# MILITARY PROFESSIONALS AS POLICY ADVISERS

William E. Simons
Lt. Col., USAF

August 1968



P-3856



22

# MILITARY PROFESSIONALS AS POLICY ADVISERS

William E. Simons*
Lt. Col., USAF

The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

Along the route of the shuttle-bus between the Department of State and the Pentagon Building, one passes a new and steadily expanding section of Arlington Cemetery -- grim reminder of the responsibility assumed by those who make national security policy. As a result of both public legislation and historical precedent, the military profession shares in that responsibility. Moreover, as a group with what Sir John Hackett calls an "unlimited liability" to support their nation's policies, they have an obligation that goes beyond purely constitutional imperatives.[1] They have both a vested and a public interest in seeing to it that national military commitments are based on realistic and sufficient assessments of our vital national security concerns.

In the continuing controversy over Vietnam it has become the vogue for those critical of U.S. involvement to challenge the policy role of the military. Charges of public "brain-washing" have been levied against that old bugaboo, "the military-industrial complex." Some extremists have demanded an end to "the Pentagon's unwarranted influence" on national policy formulation. But in this respect, the current confrontation between Vietnam "doves" and

---

*Any views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of The RAND Corporation or the official opinion or policy of any of its governmental or private research sponsors. Papers are reproduced by The RAND Corporation as a courtesy to members of its staff.

"hawks" has provided only the most recent episode in a recurring controversy in American public life.

Opposition to military influence on policy-making is not new. It played a significant role in the great debate which shaped our Constitution and it was voiced frequently in the early years of our national political life. More recently, during the Eisenhower Administration, it was expressed in foreign policy literature expressing concern over too-vigorous prosecution of the Cold War. In the Kennedy Administration, it found vocal support in Congressional protests against military participation in programs designed to educate the public on national security issues. Such opposition is merely another aspect of the classic and continuous public "dialectic between freedom and security."[2] On one side of this dialectic, those who see great evil in public policies or actions which encroach in any way on individual liberties feel threatened by the prospect of policy that is influenced by a profession whose raison d'etre is collective security.

A modern nation state's performance in both domestic and international affairs is dependent in large measure on its effectiveness in balancing the imperatives of freedom with those of security. Both qualities are essential to the health and growth of a political society. Similarly, improved national performance has been accompanied by an increasingly effective partnership between civilian and military officials in the shaping of national policy. To borrow from Clemenceau, if war is too important to be left to the generals, the maintenance of peaceful order is too complex to be left to the politicians or the political idealists.

By ignoring this reality, critics of a policy role for the military in effect reject the democratic ideals

that they openly espouse. The fact is that the arch-conservative viewpoint they fearfully attribute to a military stereotype could not find voice in American political dialogues if it did not exist already in the civilian community. In a society as oriented to the civilian as that in the United States, so-called "military" arguments could not be heard in domestic politics unless they had strong advocates within civilian political circles. I do not call attention to this to suggest either the correctness or incorrectness of such arguments. Indeed, it is evident that they have not represented a dominant view within the electorate in recent years. Rather, the point is that these arguments represent a legitimate point of view that finds a civilian voice at least equally as powerful and as entitled to be heard as the voices of those who deny a proper role for the military profession in policy formulation.

Actually, the military are no more representative of this arch-conservative viewpoint than the civilian population is of an ultra-liberal opinion. Since the early 1950's, professional officers have increasingly exemplified the different combination of socio-economic background and educational preparation that have produced the range of social and political perspectives found in the civilian community. The almost uniformly conservative attitudes of the pre-World War II professionals have been offset considerably by larger numbers of career officers with more liberal views.[3] Of course, on issues of national security, the predominant professional attitude remains conservative. However, it is a conservatism stemming from responsibility for that particular aspect of American life -- much as business

executives are conservative about matters of company finance and college professors are conservative about academic policy. Would anyone suggest that these kinds of attitudes make it improper for these men to influence policy in their particular spheres?

