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REFLECTIONS ON CITIZEN-SOLDIERS AND LOW INTENSITY
CONFLICT

Walter A. Schrepel

Oliver Stone's *Platoon* recently captured the "hearts and minds" of the motion picture industry by illuminating the riveting aspects of a soldier's Vietnam experiences. As audiences participate in his reminiscences, the war's moral dimensions slowly become more readily apparent. When our government committed drafted citizen-soldiers to an open-ended, low intensity conflict like Vietnam, the lack of clear political ends which should have defined the appropriate strategy to secure those ends ensured that there would be no real winners (Summers, 1-5).

In our efforts to remedy this situation by eliminating the draft, we have made the only beneficiaries of war the writers of cheap war novels and the fabulists of tall tales at the American Legion. While the draft has gone by the boards, the dangers of low intensity conflict remains even more formidable for us. I will argue that the real losers from our Vietnam experience have ironically become the citizens who have replaced the Oliver Stones in the front line of low intensity conflict.

The Vietnam war surely deserves our profoundest attention as philosophers and citizens for its far reaching impact upon the American way of conducting contemporary war. It marked the real possibility of fighting a bloody, protracted battle against the low intensity threat of non-

conventional war. It also represented a series of mistakes waiting to happen. First, the commitment of a generation of American youth to combat for dubious political objectives has adversely affected the national psyche. The very mention of the resort to arms as part of any foreign policy not couched in terms of a crusade against an apparent evil sends shivers down the spine of many a citizen. Second, and more important, in its aftermath, the burden of national defense has been shifted from the conscripts of Stone's army to the volunteers of a smaller, professionalized, volunteer army. While attempting to eradicate the injustices of the Selective Service system, the political community has fostered a concealed danger of immense proportion.

In the wake of the anti-draft protests, the nation has compromised the traditional citizen's obligation to participate in the national defense. By surrendering the moral initiative to ethical egoists and political relativists, we, as a nation, have severed the linkage between the citizen and his community. Citizens may now permissibly opt out of military service. Without the imminence of a dire threat to national survival, like that from Nazism, citizens may rationalize away their responsibilities when their interests conflict with those of the greater community. The draft went out with the political winds, so, too, did civic virtue.

We could tolerate this development so long as it provides security at a reasonable cost in terms of treasure

and blood. Unfortunately, this may no longer be possible with the advent of Low Intensity Conflict. It threatens to destabilize regions of the world critical to the security and stability of the world order. The stability of that order continues to remain an illusory objective while our attempts to buttress it by filling the post-World War II void have not been entirely successful. Although the threat of a world war between the superpowers seems unlikely, the threat of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) for American and friendly interests seems likely to remain with us and be quite dangerous, too. LIC-terrorism, subversion, revolutionary war, and Iranian-religious imperialism-seem far more likely to unhinge American interests in distant corners of the globe (Paschall, 32). No one wants repetitions of the Marine retreat from Beirut which could spell trouble for this country and for those who depend upon us. The troubles could be quite problematic for our interests. As such, the U.S. must be prepared to fight a LIC for necessary political objectives while hoping never to fire a shot in anger. Fighting would not be so problematic if the adversary would only clearly identify himself, but that is part of the nature of LIC.

With the advent of LIC, keeping the peace has become a full time preoccupation. LIC endangers not only the world political order but also the economic and social systems as well to which we have allied ourselves. There is something positive to be said for our nation's current

commitment to promote democracy and human rights throughout these systems. This mission has helped us better maintain an uneasy balance in an international world order that has fortunately escaped the cataclysm of the past world wars of this century. One consequence of a so-called American stewardship is a *Pax Americana* that seems more morally justifiable than condemnatory for its intended idealistic ends.

When our American *weltanschauung* seems endangered, the military option has increasingly become the superpower trump card for dealing with various international crises, especially in the Third World. If in doubt, send an aircraft carrier and Marine landing force, when diplomacy fails. The mailed fist inside the velvet glove can become a powerful means of persuasion. The Tripoli reprisal has proved that so far. The jury is still out on defending the freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf or on limiting Iranian imperialism. What should not be in doubt, however, is the character of the instrument for projecting American power: the volunteer citizen-soldiers of our standing defense establishment, ready and under arms, prepared to do the Commander-in-chief's bidding. Here lies the rub.

