six decades, and its process of professionalization continues today.²

In contrast, organizationally the Army will always be a military bureaucracy, with or without the trust and support of the American people. The default, or natural, character of the Army is that of a bureaucratic government occupation. The Army is by its creation under the Constitution a hierarchal bureaucracy that even now will only behave as a profession if its leaders at all levels, both uniformed and civilian, conform its culture and practices daily -- i.e., if they lead it by mission command to be, and therefore to behave as, a vocational profession.

The critical point here is that leadership within the Army, specifically the competence and character of its individual leaders at all levels, uniformed and civilian, *is the single most influential factor in the Army being a military profession*. The Army's leaders are the *sine qua non* of the Army's current and future status as a profession.

The rationale for this claim is straightforward—effective leaders within military professions lead differently than they do within other types of organizations such as businesses and bureaucracies. Stated differently, while there are many functions of leadership that are common to all organizations, there are a critical few that are significantly different in military professions, most owing to the unique expert knowledge of professions (its internal creation, adaptation, etc.) and the inherently moral, "life or death" nature of the individual and collective practice of military professionals. Leaders of professions must uniquely focus on the development of the profession's expert knowledge and the subsequent development of individual professionals capable of using that knowledge in expert, ethical, and often courageous practice. Without that, there is no military profession.

Thus to maintain its strategic capabilities within the current challenge of an acutely reduced-resource transition, the Army must continue to develop leaders of uniquely military competence and character, both uniformed and civilian, from robust leader development programs at all levels within the profession and it must continue to certify, cull, retain, and advance sufficient numbers of these leaders.

The unique attributes of the Army as a profession are manifested in the being, knowing, and doing of those leaders, and progressively so growing over a career.³ The **Being** of the leader refers to the leader's moral character and sense of personal

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (MA: Harvard Belknap Press, 1957): 7-18.

² Taken from an unpublished manuscript prepared by Colonel Mat Moten, Deputy Head, USMA Department of History, June 2011. Copy in possession of the author.

³ "Be, Know and Do" is a traditional method within Army doctrine for describing the attributes, as well as the necessary

duty as he or she inculcates over time the values and attributes of the Army profession, rationalizing them with their own personal morality in order that they can lead authentically within the chaos of mortal combat. This personal embodiment of the profession's values and attributes into the character of its leaders is perhaps the most influential factor in creating and developing trust with the American people. Further, if well developed over time, this aspect of the leader's strength of character is normally least perishable and is thus of most value to the profession.

The **Knowing** aspect of the leader's competence refers to their individual facility with the unique expert knowledge of the Army profession, its evolving knowledge of how effectively and ethically to conduct land combat operations.⁴ To master and apply such expert knowledge requires years of study, practice, and experiential learning. Army Soldiers and many Army civilians are, when fully developed and certified, truly military experts. Historically, this area of military competence requires vigilant attention by the profession's senior leaders as it is the most perishable over time simply because of the rapid evolution of the military-technical aspects of warfare as conducted between very adaptive adversaries and the Army (e.g., stability operations, cyber-war).

The **Doing** aspect of the Army leader's responsibilities, such as influencing, operating, and improving, while of vital importance, shares commonality with leadership in other types of organizations. Yet even these are done within a very different moral ecology that is the Army profession and its engagements. The expert work of the individual Army professional, even though supported by huge amounts of technology, is done humanly -- i.e. the expert practice or expertise of the Army professional is the "repetitive exercise of discretionary judgments," a quintessentially human activity, whether practiced internal to the Army or external within the JIIM and civilian environments. Given the unique nature of the Army's work, "to prepare to kill and to die," each of the discretionary judgments made by Army leaders has high moral content: they directly influence the lives of other human beings such as enemy, non-combatants, other Army professionals, and Army families.

All three of these characteristics of professional Army leaders, regardless of rank, have been seen repeatedly over the past decade in their actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps the experiences of Army leaders within the Brigade Combat Team in Ramadi, Anbar Province, Iraq, 2006-2007 serves most aptly. As later described by their commander, now Brigadier General Sean MacFarland, military competence and "uncommon valor" were the foremost common virtues among the forces under his command:⁵

"In Ramadi, Soldiers, Marines, and Navy SEALs fought and died for their buddies, their leaders, and their subordinates. In the midst of it all, I became almost numb to the routine courage and sacrifice occurring every day. Many of these acts went unrecognized, but not all. In just a few days one battalion earned a Distinguished Service Cross, three Silver Stars, several more Bronze Stars and Army Commendation Medals for Valor and numerous Purple Hearts...a few days later a Navy SEAL earned the Medal of Honor..."

CONCLUSION

From the trust placed in the Army by the American people and the morally discretionary nature of the practice of Army professionals, Ramadi reminds us that each Army Professional must be of the highest moral character with a well-developed sense of Duty but such strength of character, steeped in the martial virtues of honor, courage, and willing sacrifice, can only result from lengthy and focused professional education and moral development processes that enable the individual to be willingly "called" into the military life of sacrifice and service. An Army professional is not working in a job but rather serving in a values-based profession, following an individual and collective "calling" to secure the Republic. And they must be led as such!

Thus, the Army is a military profession only by the success of its leaders at all levels to lead it to be one. Historically, in periods of force and resource reduction after prolonged wars, the Army has tended to bureaucratize itself in the process, creating the antithesis of a professional culture.

The key, once again, will be seen in how successful the Army is in retaining its very professional corps of mid-level leaders for the long road ahead.

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developmental processes, for Army leaders.

⁴ See the Army White Paper, *The Profession of Arms* (VA: Ft. Monroe, HQ, Training and Doctrine Command, 8 December 2010) for a discussion of the four fields within the Army's expert knowledge, a different blend of which is required as a leader progresses through a career.

⁵ Sean MacFarland, "Fight, Kill, Die, Buddy" (*Military Review*, Special Edition on the Profession of Arms, September 2011): 51-55.