It is no less proper for the military to contribute to policy-making in the national security sphere. The kinds of responsibilities that affect their attitudes also help equip military officials uniquely for rendering policy judgments. Being charged with the management and direction of military forces committed to the implementation of policy, military officers are particularly aware of the costs in material and human resources which certain kinds of decisions can incur. Moreover, in addition to their direct staff and field experience, many officers acquire formal educational backgrounds comparable to those of civilian officials. The combination provides invaluable preparation for evaluating the political-military interactions likely to result from contemplated policy decisions.

With human resources at its disposal so uniquely qualified to offer practical and rational judgments on vital national security issues, it is essential to the national interest that the military profession take a vigorous part in helping to determine what these policies should be. Indeed, it would be irresponsible if the profession were simply to wait passively while policy determinations were being made. The days of such a simple division of labor between the Nation's military and civilian officials have long since passed. The interaction of military and non-military elements in the emergence of

national security issues has become so complex as to require military judgments as a regular part of the policy-making process.

There are several reasons why this is so. The basic reason is that all aspects of national security policy relate in some way to the use or condition of military forces. Both deterrence and forward defense policies depend in large measure on the way forces are postured and deployed. If either of these policies should fail to have its desired effect, the forces may have to be committed to combat. Adjustments in national monetary policy may affect troop deployments or weapon and equipment purchases. Domestic economic and social programs may produce changes in military force composition and require adjustments in training programs. Mutual assistance agreements usually create personnel requirements for overseas missions which the military services must accommodate. Arms control negotiations may infringe on the operational procedures and logistics of forces in the field. National budgetary decisions establish real limits on various military programs.

To attempt to develop such policy elements without benefit of military advice could result in serious over-commitments of available resources and obvious program shortcomings as the policies were implemented. The range of national security problems affecting military forces is more than matched by the variety of non-military agencies and offices whose advice is sought on these problems. One could not expect even the career officials in these agencies to be fully aware of the military impacts of their

recommendations. Less likely to be sensitive to such matters are the more itinerant, bright young men with whom the civilian agencies in Washington seem to abound. These occasional members of the bureaucracy, who move in and out of Government or shift from agency to agency, may not remain long enough to experience the consequences of policies on which they render judgments. It is important, therefore, that military professionals, who have had to cope directly with the procedures and effects stemming from various policy decisions, be given opportunity to review and recommend positions on issues likely to affect them.

A second reason is encompassed in the observations of Karl von Clausewitz that:

> Wars are in reality...only the manifestations of policy...; policy is the intelligent faculty, war only the instrument, and not the reverse.[4]

If one substitutes "military action" for "war" the meaning is sharper; Clausewitz reminds his readers that policy judgments establish the intent and provide the direction for all military activity. It follows, therefore, that means are needed to assure that military activities are carried out in ways appropriate for policy.

Encouraging military participation in the development of policy is one means of providing such assurance. Having the military profession involved in the development of national security policy increases the likelihood that the full intent of policy will be understood by a primary implementing agency. Thus, the implementing directives and command judgments can be more readily attuned to the purposes

perceived by national leadership. Conversely, the likelihood can be lessened that the implementing actions may inadvertently convey signals to friend or enemy that conflict with the original policy intent.

A third reason is to assure that policy decisions are based on realistic appraisals of the strategic alternatives available to the United States. To be sure, the military profession has no monopoly on wise uses of military power. Forward-looking military concepts and timely strategic judgments have also emanated from the civilian research community and from certain civilian officials. Moreover, excellent studies, like Elting Morrison's Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy and Barbara Tuchman's The Guns of August, have appropriately illustrated the shortcomings of doctrinaire applications of purely military rationale. Still, while perhaps not always proven correct in the strategies they recommend (And who is?), military officials are uniquely well qualified to describe the resources and costs demanded by available strategic alternatives.

