

AN UNINFORMED DEBATE ON MILITARY CULTURE

by Don M. Snider

A decade of debate and legislation in Washington designed to change the "military culture" of our armed forces has not been in vain.¹ The number of African-American and female officers and enlisted persons has increased dramatically, women now hold scores of jobs reserved for men just a few years ago, and President Clinton's "don't ask, don't tell" policy has given homosexuals executive sanction to serve in our armed forces.² During the same time, serious failures by the officer corps of two services have focused national attention on isolated incidents of sexual harassment that indicate to many the need for further reform. The most recent example of the continuing attempts to reform military cultures flowed from the celebrated cases of Air Force Lieutenant Kelly Flinn and Army Major General David Hale, and resulted in the attempt by the secretary of defense to standardize across the services the official sanctions imposed for adultery and fraternization.³

Various interpretations clash over this ongoing reform of our armed forces. One prominent participant sees the entire debate through political and conspiratorial lenses, positing that it really started in 1975 when women were admitted to the military academies under the feminists' demand for "simple equality," whereas their real purpose was to overthrow the traditional culture. What is more, the effects of such decisions have remained unexamined even today.⁴ Another widely read and referenced source holds that the American military is becoming dangerously isolated from the

¹This essay originally appeared in *Orbis*, Winter 1999, and arose from the Foreign Policy Research Institute conference "The End of American Military Culture," Philadelphia, Pa., July 15-16, 1998. The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of Defense, or the Department of the Army.

²Craig Donegan, "New Military Culture," *CQ Researcher*, Apr. 26, 1996, pp. 361-84.

³Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), "Secretary of Defense Directs More Uniformity and Clarity in Service Policies Pertaining to Good Order and Discipline," News Release no. 404-98, July 29, 1998.

⁴James Webb, "The War on Military Culture," *Weekly Standard*, Jan. 20, 1997, pp. 17-22.

society it protects, and notes the disdain in which some members of the armed forces hold that society. In this view, further changes in military culture are warranted to reconcile the armed forces to civil society.⁵

In my own judgment, it is fair to say that in most of the debate to date, “military culture” has been presented by the progressive advocates as something unacceptably different from the prevailing culture of contemporary American society. Hence they represent military culture as a belief system homogeneous across all services and conforming to a “traditional and exclusionary combat, masculine-warrior paradigm.” Counterpoised against it is an “evolving model of military culture characterized by egalitarianism and inclusiveness.”⁶ Clearly, given the author’s selection of adjectives, the focus of this representation is on the composition of our armed forces and on issues of gender and sexual preference as they are either included in or excluded from “military culture.”

Such attempts to change American military culture no doubt will continue, and they will continue to inspire a largely rhetorical debate focused narrowly on the role of the traditional “warrior” in military culture and on issues of interest to the progressive advocates of identity politics. And insofar as this debate remains centered on the role and treatment of women, minorities, and homosexuals in the military, then uniformed military leaders are clearly not setting the terms.⁷ As a result, our national discourse is not really about military culture at all, and is incapable of judging whether the changes it is producing are for the good of America’s armed forces and the nation as a whole. I believe that the political discourse leading to these changes has not yet addressed the truly important questions because the debate thus far has been *false* and *misleading*. It has been *false* because it has largely ignored what military culture really is and why it is important. Seldom discussed is the functional, warfighting rationale behind the peculiarities of military culture, what our British colleagues describe as “the right to be different.”⁸ In fact, the adjective “military” is seldom even defined in the context of military missions and tasks,

⁵Thomas E. Ricks, *Making the Corps* (New York: Scribner, 1997); James Kitfield, “Standing Apart,” *National Journal*, June 13, 1998, pp. 1350–58.

⁶Lt. Col. Karen O. Dunivin, “Military Culture: A Paradigm Shift?” Maxwell Paper no. 10, (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air War College, 1997), p. iii.

⁷If they had set the terms, the results likely would have been different, as they were in the case of the Weinberger Doctrine. See Cori Dauber, “The Practice of Argument: Reading the Conditions of Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Spring 1998, pp. 435–46.

⁸Patrick Mileham, “Military Virtues 1: The Right to be Different,” *Defense Analysis*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1998), pp. 169–90.

and perhaps even more important, almost never with the additional description as “effective” or “successful.” America has, and has had, a very successful military, and to debate policies designed to change its culture without at the same time having an informed discussion of the consequences in terms of military effectiveness is folly.