Employing legions of volunteer citizen-soldiers may simplify our ability to smite our foes, or competitors. A hard-hitting, professionalized force should provide a more dangerous instrument of policy than a cumbersome conscript force. Draftees would definitely be far more cheaper to

maintain and employ, guaranteeing a proven reserve of trained manpower. Volunteers, however, though far more costly to maintain, are far more willing to serve. The moral problem here should become more clear to the reflective person. Committing a drafted army to war commits a nation to war. Echoes of 1914 should be heard anew even now in the 1980s. Volunteers are easier to deploy and motivate because they eagerly await the challenge to prove themselves. The more willing the sheep are, the easier it would be for the shepherd to lead them into battle.

Unfortunately, people, not sheep, are the issue. Soldiers must steel themselves for the ultimate possibility of combat; that is the nature of the profession. LIC has changed the nature of the soldier's traditional problem because, unlike in past conflicts, there is no separation of peace from war in LIC. Peace is now merely a lower intense level of combat that seems to continue without moral boundaries or attainable objectives with our soldiers being caught "holding the bag" on the continuum of conventional and non-conventional war.

The problem facing soldiers by the threats of LIC would not be questionable for most of us because danger is part of the soldier's lot except for one difference. Like the policeman, the soldier should be constantly on guard to respond to violations of the neighborhood peace. Unlike the policeman, I believe a problem arises here when the soldier leaves his community on unclear, open-ended missions that

take him from away the 'neighborhood beat' that remain obscured to his fellow citizens. When the USS Stark was hit by an Exocet missile in the Persian Gulf, the crew had been showing the flag to protect our interests in the Gulf. Many of our fellow citizens were uncertain of her mission or her sacrifice. That mission put her crew at risk in the shadowy world of LIC, not quite war but not quite peace, much like the late Marine garrison at Beirut; their mission ostensibly was to realize some expected utility on behalf of the rest of us. In effect, the USS Stark was helping police the international sea lanes and would have been sacrificed, if necessary, in the name of the national interest. That has traditionally been the soldier's lot; I believe the Marines knew that. Now, we will be doing the same thing, placing our soldiers in harm's way for policy reasons, whenever our soldiers are deployed to show the flag. Our real problem now is that we do not know to whom we should show the flag, our resolve, or our might because we cannot identify our adversaries may not satisfactorily safeguard our interests in the process.

If we must send soldiers to fight against the constant threat of terrorism or surprise attacks by those who do not respect international law, the ostensible justification would be the general utility of the nation. A few centurions should go forth to battle so the rest of us may be safe and secure; there is no problem here. In the process, however, we may have unjustly distributed the burdens of such combat

on an increasingly smaller segment of society. When soldiers die in compliance with orders, they and their families alone bear the pain. No ceremonial eulogies can restore the dead back to us. The sad part is the volunteer remains isolated from the mainstream of American life. The very nature of his status makes the volunteer soldier liable for extended, isolated tours of duty against our LIC opponents. In doing so, he become vulnerable to any madman trying to knock a chip off of Uncle Sam's shoulder.

The conscript soldier of the past has lived in an enviable position with regard to his employment as a soldier. The draftee has usually entered military service under the pressures of the social and legal systems to defend his political community from some internal or external danger. His motivation often resulted from the legal and social coercions that stemmed from public policies responding to threats to the Nation. His destiny had become irrevocably linked with that of the community. If he were to fail in his mission, the Nation might be disastrously humbled or totally destroyed: the specter of permanent separation into two nations during the Civil War and the threats to American freedom during the world wars provided his motivation. Under these influences, Congress has only reluctantly mobilized our young men of military age for war. With the exception of the extended Cold war era which gave rise to the peacetime standing army, Congress has mandated

under penalty of legal and moral coercion the national call to arms primarily during periods of national emergency.

The situation for the volunteer is far less shrouded in such political and moral reluctance. The citizen-soldier has continuously distinguished himself by volunteering for this dangerous profession. Unlike the draftee, the volunteer willingly surrenders to the military system himself for whatever the reason his liberty in joining the force. He additionally surrenders some degree of individual autonomy and political rights to the military service. Once in uniform, his moral status seems similar to that of the draftee except for one crucial difference. The mission remains the same: to defend the Nation. The volunteer soldier stands ready to their arms by virtue of his enlistment through thick and thin, in crisis and calm, making him a more reliable instrument for projecting national power in peacetime.