Realistic strategic appraisals are essential to help national leaders examine critically any schemes for scoring major international coups "on the cheap." While much has been written about the doctrinal biases and past errors of the military, little criticism has been directed toward these politically attractive, intellectually exciting strategies devised by highly persuasive but overly academic theoreticians. These schemes have great appeal for the policy-maker who feels the need and the pressures to take some initiatives, but who recognizes the severe penalties of over-commitment and the difficulties of rallying public

support for less palatable, though perhaps more assuring measures. The Taft-Radford proposals for relying on offshore air and naval power to contain Communist expansion provide one example.[5] The Schelling theories and analogies on behalf of "compellence" are another.[6] The initial wave of counterinsurgency tracts represents a third.

Such ideas have wide appeal. They give intellectually live persons an opportunity to spin out internally rational theories on matters of public importance. They provide public officials with hopeful ways of dealing with sticky national security problems when more conventional solutions are clearly unacceptable at the time. They may offer defense industries and "think factories" new areas for research and development. They may also promise individual services opportunities to regain prestige or support which they perceive as lost.

Not that these kinds of appeal are harmful in themselves. On the contrary, it is out of motivations like these that many sound ideas and effective policies also emerge. The critical problem is that such multiple appeals, and the pressures they generate have a tendency to obscure the hidden and ultimate costs.

Unfortunately, the costs can be high. National military involvements that might be avoided in the face of risks and costs associated with more conventional solutions may be entered into -- in the belief that desirable results can be obtained by the "cheap" approach. The plain truth, demonstrated repeatedly in history, is that major international successes seldom come cheaply. And, once entered, national commitments intended to achieve them seldom are short-lived. One need only consider the oft-repeated reference to the

contributions of "three Presidents" to current Vietnam policy to realize how subtle and far-reaching seemingly "safe" international policy decisions may be.

Being long-experienced and professionally involved in the real costs of overseas commitments, the military services must assist in evaluating the alternative strategies available to U.S. leadership.

Actually, the military does participate in the policy-making process -- through the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Staff, and unilateral service channels. As "the principal military advisers to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense," the JCS register policy viewpoints and recommend courses of action to deal with most major national security issues.[7] This can occur either as a result of a request for JCS views, channeled through the Secretary of Defense, or as a result of JCS initiative. Their viewpoints are also injected into various interagency committees by high-ranking members of the Joint Staff. The principal bodies in which these are represented at present are the Interdepartmental Regional Groups -- one for each major foreign policy area. Among other supervisory functions, these bodies are tasked with developing formal statements of U.S. policy objectives (Country Analysis and Strategy Reports) and with recommending policies to deal with developing situations in the geographical region each represents. Other Joint Staff officers participate in such interagency functions as the development of Country Internal Defense Plans, which provide guidance relevant for the military assistance programs.

Aside from their routine staff contributions to the development of JCS policy positions, the individual services also have unilateral means of influencing policy. Legislation provides the service chiefs with procedures for making their own views known outside the regular JCS-DOD channels. The chiefs may appeal DOD policy recommendations through direct access to the President. They and their deputies are also enjoined to testify before Congressional committees and to present their views irrespective of those recommended by the JCS corporately or by the Secretary of Defense. In addition, the individual services are able to transmit their unilateral views to the Secretary of Defense through their respective civilian secretaries. Concepts and arguments which become altered or beclouded in the process of joint staffing can sometimes be presented more clearly and persuasively through this channel.

However, in the past, the services have not tended to use these direct channels to express individual views on issues that commit the nation as a whole. Rather, they have been used primarily to comment on specific force-related issues -- whether or not to buy a nuclear carrier, whether or not to authorize additional tactical fighter wings, whether or not to create an air-mobile division. Although these issues are important to the shape and thrust of national security policy, the commitments they entail consist of providing certain levels of funds, supporting particular force levels, or structuring our defense establishment -- all elements that can be redressed unilaterally (though perhaps not readily) through subsequent appropriations or legislation. Only indirectly might these

commitments move the nation toward or away from involvements in conflicts or in alliances that determine the thrust of national life for a generation or more in the future. The service chiefs have very rarely addressed this latter kind of issue through their privileged access to the nation's Legislative and Executive leaders.