Secondly, I will argue that the dialogue has been *misleading* largely because of the missing voice of the uniformed military leadership, that is, those charged with representing in a professional manner to the American people the nature, characteristics, and needs of our military forces. Their abdication of this responsibility has left others to take it up, albeit with far less effectiveness than they could do themselves.⁹ But this goes beyond the issue of who speaks for the military or how vocal they may or should be.¹⁰ Rather it goes to the issue of the very nature and character of the military institution that is being portrayed to the American public. Is it a truly professional institution that the public will continue to legitimize and support as such, or is it a deprofessionalizing military that will soon lose public support as last occurred after Vietnam? At a time when the press, while reporting on America’s newly found “war” on terrorism, is creating moral equivalency between the soldiers of a democracy and international criminals and thugs, this is not a trivial question.

Thus, in the sections that follow, I will synthesize from the various literature and from my own experiences better informed, alternative views of just what military culture is and is not. In concluding I shall return to the issue of the missing voices of military professionals.

Military Culture Broadly Defined

Our first understanding of military culture is drawn from the academic disciplines within which it is studied, including organizational science, anthropology, sociology, and political science. For the purposes of this discussion, perhaps the most useful starting point is the broad definition offered by Edgar Schein for any organizational culture:

⁹This is not to denigrate the efforts of those who have filled the void, such as members of the Pentagon press corps and individuals such as Elaine Donnelly of the Center for Military Readiness. But even Ms. Donnelly admits to the frustration of repeatedly being asked to provide publicly the expertise and nuance that only serving military professionals possess. (Author’s discussions with Ms. Donnelly, July 15, 1998.)

¹⁰Sam C. Sarkesian, “The U.S. Military Must Find Its Voice,” in this volume (from *Orbis*, Summer 1998, pp. 423–37).

We must first specify that a given set of people has had enough stability and common history to have allowed a culture to form. This means that some organizations will have no overarching culture because they have no common history or have frequent turnover of members. Other organizations can be presumed to have strong cultures because of a long shared history or because they have shared important intense experiences (as in a combat unit). But the content and strength of a culture have to be empirically determined. They cannot be presumed from observing surface cultural phenomena. Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration. Such learning is simultaneously a behavioral, cognitive, and an emotional process. . . .

Culture can now be defined as (a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, or feel in relation to these problems.¹¹

According to Schein's classic definition, and those of other theorists, military culture may be said to refer to the deep structure of organizations, rooted in the prevailing assumptions, norms, values, customs, and traditions which collectively, over time, have created shared individual expectations among the members. Meaning is established through socialization to a variety of identity groups that converge in operations of the organization. Culture includes both attitudes and behavior about what is right, what is good, and what is important, often manifested in shared heroes, stories, and rituals that promote bonding among the members. It is, in short, the "glue" that makes organizations a distinctive source of identity and experience.¹² Thus, a strong culture exists when a clear set of norms and expectations—usually a function of leadership—permeates the entire organization. It is essentially "how we do things around here."¹³

Closely associated with an organization's culture is its climate. In contrast to culture, organizational climate refers to environmental stimuli rooted in the organization's value system, such as rewards and punishments, communications flow, and operations tempo, which determine individual and team perceptions about the quality of working conditions. It is essentially "how we feel

¹¹Edgar Schein, "Organizational Culture," *American Psychologist*, Feb. 1990, p. 110.

¹²Bernard Bass, "A New Paradigm of Leadership: An Inquiry into Transformational Leadership" (Alexandria, Va.: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, Feb. 1996).

¹³Walter Ulmer, Joseph Collins, and T. O. Jacobs, *American Military Culture in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2000), p. xviii.

about this organization."¹⁴ Climate is often considered to be alterable in the near term and largely limited to those aspects of the organizational environment of which members are aware.¹⁵

Climate and culture are obviously related in complex ways, climate being an observable and measurable artifact of culture and considered by many to be one of the major determinants of organizational effectiveness. More recent research indicates that other cultural traits such as involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission orientation are positively related not only to members' perceptions of organizational effectiveness, but also to objective measures of the same.¹⁶ Such definitions would seem to establish from the outset that those who tinker with the culture and climate of military organizations may well be, either unknowingly or without concern, modifying the long-term effectiveness of America's armed forces.

The Four Basic Elements of Military Culture

A second view of military culture is functional in its approach. That is, the elements of military culture derive from the purpose or tasks for which societies raise, support, and maintain modern militaries, for instance, waging war on behalf of the nation-state and, if needed, enforcing domestic order. Even though the end of the Cold War has brought a new emphasis on missions such as peacemaking and peacekeeping, James Burk argues, correctly I believe, that "warfighting still determines the central beliefs, values and complex symbolic formations that define military culture."¹⁷

What makes military culture unique, not surprisingly, is that its central elements derive from "an attempt to deal with (and, if possible, to overcome) the uncertainty of war, to impose some pattern on war, to control war's outcome, and to invest war with meaning and significance." In so saying, scholars are not suggesting that military culture is in any way a mechanistic response to war's horrific environment, nor that the elements are instrumentally rational, thereby "fitting" armed forces to the task of fighting wars. Rather, history abounds with examples of military cultures

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Daniel R. Denison, "What IS the Difference Between Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate?" *Academy of Management Review*, July 1996, p. 624.

