

## REBALANCING THE MILITARY PROFESSION

BY

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved*  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 17-03-2011		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Strategy Research Project		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Rebalancing the Military Profession				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Cook				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Colonel Robert S. Buran Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> This paper contends bureaucratic functions have dominated the profession of the U.S. Military as far back as the Vietnam War. A rebalancing is long over-due. This thesis is supported through a review of literature on the military profession and a survey of past U.S. Army studies regarding the profession. This paper also examines the 21st Century security environment and demonstrates the current context is exacerbating the imbalance. This paper concludes by proposing reforms to rebalance the U.S. Military by restoring its professional ethos. The most significant reforms proposed are taking steps to implement a career-long, individual self-development program throughout the officer corps and the establishment of a professional military society modeled after the Prussian <i>Militärische Gesellschaft</i> of the early 19th Century.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Military History, Strategic Competence, Professional Ethos, <i>Militärische Gesellschaft</i>					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  UNLIMITED	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>  36	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**REBALANCING THE MILITARY PROFESSION**

by

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Cook  
TITLE: Rebalancing the Military Profession  
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project  
DATE: 17 March 2011      WORD COUNT: 8,746      PAGES: 36  
KEY TERMS: Military History, Strategic Competence, Professional Ethos,  
*Militärische Gesellschaft*  
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper contends bureaucratic functions have dominated the profession of the U.S. Military as far back as the Vietnam War. A rebalancing is long over-due. This thesis is supported through a review of literature on the military profession and a survey of past U.S. Army studies regarding the profession. This paper also examines the 21st Century security environment and demonstrates the current context is exacerbating the imbalance. This paper concludes by proposing reforms to rebalance the U.S. Military by restoring its professional ethos. The most significant reforms proposed are taking steps to implement a career-long, individual self-development program throughout the officer corps and the establishment of a professional military society modeled after the Prussian *Militärische Gesellschaft* of the early 19th Century.





## REBALANCING THE MILITARY PROFESSION

It is impossible to have a broad grasp of history and of the better literature of the past and not see the blatant falsity, to say nothing of the shortsightedness, of defining today's troublesome problems as unprecedented or exceptional. Good and bad men have been successfully and unsuccessfully wrestling with them for centuries. Our country deserves military leaders who are familiar with that territory.<sup>1</sup>

—Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale,  
USN (Retired)

The United States Military is under attack and its enemy is not isolated to the battlefield. Multiple forces of disorder in the early 21st Century—the inability to deliver clear victories after more than nine years of persistent conflict against an enemy for which we were not prepared, an environment of information overload with multiple competing agendas that promote shallow thinking and short-term solutions, and an omniscient media that immediately highlights and often questions every action the military takes—have placed significant pressure on the profession. Bureaucratic solutions have prevailed to deal with the entropy, resulting in a weakening of the U.S. Military's professional ethos. Is the military profession in crisis? Has the profession lost its way? Is it beyond repair? Is this situation only a result of the last nine years? This paper contends the military bureaucracy has dominated the military profession as far back as the Vietnam War, and a rebalancing is long overdue.

### Framing the Problem

In their highly critical book, *Crisis In Command: Mismanagement in the Army*, Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage contend one of the primary reasons for U.S. Army's failure in Vietnam was due to the inability of its officers to provide the leadership—enforcement of standards and unit cohesion—required for a combat army.<sup>2</sup>

This failure was primarily the result of the Army being “permeated with a set of values, practices, and policies that forced considerations of career advancement to figure more heavily in the behavior of individual officers than the traditional ethics.”<sup>3</sup> The authors contend this primacy of careerism over selfless service began during World War II when the military had to merge with both economic and social sources of U.S. power to confront the global challenge.<sup>4</sup> Practices of the modern business corporation—systems analysis, personnel management, and computer decision models—became the organizational model of the military, and the slow erosion of the professional ethos began.<sup>5</sup>

In a follow-on book regarding this subject, *Military Incompetence: Why the American Military Doesn't Win*, Gabriel contends that the true test of the profession is battle. He states that if a military force cannot perform well in battle, then everything else it does effectively does not matter.<sup>6</sup> He goes on to state the profession’s “structure is so deformed that it cannot produce officers—planners and leaders—who are well versed in the art of war.”<sup>7</sup> The advent of the all-volunteer force has not helped this bureaucratic imbalance in which the system strongly favors careerism over selfless professionalism. Gabriel calls for the military to “relearn what it once knew; namely, that it is a true profession, and not just one more enterprise awash in the sea of a free society.”<sup>8</sup>

As for today’s U.S. Military, Gabriel and Savage’s arguments are as valid as ever. It is a rare occasion to not see fundamental pillars of the profession—strategic competence, moral courage, and selfless service—discussed in the regular cycle of scholarly journals and articles. In May 2007, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling (USA)

published a hard-hitting article in *Armed Forces Journal* questioning the strategic competence and moral courage of America's generals by stating: "failing to visualize future battlefields represents a lapse in professional competence, but seeing those fields clearly and saying nothing is an even more serious lapse in professional character."<sup>9</sup> In a pointed self-critique questioning the moral courage of our senior military leaders, Lieutenant General Greg Newbold (USMC, Ret.), the Joint Staff Director of Operations from 2000 to 2002, expressed regret in a thoughtful but untimely *Time Magazine* Op-Ed piece for personally not doing more to challenge the decision to invade Iraq: "Flaws in our civilians are one thing; the failure of the Pentagon's military leaders is quite another. Those are men who...acted timidly when their voices urgently needed to be heard."<sup>10</sup> Finally, *Joint Force Quarterly* recently published a highly contentious article by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Milburn (USMC) on the topic of military dissent. In the article, LtCol Milburn states the military officer, by virtue of being a professional with an oath of office and a code of ethics, is granted the moral autonomy to openly disobey the orders of civilian superiors he personally deems immoral.<sup>11</sup> After 20 years of experience and professional development, it is troubling to see a seasoned officer not have a clear understanding of one of the main tenets of selfless service: that the military serves under civilian authority in accordance with the Constitution of the United States.

