The US Army's Domestic Strategy 1945-1965

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ABSTRACT: Post-war drawdowns often include a re-negotiation of the terms of civil-military relations. After World War II the US Army's command culture was marked by Army Utopianism, an expansive vision of the Army's place in American society. This article sketches the history of Army Utopianism, noting its contribution to failing strategies in Vietnam, and argues for greater attention to the link between operational concerns and the Army's domestic political strategy.

"To use—and restrain—its immense social, economic, and political influence wisely and effectively, the Army must obviously hold itself in close rapport with the people." - Russell F. Weigley.[1]

The United States Army can boast a distinguished record of innovation during times of war, when rapid technological advances have been matched by innovations in organizational structure, principles of command, and logistics. But military organizational innovation does not end with the ceasefire. In the tense drawdown periods after war, Army leaders are tasked with preserving lessons of past wars while preparing for new challenges with shrinking budgets and fewer personnel. The drawdown period is thus a *de facto* re-negotiation of the terms of civil-military relations, and accordingly it is a time when domestic political strategy is especially important.[2] Since we find ourselves yet again in such a moment of re-negotiation, we would do well to consider how earlier attempts to guide the Army's post-war relations with state and society shaped the organization's readiness when war finally came again.

In these moments of re-negotiation, Army leaders may be inclined to agree with Russell F. Weigley that "the Army must obviously hold itself in close rapport with the people." What is not at all obvious is what Army leaders should do to bring this about. While domestic political strategy, the capacity to bring about such changes, is limited by law and custom, there is a growing sense that the reality of domestic statecraft should

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1   Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, Enlarged Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 556.

2   The term "domestic political strategy," coined here, encompasses efforts to shape the domestic political environment. The concept is borrowed in part from Eliot A. Cohen, "Are U.S. Forces Overstretched? Civil-Military Relations," *Orbis* 41, no. 2 (1997): 177-186; and from Risa Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," in Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, eds., *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2009). Domestic political strategy is not a pejorative term; much of this work is mandated by civilian authorities as a means of maintaining oversight. The congressional liaising done by Legislative Affairs Officers is partly to keep members of Congress informed. Stephen K. Scroggs, *Army Relations with Congress: Thick Armor, Slow Horse* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2000).

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be acknowledged openly in the current post-war defense conversation.[3] For example, Charles D. Allen writes of the need for "senior leaders who are strategic assets capable of ensuring relevance of the Army to the nation," a turn of phrase echoed in William G. Braun's recent call for a "relevancy narrative" to secure the Army's fortunes despite the public's tendency to under-appreciate its peace-time military.[4]

As with any strategy, the Army's domestic political strategy bears the imprint of underlying attitudes and assumed meanings that form the organization's unique culture. Hints of how this is manifested in the current drawdown negotiation have been noted by Braun and Allen to "revert to a rhetoric dominated by the force sizing and prioritization mantra to 'fight and win the Nation's wars,' with all other uses of the military being 'lesser-included' capabilities."[5] These are not simple calculations, as there are particular challenges associated with changing the minds of top commanders on fundamental questions of this sort.[6] However, the deeper risk is that, faced with navigating this vast institution through changing operational and political waters, Army leaders will fall back on bad mental habits and lead the Army to fall ever further out of step with the state and the American public.

What follows is a description of a "cultural structure," or set of institutionalized patterns, that arose during the post-World War II drawdown and had negative consequences for the institution, contributing to an over-long investment in the failing strategies employed in Vietnam.[7] This was "Army Utopianism," a vision of the Army as a central structure of governance, one that was expected to connect a large proportion of citizens to the state and to the world. This cultural structure is ultimately a manifestation of a deeper well of civic republican thought in the American political tradition, reflecting in part what Samuel P. Huntington would later praise as the "military ideal."[8] However, Army Utopianism can and should be analytically separated from those concepts in order to pinpoint one specific way Army leaders tended to envision civil-military relations at a transitional moment. The existence of this set of assumptions led leaders to make poor decisions that ultimately contributed to the profound alienation of millions of Americans from the Army.

The first part of this article, will sketch the emergence of this cultural structure as it was expressed in internal Army documents. Army

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3   The legal context is reviewed by Allen W. Palmer and Edward L. Carter, "The Smith-Mundt Act's Ban on Domestic Propaganda: An Analysis of the Cold War Statute Limiting Access to Public Diplomacy," *Communication Law and Policy* 11, no. 1 (2006): 1-34.