Views of the chief military officers on the more deeply committing national policies usually are submitted by the corporate JCS body through formal Department of Defense channels. The Secretary may or may not forward the views of the Chiefs if they have not been specifically requested by another agency. Similarly, at his discretion, he may or may not explain to the Chiefs the reactions which their views have evoked from other high-level officials. However, the Chairman of the JCS is a regular participant in major policy discussions among principal agency officials, and he provides a source of information for the services concerning policy positions taken by other agencies. He also has the opportunity to explain the views of the Chiefs to the other officials. Because of the corporate and formalized nature of the JCS inputs into the policy process, their views are stated as tersely as possible and in a way calculated to directly support recommendations for particular decisions or actions. Because theirs is the only regular opportunity for military inputs, the JCS try as frequently as possible to present a united front. In the process of developing a consensus that can be shaped into a direct recommendation, a compromise is frequently worked out among individual service positions, and many of the nuances and qualifications typical of complex policy issues are either dropped out or submerged in language acceptable to all. Such procedures cannot always enable the military

profession to contribute the kinds of judgment of which it is capable to the shaping of really critical national policies.

To play a more effective role in the shaping of policy involving long-term national commitments will require at least two kinds of changes in the usual JCS methods of operation.[8] One is the maintenance of a more responsible, independent position on such vital issues. The other is a deeper analysis of contemplated courses of action with respect to long-range costs and risks.

In the past, the JCS has operated according to a "good soldier" philosophy. Under this approach, an attempt is made to keep military matters distinct from political considerations. The latter are regarded as the prerogatives of the State Department or the White House, and judgments on these matters are seldom rendered by the Chiefs. Accordingly, there has been a tendency to accept the political objectives stated by civilian authority as given. The JCS have then recommended military measures they consider best suited for achieving them. In addition, when confronted with the decision or when having anticipated that their preferred approach was not acceptable to higher political authority, the JCS have sometimes suggested lesser or compromise measures believed to be more acceptable. In such cases, they usually have pointed out that the lesser measures would not be likely to attain the objectives, but on occasion, they have used such discrepancies to argue more vigorously for that preferred course of action as follow-on measures. Rarely if ever have they questioned the initial objectives or suggested substitution of lesser objectives.

Moreover, when examining and rendering judgment on the outcomes to be obtained from recommended courses of action, the JCS normally provide only "first order" analyses. Their memoranda and annexes usually discuss the immediate results expected from U.S. and friendly actions. They also normally include the range of possible "enemy" responses and a description of those he is most likely to take. Joint Staff attempts to address the consequences of recommended actions or positions seldom include the next steps which the "enemy's" alternative reactions would require from the United States and its allies, or the impact which the next round would have on his or our policy commitments. If dealt with at all, the long-term political implications of these recommended courses of action are given only perfunctory treatment. Finally, and sometimes ultimately, the JCS discussion of consequences may be watered down and worded in such a way as to assure that it does not damage the vital interests of any one of the services.

In order to be effective in helping to shape policies involving possible long-term commitments, the military must take a stronger hand in helping to determine the nation's policy objectives where military activities are involved. In particular, they have an obligation to point out any incompatibility between the desired ends of policy and the politically acceptable means for implementing it -- even to the extent of stating a wholly negative position if that be their corporate judgment. In addition, service differences and reservations with respect to this incompatibility must not be submerged on behalf of presenting

a united front. Awareness of dissenting or minority views on the part of one or more services could serve to focus interagency discussion on issues that would result in a more realistic appraisal of national aims.

It is essential that this be done, because once objectives have been adopted and national programs initiated, resulting commitments are not readily reduced. Neither is their character easily altered. President Truman's decision to abandon the objective of unifying Korea by force in 1951 demonstrated the great political cost risked by lowering policy objectives once U.S. forces are committed. It is doubtful that the domestic effects of that demonstration have gone unheeded by astute political leaders. Like military intervention, military alliances and foreign aid programs also constitute public commitments. These, too, cannot be abandoned without penalty of domestic or international political cost.

