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## The Role of the Military

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# The Role of the Military

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From the EPIIC Symposium at  
Tufts University, February 2004

*General William Nash is former military commander, Task Force Eagle, Bosnia and a veteran of Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm, and author of The Laws of War: A Military View and Can Soldiers be Peacekeepers and Warriors.*

“We, the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves in our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Every officer and every soldier in our armed forces, army, navy, air force, marines, swears to uphold and protect that constitution, the preamble of which I have just read you.

In the political process the constitution is laid down for the governance of the United States and it is as a servant of that constitution and as a servant of our government that the U.S. military will have its role defined. We should not forget that, and I don't think we should apologize for it. The military must remain a servant of the people and of the civilian leadership elected to direct it. I think that's absolutely the most important thing for us to remember, and certainly, I feel that that's the most important thing for the American military to remember.

Fighting and winning will remain the core competency of our armed forces. Now the definition of fighting, the ways of fighting, and the definition of victory will, in fact, change and be largely prescribed by the civilian leadership as well as by the evolution of technology and doctrine and tactics. Warfare in the future will emphasize (as we have seen glimpses of in recent months) the use of intelligence, the use of precision fires, speed of action, and, more and more, a joint integrated effort to accomplish missions. Much of this is all to the good with respect to the fact that it allows wars to take place with less violence to non-combatants. But no matter how smart a bomb is, when it goes off, it is indiscriminate in its killing. The violence that is able to be imparted today is much greater than ever before. And it will be greater in the years to come, but it will be more precise, and the intelligence information upon which it will be used will be better and better and better.

How do you go about defining victory in the war on terror, and how do you combine the ends, the ways, and the means used, the strategy used, to achieve the national goals. As we continue to grow in our thinking with respect to how to engage in this war on terror these issues will necessarily require us to see beyond killing efficiently. We are dealing with an environment throughout the world that is much broader than a military contest. The major threats that come to the United States today are from non-state actors who, by virtue of a sanctuary of some sort in ungoverned territory or by association with nations that choose to harbor them in order to allow harm to be brought to the United States, the western world, or to other enemies of the non-state

actors and rogue nations is a very difficult problem. We need to have civil/military operations in a nation-building environment. We will not be able to win the war on terror with force alone. It will require the integration of political, economic, social, as well as military power. And the building that's associated with this war will be as important, if not more important, than the destruction that the war brings about.

We will have to husband our resources. I think we have seen, because of our concern with Iraq, that resources were not devoted to Afghanistan. We took on another large mission before we had finished the last one. If we think back to the strategy of World War II, we had to limit our desire to do everything at once; the Europe first versus a dual strategy with respect to Asia. Even though we knew that at some point we would have to enter the continent of Europe and defeat the Nazi force in a direct confrontation, working at periphery was required to develop the capacity to cross the Channel and attack the heart of Germany. It required preparation in terms of the weapons of war and also in the capability of the force to meet the challenge. The growth that took place first in North Africa, later in Italy, gave us the capacity to cross the Channel and engage Nazi Germany head on. Likewise we were able to develop a strategy unique to the circumstances of the Pacific largely with economy of force elements in order to take Japan. And then, of course, technology brought an earlier end to that contest in the Pacific than we had imagined.

I mention this not to compare the war on terror to World War II, but to cause you to think through the fact that we, as a nation, will have to approach this in a way of combining ends, ways, and means in a manner to husband resources and put them to use achieving our desired goals.

I guess as a global citizen I should say a few words about our relationship with the international community, which, I would argue is both a participant in this war on terror and the battlefield. There are in fact 190 players (states), not all of them are important but all of them are present and all have an impact on our ability to put the necessary ends, ways, and means together to go after terrorism. But I believe that as we do that we must, number one, provide for the common defense and the prosperity of ourselves and our posterity; and that at the same time we must integrate our capacities with those of others for our own good as well as the greater world's.