4   Charles D. Allen, "Assessing the Army Profession," *Parameters* 41 (Autumn 2011): 73; William G. Braun, III, "Op-Ed: Between Conflicts: An Army Roles that Sticks," Strategic Studies Institute, January 17 2014, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/Between-Conflicts-An-Army-Role-That-Sticks/2014/01/17.

5   William G. Braun III and Charles D. Allen, "Shaping a 21st-Century Defense Strategy: Reconciling Military Roles," *Joint Force Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2014): 54.

6   Stephen J. Gerras and Leonard Wong, *Changing Minds in the Army: Why It Is So Difficult and What To Do About It* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2013).

7   John R. Hall, "Cultural Meanings and Cultural Structures in Historical Explanation," *History and Theory* 39, no. 3 (2000): 331-347.

8   Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1957). For a discussion of civic republicanism in American civil-military relations, see Gary Schaub, Jr. and Adam Lowther, "Who Serves? The American All-Volunteer Force," in Stephen J. Cimbala (ed.), *Civil-Military Relations in Perspective: Strategy, Structure and Policy* (London: Ashgate, 2012).

Utopianism emerged as a consequence of the massive mobilization of the country during World War II and was cultivated by some Army leaders over the next three decades. The second part of the paper notes the strategic significance of the cultural structure. Initially, it reflected a major division in the newly-formed Department of Defense over the role of conventional ground forces, and specifically President Dwight D. Eisenhower's New Look policies. Subsequently, when President John F. Kennedy pivoted from New Look to an emphasis on irregular warfare in the early days of American involvement in Vietnam, the Army was again challenged to justify its special monopoly on conventional ground forces. Together, these pressures led Army leaders to favor a form of involvement in Vietnam that would prove politically disastrous.

As domestic US political will flagged following the Tet Offensive of 1968, this structure was gradually rejected by Army leaders as an impossible dream. New visions, giving rise to new political strategies, emerged in its wake. By turning our attention to this fleeting cultural structure, we can sensitize ourselves to one way the Army's leaders failed in the past to keep in close rapport with the public. This example should serve as a reminder as a new generation of leaders attempt to navigate the politics of drawdown and the desire for a peace dividend while also undergoing the costly "Pacific pivot."[9] Then as now, the temptation to strengthen civil-military relations by expanding the Army's presence in American public life may well lead to the opposite outcome. While changing culture at any level can be difficult, this expansive, optimistic element of the Army's command culture should be recognized as posing a real danger to its future relations with the public.

Utopianism as US Army Culture

Perhaps no figure was more influential in shaping the US Army's command culture during the mid-twentieth century than George C. Marshall. Described as "the principal military architect of the Western democracies' ultimate victories over the Axis powers," Marshall was also considered by some "the most powerful figure in the government after the president himself."[10] As such, he was responsible for setting the tone of the Army's domestic political strategy, influencing the development of Army utopianism.

A sense of Marshall's preferred command style can be gleaned from a commencement address at Trinity College on June 15, 1941:

> This Army of ours already possesses a morale based on what we allude to as the noblest aspirations of mankind—on the spiritual forces which rule the world and will continue to do so. Let me call it the morale of omnipotence. With your endorsement and support this omnipotent morale will be sustained as long as the things of the spirit are stronger than the things of earth.[11]

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9   This has been described by Joseph S. Nye as "the great power shift of the 21st century." Joseph S. Nye, "Obama's Pacific Pivot," *The Korea Herald*, December 8, 2011. See also David A. Beitelman, "America's Pacific Pivot," *International Journal* 67, no. 4 (2012): 1073-1094.

10   Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 421; Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 402.

11   Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 2: "We Cannot Delay," July 1, 1939-December 6, 1941*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), 538.

Things of the earth eclipsed things of the spirit more quickly than Marshall would have hoped: while public support remained at "unprecedented levels" throughout the war, this quickly dried up after V-J Day.[12] At the same time public support was declining, demobilization and drawdown were shrinking the armed services, if not quite back to pre-war levels. Yet Marshall recognized the threat of Soviet power and believed the public needed to maintain its close attachment to the military in order to provide the groundwork for another mass mobilization. In a peculiar historical echo, just as the Army pivoted from the Pacific to the Eurasian landmass in the mid-1940s while struggling to maintain its funding and capacities, so today it pivots from Eurasia back to the Pacific, once again facing a public weary of war and a Congress eager for a reduced defense budget.

