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## The Military Profession

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*Having developed as an institution separated in a sense from the rest of American society and possessing a discreet set of corporate values apart from those espoused by the Nation as a whole, the military today faces an almost revolutionary challenge to some of its most dearly held practices. While all centers of authority face questions about their continued value and effectiveness, perhaps no other profession today needs to confront these challenges with a willingness to try new methods more than does the military. Maintaining a viable fighting force under social and political conditions vastly different from those of the past demands that the services seek to capitalize on the positive values of today's young people—their emphasis on human dignity and their belief in personal and social development.*

# THE MILITARY PROFESSION

A lecture delivered for the Strategy Curriculum  
at the Naval War College

by

Brigadier General Robert G. Gard, Jr., U.S. Army

It is presumptuous indeed of an Army officer to appear before this distinguished audience at the Naval War College to try to address as central and complex a topic as "the military profession." Yet it is necessary for all of us to give this subject careful consideration not only because of current problems with civilian attitudes toward the role of the military but also because of serious questioning by members of the military institution itself.

As the historical orientation of your strategy course suggests, the current situation is understandable only in the light of its evolution. Such an approach is essential in addressing contemporary problems of the military profession in the United States, for the precepts of what may be called "traditional professionalism" are firmly entrenched in the military ethos as well as in civilian

perceptions of the military profession. Attempting to provide this perspective requires what our academic friends term a "conceptual framework," which in turn results inevitably in simplification, generalization, and even distortion; this is necessary, however, if we are to place the subject in a meaningful context.

Prior to the Korean war, an accommodation existed between the requirements for defense and the role of the military professional in a basically anti-military American society. This operative consensus was based on a concept that could be termed "national defense." The United States was protected from foreign power centers by vast expanses of ocean effectively dominated by the British Fleet. We found security through reliance on a tiny, physically isolated Army and a relatively larger but still small Navy, which

could be expanded by mobilization in time of emergency.

Complementing this means of providing for national defense was what one might call a doctrine of "mutual exclusion," a reasonably clear separation of civilian and military functions. Civilians engaged in politics and diplomacy without interference from the military, while the military conducted wars to victory free from civilian intrusion. This division of labor was suited particularly well to a country whose fundamental liberal ethic opposing standing armies, and the use of force was combined with elements of conservatism that viewed international politics in simplistic terms. War was considered a disruption of the normal peaceful order; but whenever a threat to the community arose, war became a moral crusade. Destruction of the offending force was considered the clearest way to end the threat to freedom, and therefore little attention was paid to the nation of using limited force to defeat the enemy.

The development of military professionalism in the United States was responsive to the concept of national defense and to the doctrine of mutual exclusion; and its precepts, by and large, were accepted by the body politic.

The expertise of the military profession focused almost exclusively on the application of military force: planning, training for, and conducting combat operations while including the administrative and logistic functions required for support. The criterion—simple but never easy—was the destruction of the enemy armed force in the shortest period of time with the fewest possible friendly casualties. This did not imply wanton violence; but consistent with the liberal justification for and approach to war, it permitted relatively unrestrained application of sufficient destructive power to cause the enemy to desist in his aggression by defeating his armed force.

This restrictive standard of expertise was rooted in a transcendent sense of duty to the state through loyalty to the lawfully elected executive authority. The military professional saw himself as politically neutral and divorced from politics, in both its narrow and more comprehensive sense. Policy was determined by political leadership, not by those called upon to execute it. Military men considered their proper role to be that of an instrument of the state, to be employed when use of force was required. There was an implicit assumption on the part of the professional that he would be committed to armed conflict only for causes that justified the ravages of war. As long as he was engaged in a moral war in support of a democratic society, the professional saw no cause for apology, especially to nonparticipants.

As a part of the syndrome of traditional military professionalism, there evolved a set of shared values which included strict discipline, and frequently was expressed in summary as "Duty, Honor, Country." Although differing in some respects from the values held by liberal civilian society, these precepts nevertheless were accepted by the civilian community as functionally necessary, and even vital, to the stringent demands of combat.

World War II vindicated the concept of national defense, the doctrine of mutual exclusion, and the traditional tenets of the military profession. At the same time, however, the outcome of that conflict and events that followed shortly thereafter established conditions that required radical revisions. Despite clear signals of the need for change in both military and civilian thinking, it was not until the negotiating phase of the Korean war, when the combat function lost its last vestige of autonomy from politics, that a turning point was evident. The objective of military operations was no longer destruction of the enemy capacity to resist, but it ex-

## 10 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

PLICITLY became a bargaining instrument for an acceptable political solution.

Events during and following the Korean war led to fundamental alterations in the basis for, and tenets of, traditional military professionalism. The implications are profound; but accommodation to these changes, which have occurred relatively recently in terms of the life of a large institution, is by no means complete and continues as a source of considerable controversy both within the military profession and the society at large.