*Jeffrey W. Taliaferro is assistant professor of political science, Tufts University and author of Balancing Risk: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery.*

I'd like to offer a few thoughts about the role of the U.S. military. To echo Robert Art and Barry Posen, both of whose books members of the symposium have read in class, grand strategy is simply a state theory about how it can best cause security for itself. The state identifies likely threats to state security and it must prioritize those threats because even the most powerful states in the international system face a potentially infinite number of threats but only have finite resources with which to meet them. Ideally, the three principle components of grand strategy — the military component (military doctrine, how our armed forces are organized, what missions they are supposed to perform) the diplomatic component, and the economic component, should be well integrated.

With that broad definition of grand strategy and components I'd like to raise some issues about the future role of the U.S. military. Since 2001 the United States has fought two wars, one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq; military operations at least at some scale in Afghanistan and on a large scale in Iraq are ongoing. We've done

this with a military, particularly an army, which is the best trained, most professional military force in the history of the world, and we have done this at a time in which the United States is preponderant in all of the underlining components of material power including military power and technology.

But one of the fears is that we have stretched our military much too thin. Our active duty army is approximately 380,000 troops. In order to carry out missions in Afghanistan and post-war stabilization in Iraq, we've had to rely very heavily on Army Reserve and National Guard units. We have deployed units for long tours of duty. Now, while it is true that the military is the servant of the American people and that all members of the military from privates first class to four star generals take an oath to defend and protect the constitution of the United States and obey the orders of the president and national leaders, one has to ask how much strain can our military take? How often can one deploy individuals who are in the Guard and Reserve who have careers outside of the military, who are taking leaves from their civilian careers and from their families for these prolonged, sometimes year-long, tours of duty before it begins to affect re-enlistment and recruitment.

The second question I think we have to look at is the relationship between the political objectives of U.S. grand strategy and how we actually employ a military instrument. Over the past few days everyone in this room has heard the question "is the United States an empire or not, and if so, what should we do about it?" Well, I would argue the United States has been an empire for better or worse since the Spanish/American war in 1898 although we really don't like using E words; it conjures images of imperial role, the empire "Pax Americana" bestrode the world like a colossus. It sounds like something right out of Edward Gibbon. We invaded this country and invaded that country and then wondered, why do they hate us?

I know that was a cheap shot, this is a real question: What are we going to use the military for and what types of missions? If we're going to have a military, rather, if the political objectives of our grand strategies are going to be to topple the governments of rogue states and intervene to either prevent state failure or to bring states back from the brink of failure, particularly states in strategically volatile regions in which there is a possibility that elements within those states are either terrorist organizations or in which the leaders or elements within those states seek to obtain weapons of mass destruction, then obviously we're going to be in a different type of military than the type of army and navy and marine corps that fought in the two world wars of the past century, that fought the Korean war and the Vietnam war, and that is going to entail some difficult trade offs, particularly since expanding the active duty military and retreating from an all volunteer force to the dreaded C word, conscription, is really the third rail of politics for a lot of people, including those in the uniformed military. That's a discussion that I think we need to have.

The third and final point that I'd like to make is the primacy of land power. In the 1990s after the first Persian Gulf war, the U.S. fought a number of engagements in which it relied very heavily on air power, very heavily on precision guided munitions and satellite base intelligence. There was a tremendous amount of talk, some of it in academic journals, some of it in the popular media, about how air power would be the dominant military component in the 1990s and in the twenty-first century, and how one could basically fight wars, or rather the United States could basically fight wars with zero casualties from enemy fire. How many Americans were killed during the Kosovo war? Not a single one by enemy fire.

So there was a tremendous amount of discussion that air power was the preferred

military instrument. I think that the events over the past two years have rightfully turned that argument on its head. In order for the United States to protect its interests, in order for the United States to defend vital areas of strategic concern and to advance various non-critical security components, we need a well trained large, active-duty army. There is no substitute for having boots on the ground.

*Gwyn Prins is author of The Heart of War; On Power, Conflict and Obligation in the 21st Century and Alliance Research Professor, European Institute, London School of Economics and Columbia University.*

**T**hank you very much Madam Chairman. What I want to do in the ten minutes that I have, sorry nine minutes and forty-two seconds, is to talk about a small subject which is the future role of the nature of military force.

