Policy Recommendations

As commander-in-chief, the next president must take on the challenge of rebuilding and reforming the American armed forces, by:

- Implementing a process of reevaluating what has succeeded or failed in recent military operations, identifying future threats, and examining how to refashion U.S. armed forces to meet them.

- Creating three study commissions: a Military Lessons-Learned Commission, a Future Threat Commission, and a Military Reform Commission.

- Choosing membership of the commissions carefully, with appropriate composition of military men and women and civilian specialists as dictated by specific objectives of each commission.

- Maintaining active involvement and support for the commissions—the quality and value of their work depends on the president’s continuing interest.

The Military Reform Commission should:

- Develop practices for prioritizing “Phase IV Planning”—how to conduct post-hostility operations—before planning for Phases I-III (Preparation, Shaping the Battlespace, Decisive Operations).

- Explore creating specific units trained and equipped to carry out peacekeeping, humanitarian, and counter-insurgency operations.

- Work to align military use of technology with ultimate U.S. strategic goals, rather than immediate tactical advantages.

Defense Policy: Regenerating the American Military

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The Importance of Defense Policy

Rebuilding and reforming the American armed forces will be one of the paramount challenges faced by the next president, and it is an arena in which he or she can exert particular influence as commander-in-chief. Yet, if in rebuilding our armed forces the president just recreates the hammer, the United States will still have to treat all the world’s problems as nails. We need military forces that can perform a diverse range of tasks in appropriate ways. It must not be a one-size-fits-all military. The required variety of knowledge, preparation, and ability cannot be pulled out of thin air, but must already be incorporated in the military.

All too often, liberal academic and policy elites disdain the military either as unknown territory, ruled by arcane technical expertise, or as an alien moral universe, typified by the acceptance of hierarchy and force. Moreover, there seems to be an assumption that all the United States requires for success is an intelligent foreign policy, and if called upon, the military can simply implement it as ordered. However, it is key to realize that foreign policy options can be limited or distorted by the character and abilities of our military. The last five years in Iraq make this painfully clear.

The Fundamental Problem

Historically, armed forces prepare for the war they want to fight, not the war that they may have to fight. Another way to say this is that militaries have an idea of what war should be, and they tend to act according to that idea rather than to reality. The most fundamental task in military reform will be getting the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force to reconceptualize war in terms of threat and response. From this would follow changes in force structure, planning, training, and equipment. It is said that an army fights the way it trains, but it trains the way it thinks.

Study Commissions

The first step would be to seize this historical moment to reevaluate what has succeeded or failed in recent military operations, identify what future threats loom before us, and examine how we should refashion the armed forces to meet them. Now is the
moment to act; because the military community recognizes that structures and practices require reform, the armed forces are open to questions and suggestions. Failing to undertake this examination would be dangerous, because given time, militaries tend to develop selective memories, choosing to forget what they do not do well, as U.S. forces turned their backs on counter-insurgency after Vietnam.

We might best begin the process by creating three study commissions, each with a different, but related, agenda:

- Military Lessons-Learned Commission
- Future Threat Commission
- Military Reform Commission

Of course the names of the study commissions can be changed, they are simply descriptive here.

For the process to work, it cannot just be forced upon the military from the outside. There will be debate, of course, but an attempt must be made to keep the commissions as collegial as possible. The military must be respected for its professionalism and its sacrifice. Yet, the next administration ought not to allow vested interests within the military to defend the status quo, demand more resources to do the same things, or blame its own shortcomings on convenient civilian targets.

Of course commissions of inquiry abound in Washington history, and the military has seen its share, even recently. But the paramount importance of military reform for the next administration demands we go at the process again. The quality and value of the work produced will depend on choosing the membership of the commissions carefully and on maintaining the active involvement and support of the president.

**Military Lessons-Learned Commission**

For obvious reasons, this body should be composed predominantly of military men and women. They must be noted for their experience and intellect, but also for their integrity and moral courage. The commission should also include some civilian specialists without immediate ties to the services.

Issues for discussion might include:

- war planning, including the failure to give proper emphasis to stability and security;
- logistics in support of a counter-insurgency;
- training Iraq military and police forces;
- cultural preparation of U.S. troops, its promises and limitations;
- conflict between the “warrior spirit” and effective policing operations;
- impact of terrorist violence on the ability to carry out effective small-scale counter-insurgent patrolling; and
- numerous technical questions, such as the values of different kinds of military equipment, e.g. up-armored humvees and blast-resistant vehicles;
- and much more.