Despite the preceding critiques, the U.S. Military regularly conducts assessments to evaluate the health of the profession. Most recently, the Secretary of the U.S. Army, the Honorable John M. McHugh, and the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General George W. Casey Jr., tasked the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

(TRADOC) on 27 October 2010, to be the lead agency in an Army-wide discussion of the profession of arms over the next year. Their guidance directs TRADOC to examine how the last nine years of war have affected the Army and the members of the profession “so that we can better adapt ourselves to deal with the increasingly complex security challenges of the 21st Century.”<sup>12</sup>

In advance of this yearlong discussion, this paper contends it is time to recognize the military profession is out of balance and in many respects a “wicked problem.” Wicked problems are “ill-defined, ambiguous and associated with strong moral, political and professional issues.”<sup>13</sup> As such, the military profession needs to be viewed through lenses that recognize both its enduring ideals as well as its context-dependent traits. Both categories of traits determine whether the profession is better or worse off during a given period. Colonel Matthew Moten (USA), deputy head of the History Department at West Point, clarifies this position by stating that professions wax and wane over time, and that wartime often exposes weaknesses needing reform.<sup>14</sup> As a wicked problem, the military profession cannot go from worse to better via sporadic, shallow, and incremental solutions. Rather, the profession needs continuous senior leader engagement. The time is long overdue for implementing changes to foster a renaissance of professional ethos in order to ensure the sustained health of the profession.

Using the U.S. Army as the primary focus given the multitude of studies and reviews it has conducted over the past four decades, this paper believes the forthcoming 2011 study will produce many similarities to past results, conclusions, and recommendations. Past U.S. Army studies reveal a military profession out of balance;

acting more like a bureaucracy—in which careerism, micro-management, and a zero-defect mentality dominate—than a profession that is competent, courageous, and selfless. This monograph begins by framing what it means to be a military professional. Next, a review of the U.S. Army studies is conducted to establish what has brought the profession to its current bureaucracy-dominated condition. The paper then examines the profession in the context of the 21st Century. While volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), the current environment is not unprecedented, but it has resulted in what can be characterized as the “Pecos River approach” in regards to the U.S. Military’s response to the multitude of challenges.<sup>15</sup> The paper concludes by proposing several reforms. The two most significant reforms are encouraging career-long, individual development throughout the officer corps and a renaissance of the profession through the establishment of a professional military society modeled after the Prussian *Militärische Gesellschaft* of the early 19th Century.

#### Military Professionalism Defined

Samuel Huntington begins his classic book on military professionalism, *The Soldier And The State*, with the thesis, “the modern officer corps is a professional body and the modern military officer is a professional man” defined by the characteristics of *expertise, responsibility, and corporateness*.<sup>16</sup> In defining *expertise*, Huntington puts forth the dual requirement of officers to have both breadth and depth, stating these traits only come about through education and experience over a long period of time.<sup>17</sup> It is up to the institution to first ensure its officers begin their journey with a broad-based liberal education that imparts an awareness of the society and traditions for which he serves.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the institution must develop the officers with a depth of skill and knowledge to ensure the successful application of violence, which is the primary function and

“peculiar skill of the officer.”<sup>19</sup> The characteristic of *responsibility* is based upon the fact that the expertise of the profession is essential for the security, functioning, and well-being of the society that created it.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Huntington goes on to state the society that created the profession demands “the management of violence be utilized only for socially approved purposes.”<sup>21</sup> Huntington’s final characteristic is *corporateness*, which is the notion of unity and consciousness that separate the profession from the society it serves; manifested through the establishment of standards and enforcement of professional responsibility.<sup>22</sup> It is through *corporateness* that the hierarchical bureaucracy of the profession and organization is established; meaning increased levels of competence and responsibility are defined by promotion to progressively senior ranks.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Huntington believed the military officer should stay out of the political process because it was beyond the realm of military competence.<sup>24</sup> As such, the military profession is subordinate to civilian control of the state, responsible for three primary functions: 1) to advise what is necessary for the minimum military security of the state, 2) to provide the military point of view on the implications of alternative courses of state action, and 3) to implement state decisions with respect to military security, including those which counter provided military judgment.<sup>25</sup> While Huntington does acknowledge the pressures of the political process on the military profession, the value of his work resides in defining the enduring ideals of the profession.