If the problem in 1946 was maintaining public support with less money, without a war to justify that support, and with only a nebulous threat from Russia in its place, the solution to Marshall's mind was Universal Military Training (UMT).[13] Described as "the most revolutionary proposals ever made to the American Congress," Universal Military Training would encompass peacetime conscription, military training for young people, a reserve of alumni trainees and refresher training for six years.[14]

The eminently practical Marshall had little taste for militarism in the sense described by Alfred Vagts, the "vast array of customs, interests, prestige, actions and thought associated with armies and wars yet transcending true military purposes."[15] Universal Military Training represented instead a form of militarization, as sociologist August B. Hollingshead described military socialization in his article in an influential 1946 special issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*.[16] Whereas militarism is generally used to refer to the celebration of the pomp and circumstance of those elements setting military life apart from the norm, militarization refers here to the attempt to integrate a fundamental concern with military affairs into either the individual (as soldiers are militarized through basic training) or into the general public. This preference for broad militarization was a manifestation of Army utopianism, a set of assumptions about the nature of civil-military relations that places the Army at the very center of social life. Army leaders believed a high degree of militarization was both possible and attainable at relatively little threat to the organization itself, since the public and the media were expected to react favorably to attempts to militarize.

While Universal Military Training was an important effort by Army leaders to militarize American society, it was not the only one. Significantly, Army leaders of this period attempted to militarize American society partly through the work of public affairs. Surveying

12   Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 209.

13   John Sager, "Universal Military Training and the Struggle to Define American Identity During the Cold War," *Federal History*, 5 (2013): 57-74.

14   Charles H. Lyttle, "Review of Universal Military Training and National Security, ed. Paul Russell Anderson," *Social Service Review* 20, no. 1 (1946): 111-112.

15   Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Military and Civilian*, Revised Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 13.

16   August B. Hollingshead, "Adjustment to Military Life," *American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 5 (1946): 439-447.

the developments in Army public affairs in the early Cold War period, there is a rich sense of how Army utopianism was integrated into the Army's basic messaging with the public. Messaging in general and public affairs in particular were accordingly championed by several top Army leaders in this period, reversing the trend set during World War I, when the Creel Committee (the first major US military effort to shape public opinion) was disbanded and its organizational developments lost.[17]

Shortly after the war, two reports were submitted to the Army's top leadership underscoring the centrality of messaging activities to military success; these helped trigger the relative rise of public affairs. The Page Report of 1945, recognizing the low prestige of the field, called for a high-ranking officer to lead the new Army public affairs department replacing the World War II-era Bureau of Public Relations. The Army obliged by naming J. Lawton Collins the first Director of Information. Collins was a rising star and would become the chief of staff four years later. His appointment was a clear vote of confidence. Working alongside Collins and his office was the Public Relations Division, headed by Maj. Gen. Floyd L. Parks, another experienced and respected officer.[18]

Under Collins and Parks, the new departments commissioned the Lockhart Report (1946), which advocated the centrality of the Bureau of Public Relations to the Army and the importance of aligning public relations activities with Army goals, "so as to gain maximum public benefit".[19] What precisely this meant was spelled out to the corps of information officers by Parks in an issue of *Army Information Digest*, in August of 1946. Parks noted, "every action dealing with the media of public relations, should be calculated to advance the purpose of the Army as a whole toward the larger objective."[20] He followed with a four-paragraph "Creed of Army Public Relations," which stressed the transparency of Army information and its "public utility function". A tension within Parks' article is evident today: how could one expect information officers to conceive of their role as both active instrument of Army command and as passive public utility? At any rate, few would have mistaken Parks's own clear preference of the former over the latter. These early documents suggest strongly the belief that if the Army is to exist within the broader society, it must pursue its objectives partly by shaping that society.

An indication of what such a process might require can be found in an obscure report by two junior officers, Sidle and Notestein, working at the Presidio in San Francisco for the Sixth Army.[21] Sidle and Notestein presented the report to Maj. Gen. Milton B. Halsky (who signed it) for distribution among Professors of Military Science and Tactics, Senior and Junior Division Reserve Officer Training Corps (Sixth Army

17   Kennon H. Nakamura and Matthew C. Weed, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and Current Issues*, CRS Report R40989 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, December 18, 2009), 14.

18   Both departments would move through a quick succession of name changes, but would eventually be known as Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) (Collins's job), and Army Chief of Public Affairs (Parks's job).

19   Sidney Alvin Knutson, *History of the Public Relations Program in the United States Army* (M.Sc. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1953), 322.