¹⁶Daniel Denison and A. Mishra, "Toward a Theory of Organizational Culture and Effectiveness," *Organizational Science*, vol. 6 (1995), pp. 204-23.

¹⁷Within this section all quotations without footnotes are from James Burk, "Military Culture," in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, ed. Lester Kurtz and Jennifer E. Turpin (San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 1999).

that rendered armed forces grossly ineffective at their assigned task, the U.S. Army in Vietnam being a notorious one.¹⁸ These scholars maintain that military culture is “an elaborate social construction, an exercise of creative intelligence, through which we come to imagine war in a particular way and to embrace certain rationalizations about how war should be conducted and for what purposes.” While it is a product of war, military culture also influences the likelihood and form of future wars.¹⁹

The first such element is discipline, “the orderly conduct of military personnel, whether individually or in formation, in battle or in garrison, and most often prescribed by their officers in command.” The purpose of discipline, needless to say, is to “minimize the confusion and disintegrative consequences of battle by imposing order on it with a repertoire of patterned actions that they may use on their own initiative, or in coordination with others, quickly to adapt and to prevail in battle.” In the Gulf War’s celebrated tank battle of 73 Easting, the performance of the Second Armored Cavalry Regiment in combat against the Tawakalna Division of Iraq’s Republican Guard convincingly demonstrated the value of individual, team, and unit discipline.²⁰ A second purpose of discipline, scholars maintain, is to ritualize the violence of war. Following discipline reassures soldiers in combat and defines when and how they are “authorized” to violate the normal societal prohibitions against killing and violence. In my own experience as an infantry company commander in Vietnam, when the enemy was seldom clearly seen and thereby provided few real targets to engage, the discipline of a full rifle team or squad providing covering fire for maneuvering comrades enabled many reluctant soldiers to fire their weapons when they otherwise would not. This reluctance to fire was not new to Vietnam, having been widely documented in previous wars.²¹

Scholars also note historical patterns with respect to the levels of discipline military organizations need and how they are

¹⁸See Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

¹⁹Theo Farrell, “Figuring Out Fighting Organizations: The New Organizational Analysis in Strategic Studies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, March 1996, pp. 122–35.

²⁰Stephen Biddle, “Victory Misunderstood: What the Gulf War Tells Us about the Future of Conflict,” *International Security*, Fall 1996, pp. 139–79; Stephen Biddle and Robert Zirkle, “Technology, Civil-Military Relations and Warfare in the Developing World,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, June 1996, pp. 171–212.

²¹S. L. A. Marshall, “Americans in Combat,” in *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, D.C.: American Forces Information Service, Department of Defense, Feb. 1988), p. 80.

achieved. First, since the earliest times discipline within a military culture has been manifest at the individual level, whether as combat among warrior “heroes,” charioteers, or individual cavalymen. It is a tradition carried on today by fighter pilots in aerial dogfights or tank commanders on the desert floor, however distant they may be when they engage the enemy.

A growing pattern in contemporary war, however, is combat based on the crew or team, disciplined units fighting combined-arms battles within joint commands. In such team-based forces the will and needs of the individual must be subordinate to those of the group (in sharp contrast to the trends in our hyperindividualistic society). Such group discipline, military leaders have learned, must be engendered and enforced by other than the primarily punitive means used in earlier eras when the emphasis was on individual discipline. Janowitz hypothesized correctly in 1960 that with the industrialization of war “there has been a change in the basis of authority and discipline in the military establishment, a shift from authoritarian domination to greater reliance on manipulation, persuasion, and group consensus.”²² Today, leadership texts at schools for officers emphasize routinely, almost regardless of the specific theory expounded, the critical role of the team and group to the success of military units.²³

The second element of military culture is a professional ethos, defined, in the American case, as that “set of normative self-understandings which for the members define the profession’s corporate identity, its code of conduct and, for the officers in particular, its social worth.” This ethos must also be recognized and accepted by the larger society to provide legitimacy and support to its profession of arms, thus emphasizing again the critical importance of the current debate over military culture. Huntington explains it this way:

People who act the same way over a long period of time tend to develop distinctive and persistent habits of thought. Their unique relation to the world gives them a unique perspective on the world and leads them to rationalize their behavior and role. This is particularly true where the role is a professional one. A profession is more narrowly defined, more intensively and exclusively pursued, and more clearly isolated from other human activity than are most occupations. *The continuing objective performance of the professional function gives rise to . . . the values, attitudes, and perspectives which inhere in the*

²²Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (New York: Free Press, 1960), pp. 8–9.