In order to get a sense of the context-dependent pressures on the profession, it is Morris Janowitz’ book, *The Professional Soldier*, which does a more complete job of identifying the modern pressures the military profession faces. Originally published in 1960, Janowitz’ book reads like a current-day professional journal article when he states

in the preface: “The military face a crisis as a profession: How can it organize itself to meet its multiple functions of strategic deterrence, limited warfare, and enlarged politico-military responsibility?”<sup>26</sup> The rise of technology, ultimately manifested in the threat of total war via the nuclear weapon, signaled the beginning of the end of the mass army and a convergence of military and civilian organizations in the U.S. government to handle security issues.<sup>27</sup> Janowitz also contended the movement away from a system of conscription was the end of the mass army, resulting in “smaller, fully professional, and more fully alerted and self-contained military force...a military force ‘in being.’”<sup>28</sup> Unlike Huntington, Janowitz believed the military profession needed to be engaged in the political process “to assist in accurately estimating the consequences of the threat or use of force against the potentials for persuasion and conflict resolution.”<sup>29</sup> Janowitz accurately forecasts today’s military struggles by stating of the many lessons that the Vietnam War provided, it highlighted the struggle of the military profession to deal with the simultaneous roles of strategic deterrence to prevent global nuclear war, the increasing likelihood of limited war, and “the variety of tasks labeled ‘stability operations.’”<sup>30</sup>

### Study on Military Professionalism

Since the end of Vietnam, the U.S. Army has conducted no less than eight major studies of military professionalism, education, and leader development. As a group, they share the common themes of examining the current health of the military profession and assessing the training and development of officers to ensure competent leadership to meet future security challenges.<sup>31</sup> Three of the studies will be examined in detail to support the thesis. These studies highlight the commonality of issues and problems

over the better part of four decades, thus supporting the call for wholesale changes in how the profession operates.

As a result of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General William C. Westmorland, directed the U.S. Army War College on 18 April 1970, to analyze “the state of discipline, integrity, morality, ethics, and professionalism in the Army.”<sup>32</sup> This study—known as the “Study on Military Professionalism”—was conducted at various Army schools over the course of two months via questionnaires and group interviews focusing on five fundamental questions: 1) what are the ideal professional standards set forth for the army officer; 2) what are the actual standards; 3) what differences between the ideal and actual are most significant; 4) what are the causes for the differences; and 5) how can the Army bring the differences into alignment.<sup>33</sup> These questions were designed to focus “on the value system of today’s Army officer...to reflect accurately the widespread convictions within the Officer Corps as to what the facts are.”<sup>34</sup>

Two hundred and fifty officers participated in the study and the results were significant to say the least. In terms of the ideal professional standards, respondents defined them as a climate of “individual integrity, mutual trust and confidence, unselfish motivation, technical competence, and an unconstrained flow of information.”<sup>35</sup> In sharp contrast to the ideal standards, respondents summarized the actual professional standards as:

Selfish behavior that places personal success ahead of the good of the Service; looking upward to please superiors instead of looking downward to fulfill the legitimate needs of subordinates; preoccupation with the attainment of trivial short-term objectives even through dishonest practices that injure the long-term fabric of the organization; incomplete communication between junior and seniors which leave the senior



uninformed and the junior feeling unimportant; and inadequate technical or managerial competence to perform effectively the assigned duties.<sup>36</sup>

As for those differences in the professional culture deemed to be the most significant, the top five were: 1) completing efficiency reports; 2) delegating authority; 3) setting a good example; 4) being loyal to subordinates; and 5) looking out for welfare of subordinates.<sup>37</sup> The five most significant causes for these differences were identified as well, they were: 1) inadequate counseling/setting standards by seniors; 2) unrealistic goals/quotas; 3) no time/excuse for failure; 4) loyalty up—not down; and 5) pressure to remain competitive (survival).<sup>38</sup> To close out the survey, study participants identified the top five solution themes necessary to bring the differences into alignment. The themes were: 1) emphasis/attention on part of senior officers; 2) the reward system—OER, promotion, assignments, schools, retention, awards and decorations; 3) communication (interpersonal); 4) stabilize personnel policies and assignments; and 5) utilize varying degrees of talent—allow for specialization and retention of solid non-promotable officers.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the concept of the wicked problem not being formally defined until 1973, the “Study on Military Professionalism” clearly acknowledged the profession as such due to its social complexity with man at the center “as an individual, a member of a number of groups and sub-groups, and a product of his culture”.<sup>40</sup> The Vietnam War put tremendous pressure on the Army, leaving it far worse off than when it began the war and resulting in the “hollow” Army of the 1970s. The study provided Army leadership with a comprehensive solution set to bring the culture back into alignment with the ideal values of the profession. The recommendations were: 1) share the findings of the study with the Officer Corps; 2) promote an atmosphere of honest communication amongst

junior and senior officers; 3) motivate competent officers and eliminate marginal officers; 4) ensure senior officers set the example and enforce the standards; 5) focus on developing measurable expertise; 6) revise officer assignment and priorities—duration of assignments and essentiality of command tours; 7) revise the evaluation system; 8) revise career patterns; and 9) revise promotion policies.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, actual implementation of these recommendations was incremental at best. While the study did result in more centralization of the officer personnel management system, Gen Westmoreland chose not to release the results of the study to the Army Officer Corps; it was finally released two years later and any real changes that could have been realized with a timely release were gone.<sup>42</sup>