20   Major General Floyd L. Parks, "A Creed for Army Public Relations," *Army Information Digest* (August 1946): 3-7.

21   Their ranks are not listed, and nor is Notestein's first name. Sidle was Winant Sidle, who would go on to a distinguished career in Army public affairs and retire at the rank of Major General.

Area). These were, in other words, professors at colleges with an ROTC program who ran summer camps in the San Francisco area. The nine page report spelled out eleven points of advice for tailoring a sequence of news releases to promote each camp. The instructors were encouraged to prepare biographical cards for each cadet; write a release for the cadet's home town newspapers and school publications; take an effective headshot of each cadet; and tailor a final release to the same publications once the camp finished. More general suggestions included building relations with media in the vicinity of the camp by encouraging press tours and open houses. The authors of the report noted the stories should be based around each camper's expectation of being offered a commission, which was viewed as something worth boasting. All of this media work was intended to promote ROTC training programs as valuable to national security, and so "gag" or humorous stories were strongly discouraged.[22]

It is difficult to imagine an era of journalism where ROTC training might conceivably give rise to dozens, if not hundreds, of stories spread across local media outlets, summer after summer. The plan, however, was clearly given serious consideration, as a note on the archival copy indicates: "CINFO [Chief of Information, Parks's successor] is sending out to all CONUS [Contiguous United States] Armies."[23] The Sidle-Notestein report reflects a spirit of immense enthusiasm and confidence in the capabilities of the Army in actively engaging with press in an overt quest to shape public opinion. This optimistic assessment, their version of Army utopianism, suggests a near-perfect synthesis of military and public interest and a press compliant enough to allow the Army to use it as a mere conduit. Of course, it is unclear how journalists would have reacted to this attempt at shaping their work; it is possible that they would have refused to take the bait. There is also no cause to view this as a sinister or even disingenuous scheme. Rather, it may well simply reflect the great optimism of the report's authors as well as of the Chief of Information.

In retrospect, this optimism may seem out of step with the immediate post-war period, when both militarism (in Vagts's sense) and government propaganda had finally lost their luster. Elmer Davis's Office of War Information and the Office of Censorship both closed in 1945, with significant Congressional pressure acting on the former. The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 outlawed domestic propaganda, a major blow to Office of War Information's successor, the new United States Information Agency (USIA). However, what might today look like moral stances taken against the corruption of the democratic process were at the time more like partisan squabbles, the concern being domestic propaganda would be used by one party against the other. Similarly, many Army leaders still believed George Marshall's vision of Universal Military Training may yet come to pass. So while militarism may have been out of season, it was being replaced by a more sophisticated form of militarization. This transition in turn was predicated on a rather

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22   It is of course not clear whether this attempt to shape news coverage would have had any effect on editors and reporters.

23   Suggested Public Informational Activities for PMS&Ts, Sixth Army Area, 3 April 1951; Winant Sidle Papers, 1950-1999, Box 2, Folder 4, Miscellaneous Correspondence re. PA; United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

optimistic assessment of the press's willingness to serve as a conduit for military messaging and of the public's appetite for being militarized.

In this context, the Sidle-Notestein report draws from a similar well as other utopian articulations of public information policy.[24] On June 4, 1954, for example, Collins's successor as Chief of Staff, General Matthew B. Ridgway, echoed the Page Report of 1945 and reaffirmed the spirit of Parks's Creed in a letter to all major commanders in the Army, which essentially observed the importance of public affairs for Army life. However, he also focused his comments on an issue at the heart of the Sidle-Notestein report, namely the equal importance of troop morale and local media relations to national media management efforts. According to Ridgway, "Only by doing all these things thoroughly shall we be able to gain and retain the confidence and support of the American people."[25] This was not an idle concern on Ridgway's part. A few months earlier, on February 8, 1954, he had "disturbed" the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with critical words to the House Subcommittee on the Armed Services, and particularly his concern the Army would lose too much manpower with the New Look cuts.[26] Speaking before Congress was one way to pressure Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson and President Eisenhower; messaging to the public was another.