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has been a professor of history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign since 1978. His interests center on the history of Western and non-Western military institutions and warfare. Professor Lynn’s research has emphasized eras of military change, particularly in early modern Europe and South Asia. His most recent works explore new themes in the history of war, society, and culture. *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe* (2008) examines the lives and contributions of the multitude of women who accompanied armies into the field, 1500-1815. *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (2003; revised 2004) discusses the role of cultural preconceptions and practices in affecting warfare. He has published three other monographs. His edited volumes include *Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present* (1993), among others. He is now working on a historical study of the cultural, psychological, and political aspects of surrender. Professor Lynn served as president of the United States Commission on Military History (2003-2007) and vice-president of the Society for Military History (2005-2007). He holds two orders: France’s Palmes Académiques at the rank of chevalier, and Morocco’s Wissam Al Alaoui at the rank of commandeur (awarded by His Majesty Mohammed VI of Morocco).

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Future Threat Commission

The need for the kind of work that this study group would do is obvious, and something of this kind probably exists on some level in the Department of State or even the Pentagon, but the effort needs to be given full attention and all the support possible. The composition of such a study commission would be only partly military, with a predominance of well-informed and insightful foreign affairs, regional, and homeland security experts. It would have to consider a spectrum of threats from terrorism through conventional and nuclear war, in particular the need for interventions to support friendly regimes, to undermine or change hostile regimes, to ferret out terrorists, to resist genocide, to aid in humanitarian disasters, etc. The list may be well-known in the policy community, but it is already a new world, and it will continue to change after the current war in Iraq runs its course—or enters its next phase.

It would be of particular interest for military reform, if the Threat Commission could suggest the military role and forces suitable to each challenge, from air-lift to the commitment of conventional troops.

Military Reform Commission

This last study commission would be the pay off, because it would suggest actual changes in force-composition, training, and practice. In the world of military reform, it is easier to speculate about problems and threats than to actually refashion the armed forces to deal with them. This commission must again be mainly composed of military personnel whose expertise is matched by integrity and moral courage. The choice of membership will be everything.

There is no predicting exactly what would come out of such an effort, but there are three areas that ought to get special attention.

Matters for the Military Reform Commission: Phase IV Planning

In the recent past, military planning has followed a four phase model: the first two (Phase I—Preparation; Phase II—Shaping the Battlespace) precede the big clash, and the main fighting dominates Phase III—Decisive Operations. Our armed forces executed the military parts of Phases I-III well; they captured our attention and the initial TV coverage. Phase IV—Post Hostility Operations, however, was botched. In fact, it was barely planned for; neither the Bush regime nor the military gave it much thought. Conrad Crane, Director of the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Army War College and a lead author of the 2006 Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, has argued convincingly that we need to change our approach to planning. Instead of thinking first about Phase I and working up, usually regarding Phase IV as an afterthought, we should worry first about Phase IV, defining what we want the “peace” to look like, how do we manage it, and what is required to do so. Then you concern yourself with Phases III, II, and I to set up success in Phase IV. My term for this would be “Phase IV Planning.”

The failure to put Phase IV center stage can be blamed on a number of people; Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney top many lists, but the military itself cannot escape blame. Frankly, they consider fighting their business, and that does not include the messy matter of creating and maintaining security after the tanks have stopped rolling. Here is a prime example of why the military must reconceptualize war.
General Anthony Zinni spoke critically and presciently on this point in early September 2003, before the worst excesses of sectarian violence occurred:

What strikes me is that we are constantly redesigning the military to do something it already does pretty well. I mean … breaking the organized resistance in Iraq, even though it may not have been the greatest army in the world, was done extremely well. We’re very proud of our troops and very proud of the way that was executed and led. But it wasn’t enough. At the end of the third inning we declared victory and said the game’s over. It ain’t over. It isn’t going to be over in future wars. If we’re talking about the future, we need to talk about not how you win the peace as a separate part of the war, but you’ve got to look at this thing from start to finish. It’s not a phased conflict; there isn’t a fighting part and then another part.

Our armed forces are “constantly redesigning the military to do something it already does pretty well,” because that is what is considered to be real war, because that is the military’s comfort zone. Another observation by a field commander makes the point in a different way. Commenting on his unit’s responsibilities in Iraq during December 2003, U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel William Darley remarked: “What we have here is basically a constabulary action. … We’ve seen almost nothing above the squad level. Basically this is not a real war.”