#### The Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP)—Officer Study

As the 21st Century began the Army recognized it was behind in the process of transforming to meet the challenges of the new operational environment following the end of the Cold War. By June 2001, training and leadership doctrine were more than ten years old and the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General Erik K. Shinseki, directed TRADOC to establish a panel “to study training and leadership development in light of Army Transformation and the new operational environment.”<sup>43</sup> Like the “Study on Military Professionalism” in 1970, the panel discovered—after more than 13,500 interviews—that Army practices were out of balance with Army beliefs.<sup>44</sup> Among the many findings, the ATLDP identified an erosion of cohesion and trust due to the Army not meeting officer expectations in regards to leadership development opportunities, micro-management was pervasive, and there was diminishing direct contact between seniors and subordinates.<sup>45</sup> This was very disturbing news in regards to the health of the Army culture. ATLDP findings clearly indicated an Army culture out of balance in

terms of what it believes and how it actually acts; a divergence in its espoused theories of action vice theories-in-use.<sup>46</sup> The intervening nine years of continuous combat have not helped this imbalance. It is not a stretch to state that, given the pressure to produce measures of success and effectiveness in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the mistrust in leadership has been exacerbated due to “the leader’s desire to be invulnerable to criticism.”<sup>47</sup> One can understand having a zero-defect mentality on critical, lives-in-the-balance issues, but to have the same criteria for everything not only erodes cohesion and trust, but misses a significant development opportunity of subordinate leaders as well. Senior leaders need to realize that participative leadership and open and honest dialogue are the means to developing trust within the unit.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, despite the many worthwhile recommendations made by the ATLDP, the majority of them have not been acted upon. No transformative changes have taken place since the study’s release despite the significant desire for change amongst the Army Officer Corps. A change in culture is required, one focused on nourishing the depth of the profession in order to increase the mental agility and adaptability of its leaders.

### Organizational Culture Study

In September 2010, Dr. James Pierce, of the Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College, published the results of a study that examined if the organizational culture of the U.S. Army was congruent with the professional development of its senior level officer corps.<sup>49</sup> Dr. Pierce wanted to find out if the Army was preparing its future leaders to manage uncertainty and ambiguity, and if not, what were the aspects of the current culture preventing this from taking place.<sup>50</sup> His climate assessment was unique in that, rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence, he

quantified the results through proven measurement methodologies via a survey of the 952 students from the U.S. Army War College Classes of 2003 and 2004.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Pierce utilized the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) and the Management Skills Assessment Instrument (MSAI) to determine where the Army fell on the Competing Values Framework (CVF) model.<sup>52</sup> The CVF model allows one to identify the “basic assumptions, orientations, and values” of an organization’s culture.<sup>53</sup> Within this framework, the OCAI determines the prevailing orientation, relative strength, and congruence of an organization based upon the CVF’s core culture types: *Clan*, *Adhocracy*, *Hierarchy*, and *Market*.<sup>54</sup> These four core culture types are based upon the “confluence of two major dimensions of effectiveness: internal focus and integration versus external focus and differentiation; and stability and control versus flexibility and discretion.”<sup>55</sup> The MSAI is similar to the OCAI in that it assists leaders in identifying “the necessary skills and competencies that they must either develop or improve to facilitate an organizational culture change effort.”<sup>56</sup>

Dr. Pierce hypothesized the Army’s current culture was not consistent with an organizational culture supportive of professional development and that the preferred culture of the respondents would reflect a desire for consistency.<sup>57</sup> Dr. Pierce predicted his study would show the current Army culture reflecting a *Hierarchy* type, while the preferred Army culture would reflect an *Adhocracy* type. The *Hierarchy* type is not conducive to the development of mental agility because it espouses “formalized organizational structures, with an emphasis on formal rules and policies, and a long-term commitment to stability, and efficient smooth performance.”<sup>58</sup> To put it another way, the *Hierarchy* type is an organizational culture more characteristic of a bureaucracy. On

the other hand, the *Adhocracy* type is conducive to development of mental agility because it is “characterized by dynamic, entrepreneurial, creative, risk-taking, and innovative behavior that is dedicated to the long-term emphasis of acquiring new knowledge and practical skills.”<sup>59</sup> As for the two other culture types, the *Market* culture is defined as a “results-oriented organization...competitive and goal-oriented...tough and demanding...with an emphasis on winning,” and the *Clan* culture “is like an extended family...held together by loyalty or tradition...premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus.”<sup>60</sup> Of the four types, an *Adhocracy* culture is the style the U.S. Military needs to transform to in order to meet the security challenges of the 21st Century. However, with 533 responses to the study (a 56 percent rate), the results for the current Army culture were: 37.95 *Market*, 28.84 *Hierarchy*, 21.17 *Clan*, and 11.77 *Adhocracy*, whereas the results for the preferred Army culture were: 28.97 *Clan*, 27.08 *Market*, 24.55 *Adhocracy*, and 19.34 *Hierarchy*.<sup>61</sup> While the results did not directly support Dr. Pierce’s hypotheses, there was sufficient support in the results indicating the Army’s current culture is not congruent with the goal of producing mentally agile and adaptive leaders.

With the combination of a *Market – Hierarchy* culture, the results showed the current Army culture was not supportive of the professional development of its future leaders. Rather, these findings support the anecdotal feedback regarding the bureaucratic imbalance found in the ATLDP results.<sup>62</sup> Secondly, the results demonstrate the preferred Army culture gravitated more significantly towards a *Clan – Adhocracy*, indicating the desire for a profession that is focused on the development of its members and “characterized by flexibility and discretion...the hallmarks of professionalism.”<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the MSAI results supported the OCAI profile by being predominantly in the *Clan* quadrant.<sup>64</sup> The three main managerial skills of the *Clan*-style culture are: Managing the Development of Others, Managing Interpersonal Relationships, and Managing Teams.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Dr. Pierce concluded the Army needs “to bring its professional culture and particularly the informal professional development program into congruency and pointed in the direction that favors flexibility, discretion, and innovation.”<sup>66</sup>