²³Robert L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy, *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Irwin Publishing, 1996), particularly chap. 13.

*performance of the professional military function and which are deducible from the nature of that function. The military function is performed by a public bureaucratized profession expert in the management of violence and responsible for the military security of the state. A value or attitude is part of the professional ethic if it is implied by or derived from the peculiar expertise, responsibility, and organization of the military profession.*²⁴ (italics added)

As Huntington makes quite clear, the professional function—“the management of violence” on behalf of society—is the principal determinant of the military ethos. In General Douglas MacArthur’s words, “yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory; that if you lose the nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be Duty, Honor, Country.”²⁵

In the American case, however, military ethos is shaped not only by this functional imperative derived from the nature of conflict itself, but also from the society the armed forces serve and from international law, which is accepted as binding on the conduct of this nation’s armed forces.²⁶ Thus, while American military leaders today may share many opinions, values, and professional codes and principles with their counterparts in other countries and eras of history, their military ethos is also uniquely informed by the founding values of our republic, including liberty, equality, and the dignity of the individual. The American ethos holds that military institutions should only exist when and to the extent they are needed for external defense, and that the military establishment is always subordinate to the civilian organs of state. Likewise, the moral character of the international laws of warfare to which the United States ascribes (for example, the humane treatment of prisoners of war) influences the American professional military ethos.

Thus, our military ethos is and likely will remain, in Burk’s words, “an amalgam of heroic traditions, technological traditions associated with modern weapons and their use, and managerial traditions of modern bureaucracies that emphasize skilled leadership and coordination of human effort to achieve group goals by rationally efficient means.” That said, it is also obvious that there are inherent tensions among these various influences, tensions

²⁴Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1957), p. 61.

²⁵Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Address to the Corps of Cadets, West Point, N.Y., May 12, 1962, in William Safire, ed., *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1962), pp. 74–78.

²⁶Anthony E. Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1989), pp. 27–29.

contributing to the debate today over military culture. Members of a society wherein self-serving individualism is extolled will find it difficult to accept the soldier’s commitment to unlimited personal liability on behalf of American society, a commitment that presumes personal willingness to kill and to be killed for oneself and for those one commands.

The third element of the military culture, perhaps the most observable in peacetime, consists of the ceremonial displays and etiquette that pervade military life. As Burk writes, “These ceremonies and etiquette make up an elaborate ritual and play the role that ritual typically plays in society: to control or mask our anxieties and ignorance; to affirm our solidarity with one another; and to celebrate our being, usually in conjunction with a larger universe”—in this case the smaller military unit as part of a larger one, and the military as a whole as a part of American society.

Those who have participated in war know only too well the role anxiety plays, both constructively and destructively, in the daily activities of a soldier, sailor, or airman. Thus the reliance on constructed rituals to guide individual conduct and provide a semblance of order to the harsh reality of death and destruction that often threatens to be overwhelming. The salute, the uniform, insignia of rank, ceremonies of induction, promotion, and change of command, all inculcated in training, provide order, hierarchy, and continuity to the life of military units. Burk continues:

Military weddings, retirements, and funerals mark the life cycle of soldiers just as bugle calls and formations at dawn and dusk mark the passing of the soldiers’ working day. Such rituals mark collective identity and group affiliation, forge a common identity and symbolize a common fate. They also serve effectively to connect the unique burdens of military service with the larger society the military serves.

An example of this last function might be when at Andrews Air Force Base political leaders meet the flag-draped coffins of young Americans who “have given the last full measure of devotion” to their comrades and to their country.

As even this brief overview displays, such ceremonialism is not, as many outside the profession of arms contend, an anachronistic persistence of tradition in modern times. Rather, it helps to provide substance and motivation within a culture where one’s self-selected and self-abnegating service to country can be sustained, can be deemed sufficiently worthy as to overcome the increasing degradation of the historic career incentives such as income, medical care, and retirement benefits.

The fourth element of military culture is cohesion and esprit de corps, which are the measures of a unit's morale, its willingness to perform a mission and to fight. As discussed earlier, this is a critical element with respect to the connection between military culture and the operational effectiveness of military units. According to Burk,

Military cohesion refers to the feelings of identity and comradeship that soldiers hold for those in their immediate military unit, the outgrowth of face-to-face or primary (horizontal) group relations. In contrast, esprit de corps refers to the commitment or pride soldiers take in the larger military establishment to which the unit belongs, an outgrowth of secondary (vertical) group relations. Both result to an important degree from structural factors of military organization, but they are primarily matters of belief and emotional attachment.