By 1956 there had been several important votes of confidence in Army public affairs, and a new understanding was emerging concerning just how extensive Army efforts in this regard could be. Most significantly, perhaps, was in their successive turns as the nation's top soldier, Collins and Ridgway both signaled the importance of the field. At this crucial period of post-war Army reorganization, top leadership support would have been instrumental in allowing the two Army public affairs offices (now called the Office of Public Information and the Office of the Chief of Information and Education) to continue their evolution. To this end, under the incoming chief of staff, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, three Office of the Chief of Information and Education officers undertook a vast analysis of all Army public affairs functions in order to develop a systematic approach for the Army's political strategy. The internal goal of the report was to coordinate what had thus far been four discrete fields of public affairs work: public information (engaging with national media), troop information (informing, entertaining and indoctrinating soldiers), troop education (courses and training for troops) and community relations (engaging with regional media and local governance). The plan, reviewed by the now-retired Parks, was innocuously titled "An Army Public Relations Plan," but in fact was a 250-page, 50-point

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24   Although the terms are at times confusing, "public information" and "public affairs" must be distinguished from one another. Public affairs is the broader category, including not only public information (liaising with the press) but also community relations (liaising with local civilians) and command information (liaising with the troops).

25   "An Army Public Relations Plan," March 7 1956, 216; Chief of Information, Programs Branch, Correspondence, Information Officers' Conference (1959-60), Box 5; Army Staff – Record Group 319; National Archives, College Park, MD.

26   Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New-Look National Security Policy, 1953-61* (New York: Macmillan, 1996), 57.

discussion of how to transform Army public affairs into "aggressive public relations."[27]

The tenor of this plan can be gauged in an introductory section which describes the Army's audiences. Three are identified: the general public, troops, and Congress. But in the discussion that follows, these three are revealed to be in turn composed of multiple, distinct groups that require separate public relations strategies. Thirty groups in all are singled out as requiring special care, including the press, viewed as both audience and conduit; youth organizations; local chapters of national organizations; female members of Congress; veterans of other services; and many more. Notably, foreign publics, whether those of allies or enemies, were ignored entirely: the goal of Army public relations was to shape domestic and internal audiences.[28]

The spirit of the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, which prohibited domestic propaganda, would have been sorely tested by this plan. It included extensive discussion of slogans, marketing gimmicks (e.g. work with Zippo, Hallmark, Revlon and toy manufacturers), major public events and other obvious efforts to persuade the American public of the Army's merits. The plan was also pointedly oriented to the internal public of troops (with multiple subdivisions, of course), but there was an important conceptual development. The plan reversed traditional notions of troop information as concerned primarily with maintaining morale. Instead, troops are viewed much as the press is: both are audiences that need to be persuaded of the Army's message but also conduits through which that message can be spread. In other words, troop information and education were intended to help encourage soldiers to spread positive messages about the Army to their civilian friends and family members, in effect to proselytize for the Army.

In an era of mass conscription, when Universal Military Training was still an Army goal, the utopian spirit of this expansive report is a reflection of a buoyant institution. However, there is no record of the fate of the report, which reflects the more mundane reality of Army fortunes. Post-war drawdown was sapping resources. Overt propagandizing was also coming under attack once again. On May 15, 1957, United States Information Agency (USIA) Chief Arthur V. Larson came under intense questioning by Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson. The USIA's budget was reduced by $20 million, a major blow to the USIA, partly on the grounds that Larson, in Johnson's estimation, had "stepped over the line" and begun using the USIA to support Republican Party interests.[29] For the Army's part, the Office of the Chief of Information and Education's budget had been steadily declining even as the rhetoric of its value to the Army was heating up. In fiscal year 1952, its budget was $3,225,482, but in the year of the plan, the budget was only $832,000—authors refer to this number as "totally inadequate, completely unrealistic, artificial."[30] Even if the plan was not ultimately passed, it remains a significant attempt to reas-

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27   A fourth element, troop education (job training for soldiers), was at that time housed in Office of the Chief of Information and Education, but was soon removed and did not feature in the 1956 plan.

28   "Army Public Relations Plan," 7.

29   Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, TX, "State, Justice and Judiciary Appropriations, 1958," *Congressional Record* 103 (May 15, 1957): 6968.

30   Army Public Relations Plan, 66.

sert the importance of the field to the Army, and in turn the centrality of the Army to the nation.

Justifying Conventional Force in a Nuclear Age

It is not surprising that Army leaders felt their institution, which had performed so admirably in the war, would remain a highly visible and familiar component of the state. But this line of reasoning intersected disastrously with the grand strategic vision of civilian authorities, especially the incoming president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and his New Look policies. Eisenhower's preference for a slimmer Army supplementing the deterrence of nuclear weapons had the effect of challenging the Army's monopoly on conventional force, which was going out of style, and the Army—with its hopes of vast social influence—was faced with justifying its continued relevance.