Taken as a whole, the previous studies support Gabriel and Savage’s claim that the military profession has been dominated by bureaucratic themes and activities for too long, resulting in an environment of self-centered careerism, rampant micro-management, and a wide spread zero-defect mentality. Institutionally, the U.S. Military continues to produce a conformist cadre of senior leadership deficient in strategic competence, wanting in moral courage, not accepting of criticism, and lacking in both the time and mentoring skills needed to groom the next generation of leaders. This is not a personal attack of today’s senior military leaders. Rather, it is meant as a realization of what the military bureaucracy continues to produce through its force management systems. The value of Dr. Pierce’s study is in the desire of the next generation of leaders to finally make changes to the system. The lieutenant colonels and colonels surveyed in his study express the wish to re-establish a professional ethos in the military. An ethos that focuses on the development of subordinates and encourages innovation and continuous improvement. In doing so, Huntington’s tenets of *expertise*, *responsibility*, and *corporateness* can be brought back into focus in order to ensure success in the complex 21st Century security environment.

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Context

In reference to Admiral Stockdale's opening quote, it is wrong to say the complexity of the current security environment is unprecedented. Doing so diminishes the significant security challenges of the past, is also self-defeating, negates faith in our ability to competently confront the challenges, and cedes the initiative to our adversaries. The most significant challenge the current VUCA environment presents is the ever-increasing rate of information flow that has overwhelmed the military. The military is overwhelmed because it continues to operate under a bureaucratic, closed labor system that has not significantly changed in a quarter of a century; the last significant change being the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 that addressed increased joint integration amongst the four services.<sup>67</sup> A military profession that does not take the initiative to modify its organizational structure and capabilities, or adapt its strategic, operational, and tactical focus based on the current and future threat, is assuming significant risk.

If there is one agreed upon theme regarding the current and future security environment, it is that adversaries will continue to seek ways to overcome, neutralize, or defeat the U.S. Military's conventional and technological superiority. Whether it is labeled Hybrid Warfare, War Amongst the People, or Fourth Generation Warfare, it is clear "the wide distribution and asymmetric nature of new threats makes it harder to focus attention and resources."<sup>68</sup> A second prevalent theme is that by virtue of budget allocation and the abundant resources it possesses (in comparison with the other instruments of power), the U.S. Military is going to continue to be called upon to conduct operations outside of its comfort zone. This is most recently highlighted by stabilization and reconstruction efforts and counter-insurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>69</sup>

As a result, commanders and officers at all levels “will have to be able to react quickly to enemies who will adapt and constantly probe weaknesses with an increased level of sophistication.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, current adversaries are more adept than the U.S. Military in winning the battle of the narrative in the current environment. The global spread of information technology allows for the near real-time flow of information, resulting in an environment of whomever puts the story out first gains the advantage, regardless of whether the report is factual or distorted, the audience’s initial perception often rules the day.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, the bureaucratic dominance of the military over the past several decades left the profession ill-prepared to meet these challenges.

The bureaucratic dominance of the U.S. Military since the Vietnam era resulted in a shallow understanding of the true nature of the threats and challenges of the 21st Century. The system continues to favor action over intellectual merit, where command is the dominant factor to continued promotion.<sup>72</sup> Thus, rather than taking the time to apply intellectual rigor in the aftermath of Vietnam, the U.S. Military returned to focusing on the conventional war-fighting skills required to confront the Soviet threat and the counterinsurgency lessons identified in Southeast Asia were lost.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the lingering success of Desert Storm overshadowed any of the lessons the U.S. Military could have learned from intervention efforts in Somalia and the Balkans.<sup>74</sup> The system did little to reward the creativity, courage, and vision to see the developing threat. Rather, it rewarded officers who conformed to the system and followed established careers paths that allow them to rise to senior levels without realistic assessments of strategic competence.<sup>75</sup>



Herein resides the wicked problem of the military profession. Because of bureaucratic dominance, a personnel system that rewards action first and foremost, and an overabundance of resources when compared to the rest of the U.S. Government, the U.S. Military takes a “Pecos River approach” to the myriad of issues it has to solve. The “Pecos River approach” means that by attempting to respond to everything, solutions produced are “a mile wide and an inch deep.”<sup>76</sup> Clear examples of the “Pecos River approach” are the expansive joint education requirements and curriculums packed into single academic years at the staff and war colleges, the “check the box” assignment policies, and once again conducting contingency operations with a rotation policy that causes the U.S. Military to fight its extended wars one year at a time.<sup>77</sup> The “Pecos River approach” results in a significant lack of institutional memory when engaged in protracted wars and produces an officer corps proficient in the mechanisms of the bureaucracy, but lacking in the mastery of the operational art of war.<sup>78</sup> Without reform, the military is ill-equipped to deal with both the current and future security environment. The VUCA security environment requires a rebalancing of the U.S. Military away from the bureaucratic dominance and towards a rebirthing of the professional ethos. In order to do this, the officer corps needs to go deep before it can utilize the breadth required for the 21st Century security environment.