Behavioral studies since the Second World War have convincingly shown that, in the main, soldiers do not fight cohesively because of ideology or patriotism. Rather, Burk argues that the key factor is loyalty to other members of the unit:

[It] was the capacity of the soldiers' immediate unit, their company and platoon, to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, affection and esteem. These factors increased in importance as war genuinely threatened soldiers' sense of security and recognition of worth as human beings. So long as these needs were met, soldiers believed themselves part of a powerful group and felt responsible, even empowered, to fight for their group's well being. However, when these needs were not met, soldiers felt alone and unable to protect themselves; the unit disintegrated and stopped fighting.²⁷

It should not be concluded from the foregoing, however, that all cohesive military units will be combat effective. Cohesion is a necessary but not sufficient condition for such effectiveness, which depends as well on the technical competence of the individuals and the trust and commitment that link the small unit to the larger command that supplies it with mission, matériel, intelligence, and "the situation specific context within which small unit operations gain or lose meaning and become objects of pride or disgrace." A superb World War II example of the effects of such spirit was the ability of the 101st Airborne Division to fight on at Bastogne, though surrounded, frozen, and badly outnumbered. They had confidence that Patton's Third Army would come to their rescue. These complex relationships between cohesion, com-

²⁷Indicative of the inadequacy to date of the culture debate is its nearly complete failure to address the implications of this, or subsequent, research on why soldiers fight. What will happen to cohesion and unit effectiveness on the battlefields of the future as units are intentionally more widely dispersed and isolated? See Walter F. Ulmer, "Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another Bridge Too Far?" *Parameters*, Spring 1998, pp. 4-25.

petence, chain of command, and esprit de corps are seldom noted, much less analyzed, in today's debates on military culture.

The Heterogeneity of Military Culture

A third fruitful approach to the understanding of military culture questions the homogeneity that is seemingly taken for granted in our uninformed public debates. Is there, in fact, such a thing as an American "military culture" that politicians and other advocates should be concerned to preserve, reform, or abolish? Or are there, instead, an identifiable set of subcultures about which the public needs to be educated? I argue that the latter is clearly the case.

To begin with, it should be obvious to any observer, not to mention participant, that the army, navy, air force, and Marine Corps display sharply divergent cultures.²⁸ Derived over time from their assigned domain of war on land, sea, and in the air, these individual services have developed very different ideals and concepts that in turn strongly influenced their institutional cultures and behavior, particularly their strategic approach to war that establishes their claim on the nation's assets.²⁹ For example, the air force holds dear to the idea that air power is now the decisive instrument of war.³⁰ The army has long understood that to be successful in battle, its ground forces must be supported by other branches and services, and cannot even reach battlefields overseas without the aid of the other two services. Thus, historically its strategy has been based on an integrative, joint approach. But where the air force bases its claims to resources on advancing technological development, the army tends to emphasize the human dimension of war and lobbies for resources to meet the needs of the nation's soldiers and their families.

Different from both of the above, the navy emphasizes tradition and independence, as befits a service whose forces are "over the horizon" much of the time and whose personnel remain focused on "going to sea."³¹ Hence, the navy's strategic culture has long emphasized America's insularity and reliance on overseas

²⁸Equally distinct, but beyond the scope of this essay, is the subculture of the reserve components, particularly the Army National Guard with its militia traditions.

²⁹Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, A RAND Corporation Study (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 31-43.

³⁰Earl H. Tilford Jr., "Halt Phase Strategy: New Wine in Old Wineskins . . . with PowerPoint" (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 1998).

³¹David A. Rosenberg, presentation during the conference "The End of Military Culture."

trade, and based its claim to resources on the need to maintain control over (and under) vast oceanic expanses. Thus, “military” culture and “naval” culture have been, of necessity, quite different. Manifestations of these different beliefs and attitudes have been repeatedly documented, most recently in the high-tech aspects of command and control of joint forces.³²

During the 1980s, the campaign to merge the various services’ capabilities in effective joint forces sparked one of the epic battles of inter-service rivalry, resulting in 1986 in the landmark Goldwater-Nichols legislation that reorganized the national military establishment.³³ Of importance to this discussion is the fact that now, more than a decade later, during which America’s armed forces have fought several conflicts under unified command, a new joint culture is emerging at the field-grade and senior officer levels, belying yet again any notion of a homogeneous “military culture.”³⁴ Whether this is a good thing is largely unresearched, particularly since it remains to be seen at what level conventional service forces will be integrated into joint formations. If, as it appears, they will not be integrated routinely below battalion or squadron level in the future, then organic units of a single service will still obtain “at the point of the spear.” But the fact that an identifiable joint culture is emerging among those officers in permanent joint headquarters suggests the ongoing evolution of multiple military cultures. It also highlights, as will be discussed later, the increasing dominance of the officer subculture.