There have been few peacetime protests about the volunteer soldier being deployed to fight abroad as in the not too distant past. As in the last century, the public cares little for the activities of the volunteer fighting on the frontier of American civilization or for important national interests because the burdens of war will fall only on the shoulders of a small fraction of the population. One does not have to worry about being sent off to fight in Grenada or elsewhere unless he desires to do so. The public cares only about the unusual disaster like Custer's

unfortunate demise of the Marine's untimely Beirut experience. When we remember that the volunteer soldier can be better professionalized ideally because of his motivation and longer service contract, he becomes more ideal for pacifying the heathen as in the past, defending an international principle such as the freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf, or promoting national security interests in Central America.

This tendency to view the volunteer as a tool of policy becomes more serious when we recognize that traditional constraints against employing military force have become more and more ineffective. The very nature of the modern American military establishment revolving around the volunteer citizen-soldier makes the regulatory process more complex. The power to declare war has solely resided with the Congress, but Congressional declarations of war have been rarely issued during the entire lifetime of the Republic. In fact, the war declaration has been issued but 5 times in over 200 years to mobilize the nation for war. The Nation has fought wars, of varying intensities, many more times than that and has done so largely with the bayonets of the volunteer citizen-soldier. Secondly, the very complexity of the military establishment has negated the Congressional power of the purse. Although certain programs in the defense budget may be threatened with a cessation of fiscal support, Congress cannot shut down much of the defense establishment in protest while still

portraying itself as a responsible governing body. Further, there exists a dearth of a national constituency on behalf of the volunteer soldier. World War II and Korea War veterans are slowly departing from Capitol Hill, making the Congress seem less and less sensitive to the lot of the soldier. The combination of these factors seem capable of decisively sapping the will of the Congress to withstand the encroachments of the Chief Executive. The popularity of backing a winning venture in Grenada underscores the vulnerability of a popular, but morally questionable, foreign policy requiring the use of military force. As a consequence, the volunteer citizen-soldier may very well be deployed to a hostile environment by a forceful President over the objections of an enfeebled Congress.

This assessment might seem vulnerable to the application of the War Powers Act of 1973. Under its provisions, the President may employ soldiers in a life threatening situation but for only a 60 day period before having to consult with Congress and seek its approval. In the absence of such consultation, Congress could conceivably veto a questionable military operation restraining the employment of soldiers in combat by withholding funding for the venture. The premise of the argument has so far proven questionably true. Soldiers are currently stationed in a belligerent area in the Persian Gulf and will likely remain there notwithstanding the validity of the War Powers Act. Even were the Administration able to skirt the technical

definition of the consultation requirement, the Commander-in-Chief could still employ soldiers in a hostile environment under the President's power to conduct foreign policy. Soldiers would still be at risk for a temporary period or indefinitely until the Supreme Court could conceivably deliberate upon the matter. In paraphrasing Lincoln, the government of the people, for the people, by the people could send out *its* people to fight and could perish without adequate consideration.

Arthur Hadley speaks of the great divorce between the closed military society and the greater American civilian society in his book entitled The Straw Giant. This dichotomy between the military and the civilian worlds has paved the way for such actions. Public concern for the demise of its citizens who serve as soldiers has become less of an issue than in the old days of the draft. During the Second World War, it would not be uncommon for Harvard graduates to serve in the military to defeat Hitler. Consider the meager number of Crimson graduates who have chosen national service in the military in the last generation. Besides Tennessee's Senator Gore, you will not find many of them. Military and civilian worlds co-exist uneasily in the modern, materialistic America where civic virtue seems more a topic for soul searching over the possibility for lost opportunities by joining the Army instead of Wall Street rather than rejoicing in having served the Nation.

This view, if correct, poses serious difficulties for our Nation. From the perspective of the Washington power brokers, the professionalized citizen army does not merely represent the shield and the sword of the Republic. It rather additionally represents the instrument of bureaucratic elites and unreflective advisors who dream up the glitzy plans involving military force. Like the military, academic, and civilian advisors from David Halberstam's depiction of Camelot in The Best and the Brightest, they design ambitious plans that commit soldiers to dangerous enterprises. Advisors and academics working in government, however, are able to walk away from their failures while soldiers often must clean up the mess that military force had been originally designed to solve. To others, the professionalized volunteer force represents a political ploy for forging a consensus for the national defense using soldiers as pawns to be deployed in national debate. National defense represents a fiscal justification for the continued production of the means of war. If Clausewitz's dictum about politics is correct, the citizen-soldier may also become a means for solidifying domestic political support for specific policies as a sort of litmus test of one's commitment to the nation defense. In any case, he becomes a hostage to a process that does not seem to account for his role in national life.