### Rebalancing the Profession

Now that a case has been made that the U.S. Military has evolved into being dominated by bureaucratic activities to the detriment of the profession, what can be done to correct the situation? Fortunately, there are many relevant and applicable proposals regarding a rebalancing. The most significant are: the call for Congress to mandate 360-degree evaluations for field-grade and flag officers; broadening academic

curriculums and increasing the opportunity for outside experiences at pre-commissioning schools; expanding the opportunity for career broadening assignments throughout an officer's career—sabbaticals for advanced academic degrees, exchange programs in interagency and multi-national organizations, and instructing at Service academies, ROTC programs, and professional military education schools; demanding all officers learn a foreign language; ensuring promotion boards screen for intellectual achievements—advanced degrees in non-military fields, publishing articles in professional journals, and other records of professional research; extending initial retirement eligibility well-beyond the current 20 year mark; and prolonging assignments to ensure expertise is truly gained before moving onto the next level.<sup>79</sup> While all of these recommendations are valid and merit consideration for implementation, they require formal changes to bureaucratic processes. Given the U.S. Military's past history of resistance to change, bureaucratic inertia, and an austere budget environment, it is difficult to foresee any of them being implemented in the near future.

Rather, a change in professional mindset that focuses on the peculiar skills of the military officer is required now. This change is realized through two primary methods that are semi-formal at best. Neither of them requires increased spending or formal changes to the system. First, the time is long overdue to re-invigorate a profession-wide, self-development program focusing on the study of military history. Second, senior leadership needs to establish a professional military society modeled after the approach taken by Gerhard von Scharnhorst when he established the Prussian *Militärische Gesellschaft* in Berlin in 1801.

## Individual Self-Development

One of the most prevalent themes of the day is the call for a forward-thinking military with a breadth of knowledge that expands beyond traditional military skill sets; capable of confronting wicked problems and achieving success.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, much of today's so-called forward thinking is disconnected from the past.<sup>81</sup> As previously stated, today's military is "too consumed by immediate pressures to examine the past in a serious and critical way."<sup>82</sup> This author can state with confidence, while in command of a U.S. Air Force Operations Support Squadron, many days were consumed by administrative burdens in order to keep the paperwork flowing and the squadron functioning. There was little, if ever any, time left to conduct serious and recurring unit-level professional development with subordinates. While unfortunate, it was reality. Without first changing the mindset amongst senior leadership that the dominance of the bureaucratic battle-rhythm continues to foster a shallow profession, the U.S. Military will continue to be plagued by mediocrity, if not outright failure. Unit-level professional development must be reinvigorated throughout the profession.

Dr. Milan Vego, of the United States Naval War College, sums this issue up very well when he states the "inattention to the history of warfare is perhaps the greatest weakness in the education of U.S. officers."<sup>83</sup> It is up to the officer corps as a whole to remedy this immediately by adding a deep knowledge of military history to its toolkit. The profession can no longer rely on staff and war colleges to impart the depth of history required during their single-year programs. Due to a multitude of external requirements (namely Joint Professional Military Education requirements), the colleges do not lay a solid foundation through case studies and historical analysis in their core curriculums. Hopefully, the true value in this shallow historical exposure is in igniting an

intellectual flame in officers to “enable an understanding of the past and encourage thinking about the future.”<sup>84</sup> It is then up to the individual officer to continue self-education efforts following graduation and throughout one’s career. An officer corps grounded in its history directly contributes to the ability of the profession to ensure the safety and security of the society it is charged to protect. The study of history—military and political—fosters “a full understanding of the relationship between policymakers and operational commanders...acquired only through the critical study of past wars and major operations and campaigns.”<sup>85</sup> Going forward, professional development efforts at both the individual and unit levels must place history front and center. Commanders at all echelons must lead this effort.

Few officers in modern times embodied the warrior-scholar model better than Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper, USMC retired. With a career that spanned 41 years, LtGen Van Riper fully appreciated that both operational experience and vicarious experience through the study of the past enabled him “to see familiar patterns of activity and to develop more quickly potential solutions to tactical and operational problems.”<sup>86</sup> His deep appreciation for history began after being wounded in Vietnam in 1966.<sup>87</sup> While contemplating the events of combat during his recovery he realized he had “known too little about war before going to Vietnam.”<sup>88</sup> His appreciation for history motivated him to develop a comprehensive program for career-long, individual officer development. The fruits of this effort culminated in his Strategy Research Project—titled *A Self-Directed Officer Study Program*—while a student at the U.S. Army War College in 1982.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, his actions to reinvigorate professional development steeped in

military history as a commander were remarkable and should be implemented at all levels today.<sup>90</sup>

In 1991, LtGen Van Riper took command of the 2nd Marine Division and he immediately went about ordering and inspiring “18,000 Marines to make history part of their professional development.”<sup>91</sup> He began by adding an hour of professional reading to his schedule each day, with the belief that if subordinates saw the boss dedicating the time, they would follow suit.<sup>92</sup> He also purchased more than 6,000 books for unit libraries throughout the division and required the division’s regiments and battalions to conduct reading programs and hold regular discussions on selected books.<sup>93</sup> For the individual officer, LtGen Van Riper felt a structured program based upon one’s grade and experience was essential:

Lieutenants and captains should be more concerned about the tactical and technical aspects in their studies of history while colonels should be concerned about the operational, strategic, and theoretical issues. Majors and lieutenant colonels are transitioning in their concerns, thus they have interests in both areas.<sup>94</sup>

It was LtGen Van Riper’s firm belief that “Marines fight better when they fight smarter, and a systematic and progressive professional reading program contributes directly to that end.”<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, LtGen Van Riper’s enthusiasm for life-long learning has yet to truly permeate the modern day military profession.