The myth of a homogeneous military culture is further exposed by easily identifiable sub-subcultures within each unified service. Thus, Rosen observes

that each service is far from monolithic and is not composed of sub-units simply pursuing their own organizational self-interest. U.S. Army officers may come from the infantry, armor, artillery, aviation, airborne or special forces. Navy officers may be carrier pilots from the fighter or attack communities, antisubmarine warfare pilots, submariners, surface ship commanders, or from an amphibious force. Each branch has its own culture and distinct way of thinking about the way war should be conducted, not only by its branch, but by the other branches and services with which it would have to interact in wartime. If we start with this perspective we will be inclined to

regard military organizations as complex political communities in which the central concerns are those of any political community: who should rule, and how the “citizens” should live.³⁵

The point here is that identifiable subcultures, and even sub-subcultures, do exist and are reflective of the domain of war and applicable warfighting doctrines for which their service, or branch, is responsible. Good policy analysis and debate should, indeed must, recognize and account for these differences. It is doubtful that any single policy change will be equally effective when applied uniformly to all of the services, as the secretary of defense is now attempting to do with adultery and fraternization. Broadly based policy changes applicable to all services and branches simply fly in the face of a more informed understanding of military culture. Fortunately, one military leader, the current commandant of the Marine Corps, understands this and has effectively expressed such views on the issue of standardizing sanctions for the offense of adultery.³⁶

Another way to grasp the heterogeneity among military cultures is through the metaphor of the spear. Warrior subcultures within services, such as the infantry, fighter pilots, and all who do actual killing, are at the point of the spear. Others farther down the shaft support those in direct combat through communications and intelligence. Still others near the base of the spear constitute the service support and civilian components that provide theater-level logistical functions such as medical services, matériel logistics, and mobility operations. Though laid out in operational format, this metaphor of the spear has its roots in an important body of sociological research quite relevant to the debate today.

In the late 1970s, after the Vietnam debacle, the armed forces suffered from an evident malaise, particularly within the officer corps. Observing this, Moskos theorized in 1977 that the military seemed to be developing the characteristics of a civilian occupation rather than the profession it had always considered itself. The basic distinction between these two conceptions of the military lay in their relation to, and legitimization by, American society. Moskos noted that society legitimates an institution “in terms of norms and values, a purpose transcending individual self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good. Members of a *professional* institution are often seen as following a calling captured in words

³²Kenneth Allard, *Command and Control and the Common Defense*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1996), pp. 47–88.

³³James R. Locher III, “Taking Stock of Goldwater-Nichols,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Autumn 1996, pp. 10–17.

³⁴Howard D. Graves and Don M. Snider, “Emergence of the Joint Officer,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Autumn 1996, pp. 53–57.

³⁵Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 19.

³⁶Gen. Charles C. Krulak, “Marines Have to be Held to Higher Standards,” *USA Today*, Aug. 11, 1989.

like *duty, honor, country*.”³⁷ Conversely, an *occupational* model is legitimated in terms of the marketplace where supply and demand are paramount, and self-interest takes priority over communal interests.

Building on this institutional/occupational model (I/O), Moskos cautioned that at least three aspects of the creeping occupationalism should give military leaders concern: mission performance, member motivation, and professional responsibility. Research had already demonstrated that: (1) an institutional identification, rather than occupational, fostered greater organizational commitment and performance by the members; (2) an institutional orientation relied more on intrinsic motivational factors such as social responsibility, as opposed to extrinsic factors such as a soldier’s pay; and (3) if an occupational model prevailed, the military function could be falsely quantified for decision-making analysis, severely eroding the value of professional military advice to civilian decision makers. Research conducted over the following decade with the I/O model helped the military make its transition to an all-volunteer force without eroding institutional norms and degrading overall professionalism. In fact, as noted earlier, the 1980s were a period of sharply increased professionalism in all services of our armed forces.

Subsequent research based on Moskos’s model shows that soldiers can manifest both orientations and that the career soldier of the post-Cold War era exhibits a “pragmatic military professionalism” reflecting concerns for both individual welfare and collective national security.³⁸ But where “along the spear” such an orientation has positive results, and where negative, is a question that must be answered by uniformed professionals themselves. Perhaps it is harmless, and even productive, for logistical personnel to “think more like civilians”—but do we really want our combat troops to do so?