What is needed here is not a more efficient killing machinery complete with the latest technology. The senior

military leadership and civilian secretaries had better start thinking beyond the next Congressional budgetary cycle. Strategies that entail the deployment of volunteer soldiers must be designed for objectives that are necessary for important national interests. This country can never afford the errors of well-meaning defense advisors, military and civilian alike, who cease to see military organizational wiring diagrams as theoretical representations of real flesh and blood. The recent objections of several state governors to the employment of their state troops in Honduras in ostensible support for the Contra initiative address the need for leavening the analytical side of policy-making with moral reasoning. Voluntary consent given by soldiers in accepting the vicissitudes of military life cannot be morally equivalent to consenting to being deployed in any old shooting war. The reality of the battlefield quickly dispels the romanticism about war. Rambo patriotism notwithstanding, the government of the people owes *its* people some moral consideration when the military option may be considered a necessary element of policy.

Sending our troops to fight again may indeed be necessary for preserving the conditions of peace favorable to our national preferences. We must never permit ourselves to say never to resorting to military force; doing so may set off a dangerous chain reaction abroad. If the need for military action were to arise, however, our leaders and their staffs must morally deliberate upon the necessity and

costs of executing their decisions: clear mission statements, obtainable objectives, reasonable political support, a free hand in planning and forceful leadership. These criteria form the essential core for morally worthy strategies for dealing with LIC which require the volunteer citizen-soldier for their execution. These conditions should set the parameters of the debate in which the hard moral questions must be asked: Can this military operation be morally justified? Can this venture operation be ~~the~~ justified now, before the operation begins, not after the action has started? Does our strategy deal with the shadowy aspects of LIC that can achieve our goals without making our soldiers needless targets of terrorists, extremists, and madmen?

The very real danger behind all of this is the possible development of praetorian society in the military ranks of American society. If the soldier who volunteers for national service view himself as just one more tool of an uncaring society, the vestiges of civic virtue may be lost forever. All of the ethical codes and mythical bonds between soldier, as a citizen, and his society could be swept away if the soldier views himself as a superfluous, nameless servant of a society that demands his service without thought to the human costs of its policies.

This possibility has already occurred a generation ago, when a democratic nation's Army rebelled against its government's erratic, uncaring policies in dealing with the

dilemmas of LIC during the Algerian insurgency. The 1962 Algerian putsch demonstrated that the French Army's centurions had indeed become praetorians. The same situation seems to threaten the stability of the Aquino government in the Philippines as the loyal military has begun to question the supremacy of civilian government while the disloyal seek to topple the Aquino administration. The time to think about the citizen-soldier and his role in LIC strategy is now.

A wealth of experience surrounds our recent military involvements from Korea, Vietnam, and lately Beirut. We have no guarantee, however, that we have learned much about the moral dimensions of committing citizen soldiers to a low intensity conflict. More than likely, a dearth of reflective thinking will continue in our bureaucracies. Power and politics may very well remain the primary considerations for deploying American soldiers abroad without requiring concomitant moral reflection upon the policies available to government. I hope that I am wrong in this regard.

Miscalculation and incorrect moral judgment on war will unfortunately remain with us so long as we remain fallible beings. Concern for national ends often obscure the national means needed to achieve them: the young sword bearers of every generation. Earlier in the century, masses of drafted doughboys, GI's, and grunts sallied forth to battle the scourges of democracy. As our century wanes,

however, the scourges of LIC have become less unequivocal. The armies of volunteers that now man our frontier bastions place us on the horns of dilemma. If we desire to preserve the peace that will in turn preserve our soldiers' lives, we must deploy them into the snake pit against the terrorist, insurgent, or revolutionary. In the process, we make them more vulnerable to attack by our foes in the name of peace. One dilemma to be solved by the All-Volunteer-Force remains with us in spades.

Let us keep the memory of Stone's Platoon from becoming the experiences for all grunt platoons in the near future. If we must send troops abroad to fight in the nasty, but perhaps necessary LICs, let us not exploit their willingness to serve the Nation because of mere expediency. Rather, we should make the difficult decisions now, during peacetime, because doing so precludes us from falling into terrible dilemmas that we may wish we had avoided. Any standard less rigorous than that permits us to sidestep tough moral questions, and that would just provide new sequel material for future Oliver Stones. Only Hollywood would be the winner then.

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