There are no shortages of commander’s professional reading lists available these days.<sup>96</sup> The problem is with a lack of follow through by the very commanders who publish the lists. Unlike LtGen Van Riper, there is very little push by senior commanders to encourage the reading of the listed books. Perhaps there is an expectation that all officers are sufficiently self-motivated to do so? However, without sincere involvement—call it pressure—from above to motivate the lower levels of the officer corps, these

professional development programs fail to live up to their potential for re-balancing and re-invigorating the profession's intellectual vigor and service ethic. Today's commanders need to follow LtGen Van Riper's example and re-ignite the study of military history. Senior leaders can ensure this is achieved by linking the professional reading lists to the formation of modern-day military society modeled after the Prussian *Militärische Gesellschaft* of the early 19th Century.

#### A Modern-Day Military Officer Forum

Nothing short of a professional renaissance is required to rebalance the profession to ensure success in the 21st Century security environment. The U.S. Military needs to look no further than what occurred in late 18th and early 19th Century Prussia under the tireless efforts of Gerhard von Scharnhorst. As an officer in the Hanoverian Army, Scharnhorst was one of the few who clearly understood the impact the French Revolution had regarding the art of war.<sup>97</sup> Scharnhorst understood that the French Revolution for the first time "reflected national rather than dynastic interests. It was the spirit of the French people, embodied in the nation-at-arms, that had revolutionized warfare."<sup>98</sup> Scharnhorst realized monarchical militaries were things of the past, no longer capable of meeting the French in battle. When he transferred to Prussian service in May 1801, he spent the rest of his days trying to reform the Prussian Army to meet the complex challenges of the transformed security environment.<sup>99</sup>

Scharnhorst's reforms were based on Immanuel Kant's Enlightenment concept of *Bildung*, which is a well-balanced relationship between character and intellect that is matured in the individual through education.<sup>100</sup> This concept is what he used to establish the *Militärische Gesellschaft* (Military Society) in Berlin in 1801. Recognizing that the military schools of the day only provided a beginning foundation, the goal of the Military

Society was to promote continued professional growth by encouraging officers to study the art of war.<sup>101</sup> Its explicit purpose “was to instruct its members ‘through the exchange of ideas on such subjects of the art of war which have particular relevance in our time.’”<sup>102</sup> Scharnhorst’s goal was to begin an intellectual debate amongst the Prussian officer corps to determine if the art of war had changed since the Seven Year’s War; specifically, did the legacy system established under Frederick the Great still have validity in light of the French threat?<sup>103</sup> These fundamental questions formed the debate of the Military Society over the next four years. During this period, the panel of the Military Society would send out relevant questions, society members would compose articles in response to the questions, the panel would then judge the best articles, and then have the articles published in the Military Society’s journal *Proceedings*.<sup>104</sup> By the time the Military Society disbanded in 1805 for mobilization against the French it had 187 members.<sup>105</sup> In its first three years *Proceedings* published a total of 196 presentations on the topics of military history, strategy, elementary and applied tactics, and many others.<sup>106</sup> Through Scharnhorst’s efforts, the Military Society raised the professional ethos and intellectual game of the Prussian Military. Despite the defeats at Jena and Austerlitz in 1806, Scharnhorst and the Military Society set Prussia on the course for long-term reform that led to the eventual successes in the Wars of Liberation from Napoleon in 1813-1815.<sup>107</sup>

It is clearly evident the U.S. Officer Corps desires a return to a professional environment that focuses on development and encourages innovation and continuous improvement. Establishing a modern-day Military Officer Forum (referred to as *Forum* henceforth) is the answer to meeting this need. First, the four Service Chiefs need to

launch the *Forum* by providing a more formalized reading program aimed at developing the officer throughout his or her career. They should establish reading lists delineated by the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of leadership. These lists should contain both classic and modern works in order to provide exposure to both the enduring ideals and contextual aspects of warfare. Second, the *Forum* needs to hold regular—ideally monthly, no less than quarterly—unit-level meetings to discuss what is being read. These meetings should be broken down as follows: tactical-level officer (lieutenants and captains) meetings led by battalion-equivalent commanders; operational-level officer (majors and lieutenant colonels) meetings led by brigade-equivalent commanders; and strategic-level officer (colonels) meetings led by division-equivalent commanders. Third, the *Forum* needs to bring both focus and more exposure to the myriad of professional essay contests currently being conducted.<sup>108</sup> As an example, the Secretary of Defense sponsors an annual essay competition only for those enrolled in professional military education (PME) programs.<sup>109</sup> Contestants “write on any aspect of U.S. Government national security strategy—addressing the coherent employment of the political, military, economic, and informational instruments of national power to achieve strategic objectives.”<sup>110</sup> The *Forum* could bring better focus and exposure to this competition by proposing the relevant security questions of the day that need to be answered and then open it up to all officers given formal PME programs comprise only a small portion of an officer’s career. This increased exposure to the relevant questions of the day would bring the potential for more creative and critical thought in the responses.