The concept of national defense, with skeletal peacetime forces, clearly was outdated. It was replaced by what is often termed "national security" policy and strategy, applicable in both peace and war. The world situation required not only the maintenance of substantial ready forces but also the orchestration of the military instrument with the other elements of statecraft—political, economic, psychological, and social.

The mutual exclusion of civilian and military roles gave way to what has been termed "fusionism." Civilian participation in what had been the exclusive province of the military professional proceeded rapidly and for valid reasons. Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons made deterrence of general war the highest national priority. Large peacetime forces and budgets, along with the continuation of selective service, caused extensive civilian concern with and involvement in military matters. The expanded civilian role was not limited to the development of strategic concepts or to peacetime military planning and programing, but it extended into operational matters in the control of both conflict and crises to prevent escalation. Obvious examples, in addition to restrictions on ground operations in the latter stages of the Korean conflict, include involvement of civilian officials in the blockade of Cuba during the missile crisis and in the details of air operations over North Vietnam.

The requirements of national security policy both altered and broadened professional military responsibilities. Rather than a cadre function of preparing for mobilization during peacetime, active forces were faced with the primary tasks of deterrence and maintaining combat readiness for immediate employment. Conducting military operations in the nuclear era called for restraint, containment of violence, and control, not exploitation, of force. Victory, in the traditional sense of destroying the enemy's capability to resist, was replaced by achievement of a satisfactory political outcome.

No longer could the military professional concentrate almost exclusively on preparations for war. No longer could he abstain from participating in the formulation of policy and, perforce, in politics. Nor could his advice be limited to "strictly military" matters, despite such claims by responsible military officials. In fact, it was apparently an attempt by the JCS to restrict military advice that led President Kennedy, early in his administration following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, to issue written instructions to the Joint Chiefs that among other things stated:

While I look to the Chiefs to present the military factor without reserve or hesitation, I regard them to be more than military men and expect their help in fitting military requirements into the overall context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in government is to combine all assets into a unified effective pattern.

In addition, new technology and bureaucratic imperatives called for much greater emphasis on skills other than those directly related to the combat function.

A host of factors arising from these and other developments combined to erode the military's traditional corporate values. As the scope of professional,

## MILITARY PROFESSION 11

responsibilities reached into what had long been regarded as civilian functions and contact with civilians increased, there arose within the military profession challenges to such concepts as 24-hour-a-day duty and Melville Goodwin's "genteel poverty." Attacks from outside the profession, centering on disciplinary standards, were prompted principally by the extended period of selective service during peacetime, punctuated by the prolonged and increasingly unpopular Vietnam war.

The conflict in Southeast Asia arose as a test case of national security strategy before the military institution had digested the implications of its changed and broadened professional mandate. Counterinsurgency was a new concept, and doctrine for integrating the application of military force with the operations of other agencies had not been developed. The proclivity, therefore, was to stress the traditional task of destroying the enemy armed force. This mission, of course, was still applicable; but in Vietnam, following the initial defeat of the VC and NVA regular force units, it could not remain the exclusive or even the paramount function.

You are no doubt aware that contrary to all plans for such a contingency, the substantial increase in the size of the Armed Forces for Vietnam was accomplished without calling up the National Guard or Reserve, except for a very small number of specialized units following the Tet offensive. This caused attenuation of the career force and reliance on an inequitable draft for a large proportion of the manpower, including junior leadership positions in both officer and noncommissioned officer grades. The most serious impact, however, was lack of cohesion in our units created by the personnel turbulence resulting from the requirement for a steady flow of replacements to Vietnam.

By no means were procedures followed in the buildup the sole cause for

the difficulties currently facing the military profession, although they clearly contributed to the sharp increase in disciplinary problems. In addition, there were frustrations in applying military force in a conflict with significant political, economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Serious questions were raised by the My Lai incident and all it implied; by flagrant violations of ethical conduct, of which the two most publicized involved the Provost Marshal General and the Sergeant Major of the Army; by perceptions of careerism, loss of confidence in the chain of command, and the development of credibility and communication gaps; and by recent allegations concerning both violations of the rules of engagement governing bombing in North Vietnam and falsification of reports.

As we examine the contemporary situation, we are confronted in part with a customary postwar syndrome rooted deeply in this country's basically antimilitary tradition. We can expect a continuation of recriminations, including charges of military ineptitude, some of which are justified. Criticism for deterioration in standards comes from within as well as outside the profession. Sharp reductions in the size of our forces already have been accomplished, manpower levels programed for the end of the fiscal year are lower than at any time since before the Korean war, and the current defense budget represents the lowest proportion of both the gross national product and the Federal budget since 1950. Another typical response is evident: the American tendency to reorganize as a solution to fundamental problems. Also, we probably can expect an increase in interservice rivalry caused by a combination of the budgetary process and legitimate claims over increasingly scarce resources.