At this time, military strategy was still coming to terms with the new place of civilians in war. Some strands of nuclear deterrence strategy posited large civilian populations as the inevitable target of Soviet aggression. That conceptual shift corresponded to a reimagining of conventional Army strength as a vestigial organ of state power, most powerfully exemplified by Eisenhower's New Look. Army leaders attempted to reassert the importance of the full spectrum of Army resources, justifying both conventional and irregular units as important front-line elements in the Cold War, which was in contrast to the New Look's preference for long-range missiles with nuclear warheads. These justifications hinged on making the case that limited wars could still be fought without tipping over into full-out nuclear war.

Army utopianism as a political strategy would eventually crash against the realities of American involvement in Vietnam, but at first the region must have looked like a tempting showcase for the continuing relevance of the service's unique capabilities in ground warfare. American involvement in the region consolidated in November 1955, with the creation of Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (commonly referred to as MAAG). This was part of a broader Cold War configuration of such groups. MAAG (Vietnam version) replaced the Indochina advisory group, and worked alongside similar groups in Cambodia and Laos. These groups were headed by military officers but were ultimately part of country teams that were headed by ambassadors, although a separate chain of command put the advisory groups under the commander in chief of American military forces in the Pacific. More simply put, during the MAAG era, the American presence in Vietnam was led by diplomats who worked closely with military leaders.

The MAAG era was characterized by extensive, if not entirely successful, efforts to modernize and train the South Vietnamese military services. The effort was undermined by Ngo Dihn Diem, head of the South Vietnamese state, who carefully ensured top Vietnamese officers were never so competent as to challenge his rule. This was supplemented by CIA operations.[31] By 1961, Diem's military capacity was deemed insufficient for repelling anticipated forays from the North. Something would have to be done. At first, the Kennedy administration

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31   Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., *Vietnam Declassified: The CIA and Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2010).

stood by a counterinsurgency plan that would involve MAAG shifting emphasis toward a pacification logic, which involved both coercion and nation-building tasks. The concept was approved but it was understood that it would be implemented by South Vietnamese soldiers, supervised by American soldiers, and aided by both the Army's Special Forces (the Green Berets) and CIA personnel.[32] A further complication, the Army had only vague notions of what countering insurgent or guerilla forces might actually entail, and according to Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, then Chief of Staff, the training actually conducted at MACV was, as late as March, 1960, fundamentally conventional.[33]

Lemnitzer had replaced Gen. Maxwell Taylor, who had been Chief of Staff when the utopian public relations plan was written. Taylor occupied an unusual role. After his retirement as chief of staff, he had campaigned publicly against President Dwight D. Eisenhower's New Look, particularly its orientation to massive retaliation as the key geopolitical pivot in a nuclear age. In 1959, he published a book advocating an alternative doctrine of "flexible response."[34] Taylor reflected a conventional force sensibility in his resistance to the New Look doctrine, which he argued was premised on the "Great Fallacy" that the threat of nuclear weapons would prevent war. In Taylor's words, "while our massive retaliatory strategy may have prevented the Great War—a World War III—it has not maintained the Little Peace."[35]

Eisenhower's plan relied on nuclear deterrence and market tools to realize American interests abroad, and Eisenhower himself was happy to get his country out of the business of war fighting. In the words of one historian, to Eisenhower's mind, "war was no longer an acceptable means to achieve political objectives. The military's foremost and, perhaps, only mission was to deter it."[36] An added benefit was that once modernized, the Department of Defense could begin accruing savings by cutting "frills" and make do with a "leaner and tougher" budget in Eisenhower's words.[37] It all hinged on one big question: would nuclear weapons prevent limited wars from being fought due to the risk of triggering what was then termed "general war," a third, nuclear world war? In contrast to Air Force and some Navy leaders, Army leaders rejected this notion and anticipated instead a broad space for what was in essence conventional warfare brinkmanship.[38]

The Army's perspective can be gleaned in speeches by top soldiers during this period. On April 6, 1960, Lemnitzer spoke of Soviet expectations of a long nuclear war, one that might start with the exchange of devastating nuclear attacks on civilian populations but would still

32   David Hunt, "Dirty Wars: Counterinsurgency in Vietnam and Today," *Politics and Society* 38, no. 1 (2010): 35-66.

33   David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything But Learn* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 33.

34   Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper, 2007); see also Donald Alan Carter, "Eisenhower versus the Generals," *Journal of Military History* 72, no. 4 (2007): 1169-1199.

35   Taylor, *Uncertain Trumpet*, 6.

36   Carter, "Eisenhower versus the Generals," 1175.

37   As it turned out, this was not a cheaper option, since the arms race quickly drove the cost of strategic deterrence to unexpected heights. See Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New-Look*, 259, 262, 271.