Let me start by telling you that bicycling in the summer in the South of England is fun. We know this because in the summer of 1899 a particular gentleman — bicycling was all the rage — went for a cycling holiday with his mistress. It was actually the last time that he saw her though she didn't know that this was to be the case. He wrote in his diary, "Went to Sussex to say goodbye to E," (he was diligent enough not to put her name in). Apparently they did have a nice bicycling holiday, and then the gentleman in question went to South Africa, because in 1899 the British army was sent to South Africa and the gentleman in question who went to see his mistress and then dumped her was Alfred Lord Milner.

Lord Milner was the brains behind the Boer War. He argued that the Boers would have to be dealt with and so better deal with them sooner than later. He set about a policy of consciously goading Paul Kruger, the president of the Transvaal, and more reluctantly President Steyn of the Orange Free State, into attacking the British Empire, which they duly did. And the British Empire responded by then sending an army to South Africa to defeat the Boers, but it was the wrong army for the job. The British army that had been developed in the middle of the nineteenth century was a lightweight force under the Cardwell military reforms; it was designed for intervention in a colonial context; it was not designed, it was not even remotely designed for the war that it found it had to fight in South Africa.

This isn't a history lecture because we don't have time for that. Do, however, study the Boer War. It was the moment at which twentieth century warfare became vividly apparent. The second moment actually, the first, of course, was on this continent in the American Civil War. This is where the tactics of the trenches in the First World War were first to be seen. In the context of the Boer War the British army had to reinvent itself. It had to develop radical new tactics, it had to provide itself with quite new equipment, new ways of fighting. It had, in fact, to change its generals before it won, which it did, and it did so very bloodily at the cost both of its own imperial soldiers and at the cost of the Boers themselves. This, remember ladies and gentlemen, is the war from which the term "concentration camp" comes. It was the Boer women and children who were herded into concentration camps where one in five of them died so that the front could be cleared so that the Boer commandos could be swept up.

And yet within fifteen years of the Peace of Vereeniging, which was the moment when the Boers were thought to capitulate, a key Boer general, the most successful of the commandos, General Smuts, had become a member of the Imperial War Cabinet and wrote the paper that was the foundation of the Royal Air Force. Why do I tell you all this? Because in 2003–4 the U.S. armed forces in Iraq face an eerily similar problem.

I suggest that there are several lessons that are now clear. First, competent militaries will not be conducted under the operational command of the United Nations. That opportunity died in fact on a specific evening, May 7, it was a Sunday, in the village appropriately named “Village of Waterloo,” but not in Belgium. Waterloo is a small village near Freetown in Sierra Leone, and it was that evening when a small group of British soldiers managed, by the skin of their teeth, to save the UN’s largest deployed force to date, UNAMSEL, from defeat at the hands of the Revolutionary United Front. But from that moment onward, which then was the beginning of Operation Palliser where the British saved both the UN and Sierra Leone, it became clear that competent military forces will not, in the future, be run by the UN.

Second, we don’t know this, but it may not be possible even to have sub-contracting mandates of the sort we had in the first Gulf War, resolution 678, as a consequence of the paralysis of the Security Council that was brought about accidentally but jointly by Mr. Blair and by President Chirac last year.

Third, I think it’s also clear that competent military forces will not be deployed in formal alliance. We know that because NATO was not used decisively in either of the last two major operations. The European Union is incapable of technical cooperation; it has no agreed concept of operation or indeed any agreement on foreign policy objectives; and the Asian Regional Forum, which is the other regional organization, simply isn’t this way inclined. No, the hard truth is that competent military forces will only be used in the world under that condition. They will only occur when the United States consents, not necessarily participates, but does not wish to interdict the use of that force.

If we look at the record, that is, a list of operations that have taken place since 1999, the record is perfectly clear. We have had Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, as I already mentioned, Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, and now, although obliquely through the gambit over the return of Libya, we will have decisive action remotely by military force in Zimbabwe and Iran and possibly others.