There are, however, new factors in the post-Vietnam era that significantly complicate already serious problems for

## 12 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

the military profession. In the minds of large and influential segments of our population, fundamental doubts exist concerning the effectiveness of military power in achieving political objectives. There is widespread questioning of the morality of the use of force, especially as it affects noncombatants. The military appears as a blunt, insensitive, and even immoral instrument. To some, this not only invalidates the employment of armed force, but it raises questions concerning the legitimacy of military service and even the maintenance of a military capability.

Also, recent changes within our society have been so rapid and pronounced that it has become commonplace to employ the term "social revolution" to describe the composite effect. Whether one subscribes to Charles Reich's *Greening of America* and the counterculture or to Herman Kahn's "Squaring of America" and the counter-counterculture, it does appear that a substantial portion of our population, particularly the youth, doubts the effectiveness of our larger established institutions. There is a widespread belief that bureaucratic organizations are incapable of responding to legitimate individual and social needs; many are disenchanted with what they regard as obsolete structures, outmoded procedures, and insensitive officials. This, in turn, leads to a rejection of obedience to what some view as unjust and arbitrary authority. There is a prevalent desire for greater personal freedom, more privacy, and less formality. In the relatively affluent "post-industrial society," employment and income are regarded to a much greater extent than before as means rather than ends, and there is an increasing resistance on the part of youth to being valued principally as factors of production. Few may be rebelling actively, but many appear to be rejecting role-prescribed behavior. By no means is this "antiestablishment" outlook focused solely on the military as an

institution, but combined with other antimilitary attitudes, it presents a unique challenge to the Armed Forces.

As we search for a new accommodation between the military profession and the democratic society it serves, we must recognize that the essential first task is to restore credibility within the military institution itself. This requires a willingness to learn the facts and face them squarely; to avoid defensiveness; and, above all, to be completely honest with ourselves in dealing with the wide variety of problems facing our servicemen, our units, and our military communities. We must set priorities; because when everything counts, nothing matters. Putting our own house in order is a precondition to regaining the confidence of the society from which we must draw our manpower and other resources.

For it seems clear that the world situation will require the maintenance of a substantial active military capability for the foreseeable future. Reversion to a variation of pre-World War II isolation does not seem possible for the United States, despite a general feeling of exhaustion which seems to have characterized public opinion in the wake of the Indochinese conflict. International society has not yet become a community, and force remains the final arbiter in the absence of a general consensus on the means to achieve peaceful change. In fact, world politics is becoming more complex in multipolarity and in some ways more dangerous. Although general war appears highly unlikely in an era of nuclear parity and although the Vietnam experience has produced strong inhibitions against our committing military force in situations with a high degree of political, economic, and social instability, there remains a wide range in between.

Our principal professional task, therefore, is to provide the Nation with a trained armed force, skilled in applying military resources in support of

## MILITARY PROFESSION 13

national policy. We must develop a greater appreciation of the proper role of military power, recognizing that the ability of a state to accomplish its goals requires linking appropriate means with objectives. Power is effective only if its application produces the desired result; it cannot, therefore, be measured simply in terms of gross military capability or strength. Power is situational, relative, imprecise, subjective, and dynamic. Nor are the elements of state power limited to the military; other sources usually are classified as political, economic, social, and psychological. In responding to the complicated requirements of projecting power in support of national security policy and strategy, it is essential that, as advisers, we in the military profession take into account the suitability of the military instrument in light of the political objective; and in applying military resources, we must learn to integrate our efforts more effectively with other elements of power.

Since you have studied Clausewitz, it is unnecessary to belabor the point; but it is appropriate, nevertheless, to recall his admonitions that war is a continuation of politics, not a substitute for it, and that war has its own grammar, but not its own logic. Yet, at the same time, it must be emphasized that war indeed does have its own grammar. The "management of violence," in Lasswell's terms, is central to the concept of the military profession. It is the function that is uniquely military, with leadership in combat the quintessence of the profession. It is essential that we fulfill our obligation to society by insuring our proficiency in this skill, but as professionals we also have an obligation not to allow armed conflict to create its own logic. This requires that we understand more completely the limits as well as the capabilities of military force. We must never forget that legitimacy of means is important in a democratic society, and it is incumbent on the military professional that this factor be

incorporated into our strategies, tactics, doctrine, and training.