38   Carter, "Eisenhower versus the Generals," 1181.

require conventional forces fighting on land to decide the issue.[39] This nightmarish vision was expanded in another talk in August, where Lemnitzer connected the long nuclear war scenario to the resulting decrease in the efficacy of deterrence. Nuclear war was not considered by American enemies as a decisive event, and so nuclear power was not decisive. Indeed, Lemnitzer informed his audience that Soviet forces might launch a nuclear attack on American soil simply to gain territory somewhere else. Accordingly, there should be no question of restraint when it came to conventional involvement in seemingly remote theaters; rather, a blend of US forces was needed that could go into any given area and "exterminate the rats without destroying the neighborhood."[40]

Lemnitzer was echoed by his successor, Gen. George H. Decker, who spoke before an audience in New York on March 25, 1961 on the subject of "The Army Today." His comments supported Kennedy's preferred orientation to counterinsurgency, while hedging for the importance of maintaining conventional force. He noted, strategy in this complex time "must be a flexible, pragmatic combination of all these [maritime, aerospace and landmass power], considered in context with political, economic, and other non-military factors."[41]

The struggle to preserve Army conventional force would continue throughout the period. Three weeks after Decker's speech, Lemnitzer, now the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, responded to a request from Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara to provide joint doctrine that would minimize conventional force in a nuclear war, emphasizing instead diplomatic solutions through the use of less force and scheduled breaks in fighting. Lemnitzer's response was in effect to reject McNamara's order, noting,

> we do not have adequate defenses, nor are our nuclear retaliatory forces sufficiently invulnerable, to permit us to risk withholding a substantial part of our effort, once a major thermonuclear attack has been initiated… such a doctrine, or to declare such an intent, would be premature and could gravely weaken our deterrent posture.[42]

Decker and Lemnitzer were risking their positions when they pushed back against McNamara, who had President Kennedy's support, but they did so because they believed the Army's monopoly on conventional ground forces retained its central place in legitimating American foreign policy, even in the nuclear age.

During the presidential campaign, Kennedy had championed Maxwell Taylor's doctrine in particular and called him out of retirement to investigate the Bay of Pigs incident. Accordingly, Taylor, along with Walter W. Rostow, was sent by Kennedy to review the situation in Vietnam. In November 1961, Taylor and Rostow offered the

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39   Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Address to the National Association of State and Territorial Civil Defense Directors, 6 April 1960, Box 1, Folder 1, Lyman L. Lemnitzer Papers, 1960-1990, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

40   Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Address to Association of the United States Army, 9 August 1960, Box 1, Folder 1, Lyman L. Lemnitzer Papers, 1960-1990, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

41   Gen. George H. Decker, The Army Today – Address to the Calvin Bullock Forum, 23 March 1961, Box 6, Folder 2, George H. Decker Papers, 1959-1962, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

42   Fred M. Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 273.

fateful call for a "massive joint effort" to guarantee South Vietnamese freedom. Against the backdrop of Lemnitzer's and Decker's thoughts on aggressive postures, and Taylor's own notions of flexible response, this decision was bred of confidence in the ability of the US Army to secure large-scale geopolitical ends. At any rate, the proposal included 8,000 American ground troops.[43] Kennedy balked at the troop request, but approved a scaled-down version of the plan which still signified such a significant increase in the American role that a new headquarters would be needed.[44] With this force, the Army's top leaders began the difficult task of learning counterinsurgency while also establishing a conventional force presence. Twelve years later, the Army would finally withdraw from the region, its relations with the public in a state of crisis.

Conclusion

Since World War II, the place of the Army in American politics has undergone a dramatic transformation. At first, top Army leaders anticipated they would retain a central role in public life and looked to journalists, then working under voluntary conditions of access and recently freed from censorship, to help the Army tell its story. Most importantly for many top Army officers (including a series of chiefs of staff), the Army had to justify its continuing monopoly on conventional ground forces. This had been directly challenged by other services and governmental branches, but was also indirectly challenged by a new emphasis on strategic deterrence (led by diplomats and backed by nuclear weapons). Accordingly, at the beginning of American involvement in Vietnam, the Army focused on conventional force displays and antici-pated that press coverage would rally support behind the organization.