The Cultural Dominance of the Officer Corps

The fourth and final perspective on military culture focuses on the stratification of the military by rank, divided as the services are into officer, noncommissioned officer (NCO), and enlisted personnel. This, too, is a distinction seldom addressed, much to

³⁷Charles C. Moskos, “Institutional and Occupational Trends in Armed Forces,” in *The Military: More Than Just A Job?* ed. Charles C. Moskos and Frank R. Wood (London: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers, 1998), p. 16.

³⁸David R. Segal, *Recruiting for Uncle Sam: Citizenship and Military Manpower Policy* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1989), p. 72.

the detriment of our current discourse. If it were addressed, then feminists advocating women in combat would recognize, and perhaps even accept, that the vast majority of female soldiers do not rally to their cause since the issue affects for the most part only female officers.³⁹ The necessary distinctiveness of the officer corps, as well as the nature of the vocation of officership, is perhaps even misunderstood today by members of the profession of arms, including some of the senior officer leaders.

My analysis indicates three reasons for the importance and dominance of the officer subculture. First, officers develop, maintain, and carry through time the unique elements of the profession essential for the military to be accorded high professional status by American society.⁴⁰ But it has not always been so, with the profession having to reestablish after the Vietnam War its professional status, both to itself and to the American people. It was a process conceptualized and executed almost exclusively by officers, a process of reintellectualizing, reorganizing, reequipping, and retraining a demoralized and defeated army.⁴¹ And yet this was very similar to the manner in which that same army was, along with the navy, initially professionalized during the decades of 1880–1910.⁴²

Why is it that some vocations, particularly military ones, are viewed by our society as true professions? According to Huntington, professional status implies a unique and socially useful expertise (the management of violence), a moral responsibility to provide and use that expertise on behalf of a society that cannot defend itself, and an organic unity and consciousness of itself as a group apart from laymen.⁴³ Millett, in turn, emphasizes “a life-long calling by the practitioners,” and notes that “professions are organized to control performance standards and recruitment,” thus using their monopoly of expertise for self-policing of the profession. Such limited autonomy marks all true professions, in his view.⁴⁴

³⁹Laura Miller, “Feminism and the Exclusion of Army Women from Combat,” Working Paper no. 2, Project on Post-Cold War Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge, Mass.: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, Dec. 1995).

⁴⁰Louis Harris and Associates poll, reported in Rowan Scarborough, “Poll Gives Military Its Top Rating,” *Washington Times*, Feb. 17, 1998.

⁴¹For a very informative and readable current-history review of this process, see James Kitfield, *The Prodigal Soldiers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

⁴²Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: Free Press, 1994), particularly chap. 13, pp. 413–49.

⁴³Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 11–18.

⁴⁴Allen R. Millett, “Military Professionalism and Officership in America,” Mershon Center Briefing Paper no. 2 (Ohio State University, May 1977), p. 3.

The point here is that these elements of a profession are almost exclusively the domain of officers, whether it be theorizing about strategy, researching and teaching about war and conflict, crafting the simulations needed to develop new capabilities, writing and controlling the contracts for work done by the private industrial sector, developing the training and evaluation systems, or adjudicating the military legal system to maintain discipline. Very seldom is policy, regulation, doctrine, or personnel action ever promulgated except over the signature of a commanding officer or staff officer. In sum, because of their role, their longevity, and their profession's unique avoidance of lateral entry, officers create and maintain over time those elements that make the military a profession. If you change what the officers think, you will succeed in changing the culture. No wonder that Huntington could confidently conclude decades ago that a military can only be considered professional so long as the vast majority of its officers are loyal to its ethos.⁴⁵

A second argument for the unique dominance of the officer subculture is that officers, through their formal commission as well as their unwritten contract, are the military's connection to American society. It is true that all Americans who have ever served in our armed forces remain connected to their service, if only in memory. But it is also true that officers, particularly while on active duty, fulfill the representative function of the military to civil society. They are the ones who have received a commission, a warrant, from that society to be its agent and to act on its behalf, and it is logical for society to expect individual accountability. As noted decades ago by Marshall, it is the responsibility of the officer corps to serve such that they strengthen the claim of the service on the affections of the American people.⁴⁶ Thus, the concern shown by average Americans to the Tailhook and Aberdeen scandals, though exploited by certain lobbyists in Washington, was entirely logical and correct. More surprising to this author is how mild the public reactions were, inasmuch as these instances were egregious examples of officers' betraying their "sacred trust," and significantly diminishing the professionalism of their services. But even this failure points out the dominance of the officer in military subcultures. While the NCOs involved were held accountable to legal standards for their failures, the understandable outrage of Americans was focused on the officer corps, whose unique

⁴⁵Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 61–62, 74.

⁴⁶S. L. A. Marshall, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950).

responsibility it is to shape military subcultures, particularly with regard to discipline and ethos.