Not only are public policy objectives not easily compromised by a political leadership under fire from domestic and foreign critics, but national commitments simply cannot be taken lightly. If valid initially, the Nation's policy objectives should not be abandoned or emasculated simply because they prove difficult to achieve. Of course, judgment errors will occur, and the policy process ideally should permit a re-casting of objectives if an Administration perceives that the costs of achieving them have turned out to be higher than expected. Normally, however, when objectives are realistic, it is to be expected that an initial lack of success will be followed by repeated or intensified attempts. Particularly when committed to

assist another nation, a government of the United States -- which historically has stressed respect for international agreements freely entered as a key principle of responsible diplomacy -- cannot easily afford to discard such an obligation. For all these reasons it is important that before public commitments are made our policy objectives be scrutinized and determined to be reasonable in the light of measures that the Nation's leaders feel able to undertake.

In contributing to this vital policy function, an important role for the military professional (through the JCS) should be to define clearly the proposed objectives in operational terms. He should explain to other policy advisers and to decision-makers that, given their proposed statement of what the United States hopes to achieve, "the objective behavior patterns of enemy leaders and forces would have to consist of the following..." and that "these are the kinds of military and political actions the United States would have to undertake to get them to react that way...." In addition, he should make explicit the kinds of enemy behavior likely to result from any lesser or different actions on our part. He should then describe in detail the ways in which such behavior would be different from the patterns corresponding to the proposed objectives. Hence, he would make clear that, if only certain kinds of action are agreeable to the President and his chief advisers, they must recognize beforehand that only certain objectives are reasonable for the Nation to endorse. This process would be repeated for different formulations of our goals as many times as necessary to develop a set of operational objectives compatible with the prevailing political mood and the long-term national interest.

Defining objectives operationally is considerably different from the usual JCS practice of saying, "this is what we stand a good chance of achieving, but on the other hand, the enemy may do this." It is different, first, because usual practice is to say this and little more, at least until new ground rules are received from OSD. Under this new approach, the JCS would in effect be helping to formulate the ground rules as they went along. It is different also because through this iterative process, professional military judgments would play a major part in determining what the ultimately agreed upon objectives would be. Instead of acting as a technical bureau, largely self-limited to providing narrow judgments on request, the JCS would be contributing its needed professional insights as a full partner in the policy-making process.

As a companion process to helping determine realistic national policy objectives, the JCS must also help stimulate systematic consideration of the long-term costs and risks incurred by contemplated courses of national action. With their own rather ample staff resources and with support from the service staffs, the JCS could set an example for other contributing agencies by making a deeper, more comprehensive analysis than has been the usual practice in the past of the broad implications of selected national security policies.

The typical "first-order" analysis of expected results and likely enemy responses is inadequate because international political-military situations are extremely fluid. They contain too many variables and are too dependent upon day-to-day decisions in different governmental

and military headquarters to enable sound policy decisions to be based on this kind of analyses alone. For example, in the context of military conflicts, there is ample evidence to indicate that even basically rational and stable considerations like a national commitment must be regarded as a variable. In addition to the expected motivation to "try harder" when denied a goal, governments may also escalate their sights in response to success. Our own government illustrated this in September 1950, after MacArthur's successful Inchon landing and counterattack against the North Korean Army. The effectiveness of this operation contributed directly to the Truman Administration's decision to escalate its commitment and seek to unify Korea through complete military occupation.[9] Such changes in the ground-rules for force employment make many prior calculations and planning assumptions irrelevant.

Similarly variable responses in national commitment may be precipitated by policy decisions short of actual conflict. Familiar rationale argues that noncommittal declaratory policies which permit modest, pragmatic responses to "enemy" initiatives only encourage him to adopt "salami tactics." Only firm policies, the argument continues, will discourage an aggressive power from nibbling away at the U.S. position, or that of an ally, until it obtains a significant advantage. On the other hand, there are examples of reactions to hard policies that are quite different. U.S. policies toward Japan prior to Pearl Harbor have been interpreted as so frustrating to programs the Japanese government regarded as vital to its national interest that they in fact helped precipitate Tokyo's

decision for war.[10] The point is that the motivations of other governments and the compelling political interests of the future frequently are not predictable.