All of these operations have certain interesting and important similar features. First, if the Security Council of the UN is involved at all it is through providing sub-contracting mandates but not through directing the operations. Second, these are operations that are conducted either by single states or by coalitions of the willing and able. Third, they are normal military operations, they are not the funny special thing called “peacekeeping” or “peace enforcement,” which was much discussed in the 1990s. And, de facto, these are all operations that meet the “just cause” criterion of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, even when that criterion is not claimed, as it was not initially claimed certainly by our prime minister in the case of Iraq.

Now, if that’s the future, then there are good reasons why the U.S. Army shouldn’t work in these circumstances, and they are to do with the very core and self image of the U.S. Army, of which I don’t think I have to remind you at length here. But it is that up until 2003 the philosophy, the way of war and the way the armed forces have been used by this country, has been Shermanite. From the time of the burning of Atlanta and the march to the sea through Georgia, the philosophy is that when the U.S. Army is employed, it is the use of overwhelming force to break the enemy as quickly as possible to end an unjust war, to minimize the risk to our troops because, as General Sherman explained in his famous exchange of letters with General Hood, by definition, moral responsibility for the horrors of war never lies with the U.S. Army, it lies with whoever it is who has brought war into our happy land, in

the case of the Civil War, the Confederates.

And that has, up until 2003, defined the broad way in which the U.S. Army has fought every engagement in its history. It is a war fighting force; it pours on the fire power. Force protection is a top priority mission. We saw this very clearly with the American forces deployed like Ninja turtles wrapped up in their armored cars in Bosnia. It's fast in, and it's fast out, because war is hell, and they want to end this horror as quickly as possible.

So ladies and gentlemen, the twenty-first century world is one that will require a return to something very much more familiar to those with a sense of history. The use of armed force in the twenty-first century will be in an operation that I describe as a strategic raid. A raid is familiar to you all — a force goes out of the main body, strikes a target, has an effect tactically of changing the correlation of forces beneficially and returns. A strategic raid is where the military force is inserted into a place, and when it returns from that place the correlation of political forces on the ground will have been changed irrevocably. That's a strategic raid, and that's what nineteenth-century imperial effects-based warfare was all about.

In the twenty-first century we now have two successfully fielded models, a lesser and a greater model. The lesser model is the Afghan war model, and this is an operation by the de facto successor to the now defunct NATO alliance, and this is controlled by the group of countries that are participant in all uses of competent military power, namely the intelligence special relationship countries: Australia, Canada, Britain, the United States and New Zealand. They provide the combination of electronic intelligence, of human intelligence, and of special forces. Specialists are, on occasion, added. In the case of Afghanistan, the important Russian contribution, and then, of course, local allies, in that case the Northern Alliance commanded and controlled on the ground by British, American, and Australian special forces riding horses.

So that's one model in which we have seen not the U.S. Army but a specially trained portion of it, special forces and the Marines. The great question for all of us during Kosovo was whether the U.S. Army, that is the mainstream army, was capable of fighting in a different way. And I will be candid, I was skeptical when the operation to liberate Iraq began. But we now know differently, because the Iraq war model is the larger one and it is an amplification of what was done by the British army on a small scale in Sierra Leone. What we now see is that the leading edge effect of armed force in the twenty-first century is increasingly psychological, it is no longer inevitably kinetic. Sorry, that's a pretentious way of saying that soldiers have guns that fire pieces of metal of high velocity that kill people, and that is not now the first wave, the first edge effect of military force.

What we now see are operations of which the liberation of Iraq was a classic example in which the mainstream American army showed itself capable of operating for the first time in its history in a completely different way in which psychological operations were the leading edge along with information operations and precision strike.

This, in conclusion, raises two surprising questions. The first question is this: now that it is plain that very large political gains may be obtained at remarkably low levels of casualty, because although people die that is the hard truth of these new ways of warfare — discrimination and proportionality can be employed in the use of force — does it then follow that just war theory, that is to say the *causi bello*, the way in which war is fought, can now once again be employed? And the second

surprising question — and a hard one — is, given that and given that the suffering that is caused by large scale sanctions is now well documented, does the arrival of relatively efficient effects-based network-centric warfare demand a revision of the assumption that the use of force is always the last resort, or in UN-speak does it mean that the assumption that Article 6 and Article 6 ½ always come before Article 7, Chapter 7, will hold. ❀



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