

SHOULD THE MILITARY FIGHT THE WAR ON DRUGS?

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The title I have chosen for this paper is my interpretation of the JSCOPE topic for this year. Why is this topic arising precisely when the cold war appears to be winding down? Now that the communists are receding as a convenient device for propping up military budgets, are drug dealers and users to take their place? Answering this question takes us into epistemology, i.e., the realm of philosophical reflection concerned with how we perceive and approach our world. Specifically, I wonder whether or not we must continue to look at most human relationships through the lens of war--war of the sexes, war on drugs, war on poverty, war with the Third World for scarce resources, war between the Washington Redskins and the Dallas Cowboys, trade wars, gas wars between local gas stations, etc.? War has been and continues to be a powerful metaphor in our culture, including our patriarchal religions--"put on the breast plate of righteousness."¹

In the United States we urgently need to reduce crime, to maintain law and order, and to heal neighborhoods terrorized by the violence surrounding the distribution and use of drugs. But it is not obvious to me that thinking in "war" terms or sending in the military to fight a war on drugs are among the best means to achieve these ends! I will argue later that seeing the world through the lens of "war" is a trap from which we need to free ourselves.

Why would the use of the military to fight the war on drugs be suggested? If the introduction of military force into local

¹Ephesians 6:14, and I Thessalonians 5:8.

American neighborhoods is the solution, what is the problem? There are heavily armed gangs of people involved in the import, distribution and sale of drugs. Often these gangs are better armed than the local police. Many communities are terrorized by the use of these armaments to enforce drug deals and fend off the police. Drug related violence is not limited to the inner city neighborhoods of our large cities. I live in Annapolis, Md., a town thirty miles from both Washington and Baltimore. Several young men known to my two sons have been shot to death in drug deals that turned sour--one case happened about a mile from my house, and another just this past December. A serious problem exists, and it is close to each of us. If we want to employ the war metaphor we could say the following: there is a hot shooting war presently occurring in our streets; war is being waged by drug dealers against our neighborhoods and our youth; the focus of this war is the sale of illegal drugs.

At least three things could be done to alter this situation: 1) legalize the drugs, control their distribution through current market mechanisms (like prescriptions) and reap the revenue benefits for government²; 2) beef up the local police forces with "better" intelligence and weapons; 3) bring in the considerable intelligence and weapons capabilities already present in the military to eliminate drug gangs (i.e., dealers,

²The Reagan-Bush and Bush-Quale administrations have had great faith in free-market mechanisms to solve problems. Therefore, I would think that this option would appeal to those currently in power.

not users) through capture and imprisonment, or death during shoot-outs. I take it that the focus of our JSCOPE topic is on the third of these options. What I want to do is 1) present arguments for and against option three, 2) state why I am opposed to option three, and 3) present an alternative way to look at our common life.

What beliefs are involved in an affirmative answer to the third option? First, that the civilian society cannot or will not police or govern itself. Second, that the current drug epidemic is a worse evil than a police or militarily controlled state. Third, that increasing the level of violence is the best solution to the drug problem.

These beliefs seem to me difficult to justify. Before turning to those arguments, let me state some of the positive response to option three which would involve saying first, that there is not much difference between the police and the military, and second, that our country needs to do something to shift the current balance of power in favor of the "good guys" by bringing in the military to assist police efforts. The differences between the police and the military can be seen to be differences of degree, not of kind. The police have units like SWAT teams which closely resemble the military in their uniforms, fire power and mobility. On the military side the military police receive training in police methods as opposed to combat operations. Obviously, if large numbers of the military were to engage in the war on drugs on the home front, they would receive the training

required to do police work rather than the search and destroy methods of combat that we saw, for instance, in Viet Nam.

However, on the other side we should note that the regular police by and large do an effective job of enforcing the laws and keeping the peace. If they do not, then the second option I mentioned above, strengthening the local police without bringing in the military, would enhance the ability of society at large to police itself. One way to deal with providing adequate resources to the police would be to transfer part of the military budget to local police forces. "Well," you may respond, "we need to keep a standing army for defense against foreign enemies, so, since we have it, we may as well use it." My reply is that we should solve problems at the most local level possible in our federal system of government. We need to focus on how the rights of citizens can be protected. Particularly, how can terror in the lives of citizens best be reduced, so that they can "be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects." On the one hand we have the terror of the current drug operations which do not value human life. On the other hand there is the possibility of the terror of people being oppressed by the government's war on drugs. The issue for me comes down to which of these situations is worse. Those who call for military intervention in the war on drugs seem to conclude that living under the current drug epidemic is worse than living under a state of martial law. I'm not sure about that. My concern focuses on two points: how

constabulary use of the military would be limited, and how constabulary use would be held accountable.