To compensate for these kinds of variables in political-military behavior, contemplated national courses of action must be analyzed carefully in terms of multiple costs and risks. The JCS, in particular, should contribute to this process. The first step in their contribution would be a direct spin-off from a properly conducted effort to define objectives operationally. In the iterative process of determining realistic objective enemy behavior patterns, the JCS should identify several possible actions an enemy might take that would be different from those desired by the United States. They should then make explicit a number of formulations like "if the enemy does the following... then we must take the following next steps or choose among the following remaining options...," provided we continue to pursue our basic objectives. In actual practice, a similar process would be used to refine and recast the objectives under consideration -- before final acceptance. But even after objectives are operationalized and accepted, this basic step in the calculation of risks and costs should be regularly taken as a foundation for subsequent analysis.

Cost and risk analysis should also include work on the following kinds of questions: What different kinds of military action or military support activities <u>can</u> the United States still take, in view of other commitments and interests? At what levels of national commitment could these be sustained? What kinds of additional military commitment is the U.S. public likely to support? Is the

enemy vulnerable to these kinds of military or political-military pressures? What "next steps" does he have available to him? In the event of predictable kinds of domestic and international opposition how can these pressures be sustained together with other vital programs? Do our contemplated "next steps" offer the enemy a palatable "out"? What political costs (to him) attend the avenues of retreat left open to him? What factors constrain his commitment or those of his allies? Are these constraints susceptible to reduction or to intensification as a result of contemplated U.S. actions? If the policy confrontation continues or escalates, are events likely to provide enticing opportunities for great powers to exploit for global strategic advantage at U.S. expense?

Only through exploring these kinds of questions can a realistic picture be obtained of the full range of costs and risks incurred by the United States through its contemplated course of action. To protests that this would take a lot of time and a large investment of available joint and service staff resources this writer can only respond, "Of course!" But, in view of the long-term involvements and sustained high costs incurred by a commitment made hastily or in error -- or by one which grows as a result of unrealistic initial objectives or seemingly painless incremental steps -- I would argue that there is little else in the normal JCS or service staff functions that could perform a comparable service to the Nation.

Both the legal and historical bases for a more effective military involvement in national policy making already exist. The desire on the part of decision-makers

for more-comprehensive political-military advice has been made clear. The need for greater assurances against excessive or obscure political-military commitments has been demonstrated. It remains only for the military profession to use the institutional staff structure provided for it to help relieve these shortcomings in the Nation's policy-making processes.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Lt. General Sir John W. Hackett, "The Profession of Arms," Lee Knowles lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1962.

2. Michael Howard (ed.), Soldiers and Governments (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), pp. 11-12, 22-24.

3. Compare, for example, the findings of Morris Janowitz in The Professional Soldier (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), in which a major portion of his samplings concentrated on members of the officer corps whose careers were well established prior to 1950, and those based on more recent samplings and reported in Janowitz (ed.) The New Military: Changing Patterns of Organization (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964).

4. Karl von Clausewitz, On War (O.J. Matthijs Jolles, translator) (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1953, p. 598.

5. Glenn H. Snyder, "The 'New Look' of 1953," in Schelling, Hammond and Snyder, Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 393, 410-414.

6. Thomas A. Schelling, Arms and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

7. Title 10 of the United States Code, Public Law 1028, 84th Congress, August 10, 1966, Sec. 141 (b).

8. Structural changes in the national security policy-making process may also be required, but they are not the subject of this paper.

9. See Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York: The New American Library, 1964) pp. 120-135; also Martin Lichterman, "To the Yalu and Back," in Harold Stein (ed.) American Civil-Military Decisions (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1963).

10. For expressions of Japan's interests by her policy-makers, see Nobutaka Ike (ed.) Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967).