The third reason that officers tend to dominate the service subcultures is their responsibility to shape the organizational climate of every operational unit in every armed force every day, wherever deployed. But if officers, and particularly commanding officers, so strongly influence organizational climate and the military's state of professionalism, what is the professional role today of the noncommissioned officers? What is their influence on military culture? The answer is not so clear. Decades ago, Huntington concluded that "enlisted personnel have neither the intellectual skills nor the professional responsibility of the officer. They are specialists in the application of violence, not in the management of violence. Their vocation is a trade, not a profession."⁴⁷ But while NCOs do not have the social responsibility of the officer and thus serve without commission, they are today much better educated and trained, particularly in leadership skills. In fact, all services have made significant strides in providing sequential schools for the professional education of their career NCOs, just as they have always had for their officers.⁴⁸ The more decentralized military operations become, the more organizational climate will be influenced by the performance of NCOs, thus influencing the overall effectiveness of the unit. This is a key stratum of leadership, but one that has been almost totally ignored in the debates on whether and how to change our military culture.

Conclusions

America can have military cultures different from those that now exist within the services, and in fact further change may be both necessary and desirable. But we will not learn that from the debate as it has been conducted to date. A truly informed debate is called for—one concerned with effective policymaking and focused on all the subcultures and their influences, both positive and negative, on military capabilities and effectiveness. The purposes of the military and its ability to fulfill those purposes should drive the debate, not its racial or gender composition.

At the very least, such a political dialogue should focus on what is distinctively *military* about military culture and why that is

⁴⁷Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 17–18.

⁴⁸The army's success in rebuilding its NCO corps by "leadership development" programs that essentially bundled indistinguishably the roles of the officer and NCO, particularly in training soldiers, also had the ironic effect of confusing officers as to their own distinct role under their commission.

so. For example, the changing nature of warfare in each of its domains, as fought by modern Western powers with volunteer soldiers, needs to be injected strongly into the debate. Unlike the generalized discussions of the past, the level of analysis should extend to missions and tasks to be undertaken by the services and the relative priorities of each. As discussed earlier, these are the principle determinants of the professional ethos and the reason there are military cultures in the first place. In particular, the officer subculture should become, for the reasons already presented, a major component of the public dialogue.

Uniformed military professionals must also become much more involved in the political debates over military culture with well-researched analyses and recommendations. Unfortunately, this remains a field of inquiry almost untouched, particularly by historians, and particularly since the inception of the all-volunteer force in the late 1970s.⁴⁹ But there is another and more important reason why uniformed professionals within the services must articulate better the needs of their services with respect to potential changes in the culture of the organization they lead. Simply put, they are the professional experts and no one else is! Their expertise is born of decades of training and study and episodic experiences in war and conflict, experiences in which American forces have acquitted themselves superbly. And in addition to their experience from the past, uniformed leaders are charged always with doing the analysis to prepare for the future. In this regard, the current era presents particular problems. In eras between wars, military organizations usually adapt themselves, both intellectually and organizationally, to major changes in the security environment and technologies of the nation they are protecting.⁵⁰ The level of professionalism in the armed forces during such periods of peace tends to fall for a number of reasons, but then rises again as the reintellectualization of the profession produces “new theories of victory” and the means to execute them in the campaigns of the future.⁵¹

Today, it is fair to say that that process of reintellectualization after the Cold War has only just begun, and not evenly across all

the services. Thus, it is likely that in many areas it is not yet clear just what changes in service cultures are either needed or acceptable. But the responsibility to get on with the necessary research and experimentation to make those determinations rests with no one other than the officer corps itself. To be sure, there will continue to be other voices in the debate, as befits our pluralistic form of government. But none of these other voices speaks with the experience and judgment that derive from the continuous study, experimentation, and refinement of how best to fight our nation’s wars.

It is high time, therefore, that our military professionals reread the advice of General Ridgway as he and President Eisenhower faced the mission of “preserving the peace”:

I say that the professional soldier should never pull his punches, should never let himself for one moment be dissuaded from stating the honest estimates his own military experience and judgments tell him will be needed to do the job required of him. No factor of political motivation or political expediency could explain such an action.⁵²

⁴⁹Williamson Murray, presentation during conference “The End of Military Culture”; and Andrew J. Bacevich, “Absent History: A Comment on Duaber, Feaver, and Desch,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Spring 1998, pp. 447–54.

⁵⁰Williamson Murray and Allen Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵¹Don M. Snider, John A. Nagl, and Tony Pfaff, *Army Professionalism, the Military Ethic and Officership in the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1999), pp. 16–26.

⁵²Gen. Matthew Ridgway, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 271.