I worry that constabulary uses of the military would tend to lead to a police state. When I look at the impositions of martial law around the world that our government has supported, for instance in the Philippines under Marcos, El Salvador, Chile under Pinochet, the West Bank, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua under Somoza, I conclude that living in such situations is worse than living with the current drug scene. One reason it is worse is that under martial law there is no other authority to which to turn when the enforcers themselves are not obeying basic laws. This is the problem of accountability.

Once the military intervenes, where would its activities stop? What would limit its intervention? I ask this in two senses: 1) limits to its behavior and 2) limits to the areas (e.g., drugs) in which the military is used. Would we also want the military to assist in stopping the spread of aids, or the distribution of pornography? One answer might be to point to the checks and balances which our form of government employs in limiting the use of the military by pitting the three branches of government against one another. I conclude from having observed the Iran-Contra scandal that neither civilian control of the military or checks and balances among the branches of government is working particularly well (at least to limit the executive branch).

I urge this group to distinguish between a police state and a "well-policed state".³ In a police state the authority of the police dominates and controls and terrorizes the people. In a well-policed state, the power and authority of the police is used to enforce the law without terrorizing the average citizen. We need to stay well on the latter side of that line. I think bringing in the military to do police work carries the danger of taking us over this line in the direction of a police state. Reinforcing the police we already have, with local control, limits and accountability, will help us to maintain a "well-policed state." We DO have problems with the current police--excessive use of force, violations of people's rights, corruption, etc.--but these can be dealt with by the mechanisms already in place.

Let me illustrate my concern about limits on the military with an anecdote about an incident in one of my Naval Academy classes. One morning when I entered the classroom the midshipmen were watching a TV news clip about a flag-burning demonstration.

³The function of the police in a constitutionally governed society is to maintain order, prevent crime and enforce the law. The police know how to quiet crowds, control traffic, comfort accident victims, arrest suspected criminals, handle weapons, and so forth. When I think of police, I picture the uniformed patrolman engaged in routine policing work. Their function is to serve the population. In a police state, the police dominate rather than serve the people. The result is that the people are not protected from abusive acts by this arm of the government, and cannot rely on being free of unreasonable search and seizure, self incrimination (through torture, among other means), arbitrary (vs. due) process of law, secret and prolonged imprisonment (vs. speedy and public trial), cruel and unusual punishments, etc. The label "secret police" captures for me the dominating, abusive and fear-generating aspects of a police state.

One of the midshipmen turned to me and said, "Sir, I wish they would bring those people here and put them in the middle of the Brigade. After we beat on them for a while they would have more respect for the flag." That comment lead me to drop whatever plans I had for the day, in order to engage those ideas about the role of the Brigade of Midshipmen vis-a-vis the Constitution. The crux of my position, which initially came out in a series of questions to the students, involved their oath as officer candidates to defend the Constitution, that the Constitution included the Bill of Rights, and that what the TV news clip was portraying was the celebration by these protestors of the Supreme Court decision allowing burning of the flag as a first amendment right. Therefore, I concluded, the role of the midshipmen should be to defend these protestors as they exercised their constitutional rights rather than wishing to have free reign with the protesters for five minutes of stomping them. This incident illustrated for me the misunderstandings that can occur about these issues, and that the veneer of legal restraint on lethal violence is very thin and could be quickly stripped away. These officer candidates are among our most elite, intelligent officers, and yet even they did not grasp the import of their oath of office.

In relation to the third belief, namely, that increasing violence is the best solution to the drug problem, let me begin by noting that the U.S. military has many virtues and skills that are important to our future: organization, ability to build

effective teams, risk-taking, loyalty, courage, commitment, focus on accomplishing missions, etc. These are wonderful virtues, but we need to look at the ends they serve. Specifically, what ends would they be serving in constabulary use in the war on drugs, and would they be able to reach those ends? It seems to me that one end they would be designed to serve would be the reduction of the violence in our society which currently terrorizes many of our neighborhoods. But my concern is that introducing the military would increase the level of violence. A nation does not necessarily become more secure (against enemies either foreign or domestic) merely by spending more money on the military (i.e., on preparation for the violent resolution of conflicts). World War One did not end all wars. The economy of the Soviet Union collapsed in the attempt to keep up with the escalation in the technology of violence. Yet the reduction of the current world-historical struggle between two forms of capitalism with the collapse of state capitalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe has obviously not ended all wars (or threats of war). Rather, our reliance on violence (or the threat of violence) to solve our problems has just spread the capability for violence around, to more and more Third World countries (who get our military aid and buy our weapons).⁴

⁴ Today we are worried about Iraq gaining nuclear capability. Tomorrow, after Hussein is gone, we will have to worry about another Hitlerian figure, Assad of Syria, who at the moment is the dictator of choice (as was Hussein before him and Noriega before him). The United States has provided a model of the way in which nuclear capability and the threat of nuclear violence can achieve some of the nation's goals. So, we should not be surprised

The use of violence to resolve conflicts has not succeeded in reducing the level of violence in the world. Rather than reducing violence, the application of violence has bred more violence. The constabulary use of the military in relation to the drug trade involves the notion that the police do not apply sufficient violence to succeed in reducing the drug trade, therefore we will apply even more violence by means of the military. The violence of the drug trade DOES need to be stopped. It is not obvious to me that injecting the military into the situation will achieve that goal.