As the Army became increasingly entangled in Vietnam, the impulse to justify conventional force became more pronounced, and counterinsurgency fell by the wayside. In Gen. William Westmoreland, the American forces found a leader dedicated to persistently optimistic messaging and to conventional force. While Army utopianism certainly cannot explain every element of the thinking of the top Army com-manders of this period, it provides a pathway to understanding the domestic political attitudes informing military strategic preferences. If the Army was to be a major component of American society, then it had to prove the enduring value of its core competency, conventional ground war. Both the reliance on conventional force and the utopian vision of the Army would decline as the American body count drew increasing public ire. Eventually, Vietnamization (shedding the Army's command responsibility), matched with strategic bombing (which supplanted con-ventional force), would allow the Army to withdraw from what would become an extremely damaging conflict politically.

Today, the Army's leaders are faced with two challenges: first, to preserve the lessons gained from the Global War on Terror despite the pressure to cut costs and offer a peace dividend; and second, to reorient the Army's posture to a new theater in the "pivot to the Pacific." This dilemma is not so different than the situation facing top commanders

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43   Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 20.

44   Ibid., 43.

following the end of World War II, when a far more dramatic drawdown was paired with a pivot to the Eurasian landmass. In this case, looking closely at the past can provide direct lessons for the present.

In both time periods, the link between the political and operational realities is provided in part through domestic political strategy. In the words of Russell F. Weigley, one of the foremost historians of the Army, "To use—and restrain—its immense social, economic, and political influence wisely and effectively, the Army must obviously hold itself in close rapport with the people."[45] Some Army leaders in the post-World War II period quite reasonably pursued a strategy of close rapport defined here as Army utopianism, which today can be seen as a gross miscalculation of the direction of the broader American political culture. This revealed the relationship Weigley sketches between "influence" and "rapport" is not straightforward, and simply amplifying the Army's presence in American public life can have the opposite of the intended effect.

Lessons/Insights

Accordingly, the first lesson of this historical case study is simply to guard against the optimistic and expansive vision of the Army's role of which Army utopianism is just the most extreme expression.

Another lesson is operational strategy. It is (and has long been) "sold" to the public, and this should be acknowledged as both a fact of life and as an operational concern of the first order. All the armed services are required to liaise with state and society across multiple platforms, and will inevitably pursue more beneficial outcomes to some degree when doing so, and this is especially the case when addressing the core competencies of the given service. By the same token, the political calculus can interfere disastrously with operational planning. The Army's domestic political strategy is not an epiphenomenon, but rather an intrinsic component of operations and one demanding serious attention and study.[46]

A third lesson, related to the second, can be drawn specifically for practitioners of information operations and strategic communication. In these fields, there have been long-standing failures to create comprehensive and wide-ranging strategic plans, attributed in part to competition between the agencies charged with these tasks.[47] The case of Army utopianism reminds that such failures have long dogged the services and may have deep cultural roots. In other words, these may be even less tractable problems than is currently thought. On one hand, recognizing the historical and cultural horizon of messaging problems is a first step in resolving them. On the other hand, and as Steven Tatham has pointed out in the cases of China and Russia, competitor states have already found workable solutions to these problems, and so there is real value in investing the Army's limited resources in this field.[48] Concretely, to

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45 Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 556.
46 A similar point is made by Braun and Allen, "Shaping a 21st-Century Defense Strategy: Reconciling Military Roles."
47 Hans F. Palaoro, "Information Strategy: The Missing Link," *Joint Force Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2010): 83-85.
48 Steve Tatham, *US Government Information Operations and Strategic Communications: A Discredited Tool or User Failure? Implications for Future Conflict* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), 46-57.

better conduct information and messaging activities, the Army should extensively research the blinding effects of its own cultural traditions, recognizing both the contingency and the stickiness of organizational culture.

These lessons can be implemented. It is certainly possible for the Army to guard against a tendency toward exaggerating its role in American social life (lesson 1). Likewise, it is possible to nurture a leadership cadre attentive to its domestic political standing and how it intersects with operational capacities (lesson 2) and how these in turn inform its foreign and domestic messaging (lesson 3).

And so, while the case study is intended to make clear how much the Army's culture has shaped its operational strategy, the ulterior motive is to enable the opposite outcome, the strategic shaping of Army culture itself. To this end, a fourth and final lesson can be drawn concerning the Army's characteristic commitment to conventional force. As in the Cold War, so today the Army navigates between Scylla and Charybdis, on one hand doubling down on its core competencies and potentially blinding itself to much-needed reform, and on the other hand leaping without looking at promising solutions while eroding its identity in the meantime. Between these twin dangers lies the narrow field open to the Army, a field requiring multiple competencies and a close, dialogic rapport with its increasingly global public.