Establishing the *Forum* is executable in the short-term because its semi-formal nature does not require any adjustments to force management systems. There are four



main benefits. First, the professional knowledge base of the officer corps at all levels—tactical, operational, and strategic—is deepened through recurring self-study and via robust participation in the essay competitions. Second, professional ethos and service ethic are reaffirmed through the recurring dialogue sessions that pull officers out of the daily bureaucratic grind. Third, the open debate, the objective criticism, and the challenging of ideas through *Forum* interactions would overcome Scharnhorst’s belief of one-sidedness found in private study.<sup>111</sup> This would develop the *Bildung* of the individual officer and enhance the overall intellectual agility and adaptability of the U.S. Military, thus ensuring it is better enabled to successfully meet the broad challenges of the 21st Century security environment. Finally, the *Forum* has the great potential to become the change mechanism for formally cleaning up the bureaucratic sclerosis that has plagued the profession for more than four decades.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate that the U.S. Military is out of balance. That it has acted more like a bureaucracy than a profession for over four decades. This thesis was supported through a review of literature by Huntington and Janowitz to baseline those traits of the military profession that are enduring and those that are contextual. Through a survey of past U.S. Army studies of the profession, this paper revealed the U.S. Military is indeed behaving like a bureaucracy—in which careerism, micro-management, and a zero-defect mentality dominate—rather than a profession that is competent, courageous, and selfless. However, Dr. Pierce’s study revealed an officer corps that desires a rebirth of a professional ethos focused on forward thinking and the development of subordinates. This paper concluded by proposing two significant reforms to rebalance the U.S. Military: formalizing a career-

long, individual self-development program throughout the officer corps and establishing a professional military society modeled after the Prussian *Militärische Gesellschaft* of the early 19th Century.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis In Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 9.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Richard A. Gabriel, *Military Incompetence: Why the American Military Doesn't Win* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 187.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2007, <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/05/2635198/> (accessed October 9, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Greg Newbold, "Why Iraq Was a Mistake," *Time*, April 9, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1181629,00.html> (accessed August 18, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Andrew R. Milburn, "Breaking Ranks: Dissent and the Military Professional," *Joint Force Quarterly* 59, (4th Quarter 2010): 102.

<sup>12</sup> John M. McHugh and George W. Casey, Jr., "Terms of Reference for the Review of the Army Profession in an Era of Persistent Conflict," memorandum for Principles Officials of Headquarters, Department of the Army and U.S. Army Commanders, Washington, DC, October 27, 2010.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Moten, "The Army Officers' Professional Ethic—Past, Present, and Future," *USAWC, SSI Monograph* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, February, 2010): 14.

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier And The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social And Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), liv.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, viii.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, ix-x.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 417.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>31</sup> The five studies not examined in detail are: “Officer Personnel Management System Study,” 1971; “Review of Education and Training for Officers,” 30 Jun 1978; “The Professional Development of Officers Study,” Feb 1985; “Leader Development Study,” Aug 1987; “Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study,” 9 Jul 1997, linked from *Combined Arms Research Library, History of Army Officer Education*, [http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/gateway/officer\\_education.asp](http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/gateway/officer_education.asp) (accessed December 12, 2010).

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, B-26.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, B-39.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, B-47.

<sup>40</sup> Jeff Conklin, “Wicked Problems and Social Complexity,” *Dialogue Mapping: Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems*, (October 2005): 3, <http://cognexus.org/wpf/wickedproblems.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2010); U.S. Army War College, “Study on Military Professionalism,” 1.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Army War College, “Study on Military Professionalism,” B-48.

<sup>42</sup> Harry P. Ball, *Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College*, 395; Donald E. Vandergriff, *The Path to Victory: America’s Army and the Revolution in Human Affairs* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, Inc., 2002), 107.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 44-59.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 60-70.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 78-79, 86-87.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

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<sup>79</sup> 360-degree evaluations found in Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship"; broadening curriculums found in Leed et al., "The Ingenuity Gap: Officer Management for the 21st Century," 20-22; expanding career broadening assignments found in Nagl et al., "Keeping The Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps," 5-7 and Scales, "Too Busy To Learn"; officers learning a foreign language found in Nagl et al., "Keeping The Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps," 7 and Scales, "Too Busy To Learn"; ensuring promotion boards screen for intellectual achievements found in Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship" and Scales, "Too Busy To Learn"; extending the mandatory retirement found in Gabriel, *Military Incompetence*, 192; prolonging assignments found in Gabriel, *Military Incompetence*, 193.

<sup>80</sup> Leed et al., "The Ingenuity Gap: Officer Management for the 21st Century," vi.

<sup>81</sup> Williamson Murray and Richard H. Sinnreich, eds., "Introduction," *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 6.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Van Riper, *A Self-Directed Officer Study Program*, 14.

<sup>95</sup> Van Riper, "The relevance of history to the military profession: an American Marine's view," 52.

<sup>96</sup> Every Service Chief of Staff publishes quarterly professional reading lists. These lists can be accessed through the National Defense University Library's website, <http://www.ndu.edu/Library/index.cfm?secID=217&pageID=126&type=section> (accessed January 17, 2011). Another excellent source is former Missouri Representative Ike Skelton's National Security Book Lists put in 2003 and 2009; both can be accessed at the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Research Library, [http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/gateway/military\\_reading\\_lists.asp](http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/gateway/military_reading_lists.asp) (accessed January 17, 2011).

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 128, 170-176.

<sup>108</sup> Some examples are: the SECDEF and CJCS sponsor annual essay competitions with the winners being published in *Joint Force Quarterly*, linked at <http://www.ndu.edu/press/essayCompetitions.html>; The US Navy sponsors the “General Prize Essay” contest for the best article published in *Proceedings* over the previous year, linked at <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/essay-contests>; The US Army War College sponsors an annual “Strategic Landpower Essay” contest, linked at <http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/us-army-war-college-strategic-landpower-essay-contest-2011> (accessed January 20, 2011).

<sup>109</sup> SECDEF essay rules linked at <http://www.ndu.edu/press/SECDEF-EssayCompetition.html> (accessed January 20, 2011).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> White, *The Enlightened Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militrische Gesellschaft in Berlin*, 40.