What are the alternatives to the use of violence via the military to try to reduce the drug problem in the United States? First, we need to reframe the focus of our entire society so that we do not automatically or initially look outside our individual selves for the source of either our problems or their solutions. The "eighties" focused our attention on the supply side not only of economics, but also of drugs. We sent the military into Columbia and Bolivia to stem the supply; we sprayed defoliants on marijuana crops in Central and South America. If there were no demand for drugs there would be no point to supplying drugs. For example, the buggy whip industry has gone into severe decline during this century because of a lack of demand. It is important to cut the demand for drugs among our citizens. But how can we do that? And why don't we?

that we are being flattered by imitation.

Currently our culture affirms through advertising that most of our problems can be solved by externals--by using the right mouth wash or deodorant, taking the right sleeping tablet or aspirin, buying the right car. These solutions all reduce to having enough money (and what way to get money faster than by dealing drugs???) All points on the political spectrum urge that our problems come from externals: the right wing sees threats from other nations, from other ethnic groups, from secular humanism, from godless communists, etc. The left wing sees threats from greedy capitalists, from multi-national corporations, from politicians, or from "the system" (of education, economics, politics, religion). Similarly, the solution is said to come from something external: from a God "up there", from bottles of pills and alcohol, from some preacher on TV, from battleships taken out of mothballs, or from new international alliances. I urge you to consider seriously the philosophy of the Pogo comic strip which states, "We have met the enemy and he is us." That is, we need to inquire what it is about our own conceptual framework (i.e., the way we think and feel) that contributes to the problems we are facing today.

Second, in addition to focusing on externals, our conceptual framework idolizes violence. The media sell newspapers by focusing on violent confrontations in the streets and in the legislatures. Yet, the number of conflicts in our daily lives resolved in a non-violent way is huge when compared with the

violent resolutions.⁵ In toys and games we also focus on violence: teen aged mutant ninja turtles, thousands of video and computer games focused on violently defeating an opponent, we sell war toys of all sorts, and so forth.⁶ The entertainment media in TV and the movies not only present violent themes, but also present these themes in psychologically violent ways (i.e., in terms of how the viewer is "jolted" by the changes of scene). Professional wrestling has become much more popular during the Reagan decade. The movie "Batman" presents the triumph of "good" over "evil" but only because the "goodies" are more violent than the "badies". Our sports focus on competition, with dichotomies between winners and losers, tough guys and wimps ("hitting hard"), etc. So it is not surprising that we turn to violence to resolve a problem such as the drug crisis. But this type of thinking has brought us to the brink of annihilation (internationally and domestically). We need to stop looking for violent solutions to our problems, including the drug problem. Violence IS the problem, not the solution to the problem. Many of us would affirm that statement in our personal lives (e.g., being violent to our children or spouses solves little if any

⁵In a picture the foreground stands out and we tend not to notice the background. When people begin shooting each other on the freeways, that is noticed. But no one points out the tens of millions of persons who commute daily on our freeways without engaging in violent conflict resolution.

⁶This past December I was struck by a "Ziggy" cartoon in which Ziggy is next in line to sit on Santa's lap, while the kid on Santa's knee is saying, "Let's just say that I want to be totally combat-ready!!"

purpose, and generally creates more problems than it solves). We need to begin affirming non-violent resolution of conflicts in our social, political, national and international lives.

"How," you ask, "can this notion about conceptual frameworks be translated into a program to improve our society?" I believe that one sign in our society is the direction taken by various substance abuse programs and by local neighborhood organizers who are working non-violently to rid their areas of drug dealers. Substance abuse programs like the one at Luther Place on Thomas Circle in the District of Columbia are dealing with spiritual redirection rather than physical combat. Their program involves discovering strengths, building self-esteem and looking at choices in the lives of substance abusers.⁷ We need to apply efforts of this sort in our families and schools and communities to help reduce the demand for narcotics as solutions to personal problems. Ultimately, this type of effort does rest on philosophy, on a world-view which involves becoming clear about who we are and what our place is in the universe: that both the problems and the solutions begin with us, not with external factors like Columbian drug lords or external solutions like building more prisons.

I do believe that creativity can overcome violence. By that I mean that when confronted with a problem, we can use our creative abilities to come up with genuine solutions that do not involve violence. I think that a group of this size with the

⁷The Urban Oasis, Fall, 1990.

experience, education and intelligence in this room today, can produce a list of suggestions for reducing drug-related violence, among which will be found the key for which we are searching. I commend that effort to you during our discussion period.