Our record in the creative task of preparing for future conflict is not a proud one. Quite properly, we prize the characteristic action orientation and "can do" attitudes that enable us to accomplish the mission under stress, but we should recognize that they promote a tendency to reduce complex situations to simple problems that can be solved by familiar procedures. We are inclined to emphasize tactics at the expense of strategy. Our experience in Vietnam illustrates the inclination to interpret the situation in terms consistent with existing doctrine; it also suggests that if the objectives are not clear, the tactics employed may define them. As you know from your reading, Vagts draws a useful distinction in contrasting the proper "military" approach of focusing on attaining the objectives of power with the "militaristic" outlook of concentrating on the means. This leads one to question the procedure for development of doctrine by the separate military services, organized principally on the basis of their primary modes of transportation, with the inevitable emphasis on means.

The second major task of the military profession is to maintain a viable and legitimate institution, sensitive and responsive to societal change, while at the same time retaining values essential to success in combat.

There are many within the military who believe that with the conclusion of the unpopular Vietnam conflict the restoration of stability in command positions and a reemphasis of discipline will be sufficient to restore a high degree of professionalism to solve the conglomerate social problem expressed symptomatically by such antisocial behavior as absenteeism, dissent in its various manifestations, racial conflict, crime, and drug abuse. From one viewpoint, these can be considered as no more than traditional leadership prob-

## 14 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

lems; and at high levels of abstraction, this undoubtedly is true. But such an approach risks interpreting current reality to fit familiar prescriptions appropriate to a different situation and blocks a willingness to explore new techniques to meet the challenges of social change. That probably is what Admiral Zumwalt had in mind recently when he addressed the "propensity for self-deception," as he termed it, and the difficulties in effecting change when hallowed routines are involved. As Liddell Hart put it in his *Thoughts on War*: "The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out."

Continuation of selective service might have allowed us to make only minimal adjustments, although it is highly questionable how effective our units would have been under this approach. We are faced, however, with the reality of a volunteer armed force. It appears doubtful that we in the military profession appreciate the implications of this profoundly significant fact. Never before have we been required to maintain a substantial active force in the absence of the draft. With the exception of 1 year between World War II and Korea, we have been able for the last 32 years to rely on a guaranteed labor force. This condition permitted the development of some bad habits and promoted an emphasis on institutional objectives, even unimportant ones, with minimum regard for the impact on our personnel.

Required as a matter of priority is a fundamental reassessment of the balance between short-term, low priority institutional goals and a reasonable response to legitimate demands of our young men and women for human dignity and personal development. Do we really understand that in today's society the accepted leadership principle of taking care of one's subordinates involves responding to needs far higher on the satisfaction scale than even a few

years ago? "Dry sox and a hot meal" are necessary but not sufficient. As your Naval War College President, Admiral Turner, has said: "You must have a deeper understanding of human attitudes, motivations, and behavior than most other professions." Unfortunately, despite a general self-image to the contrary, there is persuasive evidence that in this vital area we in the military have fallen behind other professions.

If we fail to develop techniques to insure adequate positive motivation, we will be unable to achieve our most fundamental and top priority institutional goal of providing the Nation with a viable armed force. For we not only must offer career incentives, but we also must attract to military service a large proportion of our eligible youth, most of whom may intend to serve only one enlistment. This requires that we change

## BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Brig. Gen. Robert G. Gard, Jr., is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, earned both his master's degree and doctorate from Harvard University where his doctoral dissertation was awarded the Charles

Sumner Prize. As an artillery officer, he has commanded a field battery in the Korean war, the 734th Antiaircraft Battalion near Chicago, the 5th Battalion (Airborne) 81st Field Artillery, and the 9th Infantry Division Artillery in Vietnam. General Gard is a graduate of the National War College, has served as a staff officer on the Policy Planning Staff in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, then as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary, and later as Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense. On promotion to brigadier general, General Gard was assigned as Director of Discipline and Drug Policies, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army, and since August 1972 has served as the Director of Human Resources Development.



## MILITARY PROFESSION 15

the prevalent impression among the young that military service is an interruption of, rather than an opportunity for, continued development. We have much to offer. Although war rarely ennobles man, preparation for it requires the development of diverse and interesting skills along with physical, mental, and moral qualities. We must provide both a challenging and personally rewarding experience to foster self-discipline. Contrary to frequent allegation, this does not call for "permissiveness," in the sense of tolerating failure to meet established standards. But it does require recognition that the needs of the individual and the organization, while by no means incompatible, are not always identical; and while priority must be accorded to organiza-

tional effectiveness, greater attention must be given to the impact of our practices and procedures on the individual.

All of us bear a responsibility to the military institution and to the society we defend to revitalize our profession. Public support is necessary, of course, but we must earn that support. To do so, we must capitalize on the positive values of human dignity, subgroup identity, and personal and social development held by a substantial portion of our youth. We should accept as a constructive challenge their calling the institutions of this country to account to match the ideals they espouse with performance. If we fail in this as military professionals, we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

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In a democracy such as ours military policy is dependent on public opinion.

George C. Marshall: Yank, 28 January 1943