**Matters for the Military Reform Commission: Phase IV Forces**

In regard to the composition and employment of American forces, the most immediate concern of voters is the multiple long-term deployments of troops to Iraq. The strain on reserve and National Guard units causes the greatest anguish. We need to reevaluate the relationship between reserve and full-time forces; however, the ultimate solution to the problem lies in avoiding such long combat commitments, unless the nation is fully mobilized for war. All this is very important, and also fairly obvious, but need for reorganization and reform goes much deeper.

Darley defined his duty in Iraq as “a constabulary action.” That is a good term for it, and to carry out such an action, we need constabulary forces, no matter what they might be called. We need some military units particularly organized, equipped, and trained for Phase IV—or peacekeeping, humanitarian operations, counter-insurgency, and other interventions below the threshold of conventional battle.

Augmentation in numbers could be wasted if it only goes to create more maneuver units, that is the infantry, artillery, armor, and air used for a main clash on the battlefield. Lately, the U.S. Army underwent “Transformation” which certainly changed the organizational chart by emphasizing brigade-size units that could be more flexibly employed. But when examining the nature of these units carefully, one discovers that the amount of armored troops meant for the battlefield increased, not decreased. If the military spends its funding to buy more stuff “to do something it already does pretty well,” such money could also be wasted.

In the world of military reform, it is easier to speculate about problems and threats than to actually refashion the armed forces to deal with them.
The largest worldwide growth in armed forces has come in units intended for internal security, not the battlefield; China and India field about a million each. For legal reasons, the U.S. lacks such a gendarmerie, with the exception of the Coast Guard. We should explore creating specific units whose primary purpose is overseas constabulary operations. Such units would emphasize light infantry, military police, civil affairs, intelligence, engineers, communications, and finance. They could probably ramp up more easily into combat infantry, if need be, than could combat infantry be ramped down for constabulary use, although many soldiers would disagree with this assertion.

We would have to redirect values and expectations to create true constabulary units. The “warrior spirit” is not easily adjusted to peacekeeping. Once after a briefing on the need for limiting and focusing violence in counter-insurgency, an experienced top sergeant agreed, but then asked what he could do about the fact that his teenage Marines had signed up to pull the trigger. Constabulary units must be imbued with a constabulary spirit. Once again, rethinking the role of force is basic.

**Matters for the Military Reform Commission:**

*Dependence on Technology*

American military technology is the most sophisticated in the world, and we should take full advantage of it, guided by the context of specific military operations. Since World War II, the American military has become increasingly obsessed with technology. Part of this results from an understandable determination to achieve desired effects with hardware not human beings, and so limit casualties. Part of it derives from the accurate observation that we enjoy an important advantage here and ought to stress it. And part of it grows out of the links between the armed forces and defense industry. Be as it may, technology can accomplish great things, but the confidence that we can solve military problems by injecting new technological fixes can be counterproductive, particularly in constabulary, counter-insurgent, and peacekeeping operations.

I recall a talk by a high-ranking and intelligent Air Force general. As is so often the case, he began by showing film clips of precision bombing. In one of these, two snipers, revealed by thermal imaging, retreated into a large building where they disappeared to take cover. An air-launched precision guided weapon then obliterated the building, and the military audience at the talk applauded. But there was apparently no way of judging if that building was empty or inhabited by frightened families crouching in their apartments in hope that the battle would pass them by. Use of high-tech weaponry at that moment may have caused great harm to innocent civilians and earned the United States the undying enmity of the relatives and friends of those killed.

*Technology must be consistent not only with some immediate tactical advantage but with our ultimate strategic goals.* Indeed, heaven save us from the latest technological catchword coming out of the Pentagon. The greatest “Shock and Awe” associated with the Iraq war was not the disorientation of Saddam Hussein’s leadership, but the disillusionment of the American people.
Established at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1978, the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS) is comprised of faculty, students, and visiting scholars drawn from diverse academic disciplines. Program affiliates pursue advanced research to address relevant issues in international security. ACDIS receives funding from the State of Illinois, private foundations, and federal government agencies.

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Editor’s Note

ACDIS integrates diverse academic and military perspectives into its research and dialogue on Reconceptualizing War. This effort covers a set of related topics, including: policies and practices in contemporary warfighting; military uses of technology; origins, history, and causes of war; military strategy; quantitative and qualitative geospatial and geopolitical analyses of conflict; sociological impacts of war; and U.S. and international military force structures. We are pleased to offer this brief on U.S. defense policy as part of the Program’s continuing commitment to the study of these issues.

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