The US Military Profession into the Twenty-First Century

War, peace and politics

Sam C. Sarkesian and
Robert E. Connor, Jr.

Second Edition

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This new edition of *The US Military Profession into the Twenty-First Century* re-examines the challenges faced by the US military profession in the aftermath of September 11. While many of the issues examined in the first edition remain, the "new war" and international terrorism have compounded the challenges.

As the US military had to respond to the changed domestic and strategic landscapes without diminishing its primary function, the new security context has not only complicated the problem of reconciling the military professional ethos with democratic civilian control but has also challenged traditional military professionalism. New developments like an increased reliance on the US Federal Reserves and National Guard make the US military profession increasingly linked to public attitudes and political perspectives.

In sum, the authors define the challenge faced by the US military profession as a dual dilemma: it must respond effectively to the twenty-first-century strategic landscape and undergo a revolution in military affairs while ensuring that it remains compatible with civilian cultures and the US political-social system without eroding its primary function. To overcome this challenge, the authors argue, the military profession must not only maintain its capability in fighting large conventional wars, but also be effective in limited wars and unconventional conflicts. Equally important, it must ensure that its voice be heard within the National Command Authority, Congress and by the American people. Only by adopting a policy of constructive political engagement with the US political-social system can the military effectively respond to the challenge of a "new war" and strengthen military professionalism.

This book will be of great interest to students of civil–military relations, American politics, strategic studies and military sociology as well as to military colleges and policy-makers.

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"For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to battle?"

I Corinthians 14:8

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Introduction

The terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, and the reshaping of the strategic landscape in the twenty-first century created complex challenges and dilemmas for the United States. The challenge came not only from within the established international order, but also from international terrorists (non-state actors). All of this was magnified by the involvement of the US military in domestic issues triggered by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast in September 2005 – particularly the devastation in New Orleans. The US military, especially the US Navy, became involved in search and rescue operations. The US Navy made a number of ships, including hospital ships, available along the Gulf Coast to assist in disaster relief. While the primary missions rested with local, state, and federal officials (FEMA), much-needed support was provided by the US military.

To be sure, homeland issues remain important. However, the terrorist attacks and the concept of new war have remained the primary focus of the military in the new era. The response to these challenges has required a wide range of diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military measures. But a dilemma has also been created: how could the challenges be countered effectively within the context of American political and democratic expectations?

For the US military this created an equally puzzling dilemma. Not only must it prepare for the twenty-first-century strategic landscape and be effective in the "new war," but the military must operate within the orbit of the American political system. This requires a more assertive military profession prepared to go beyond success on the conventional battlefield, without diminishing the concept of civilian control.

Compounding these challenges is the changing American political-social system, with notions of multiculturalism, continuing gender, racial, and homosexual issues, and debate over the meaning of Americanism. The spillover of such issues into the military domain raises serious questions regarding the degree to which the military reflects (or should reflect) society. Yet it is also clear that historical precedents and democratic concepts are deeply rooted in the American psyche and the US military profession.

This book is a study of the dilemma facing the US military profession both

before and after the "new war." It is an examination of military professionalism and what revisions, modifications, and/or changes are necessary to respond to the dilemma. We recognize that while this book is being written, the military profession is trying to come to grips with its basic tenets, remain effective across the conflict spectrum (which is changing), and still operate within the orbit of the American political-social system.

We will not delve deeply into the specific issues within the various military services. Such matters require separate studies focusing on different components than outlined here. While particular attention is given to the US Army, the study applies to the military profession in general. Nonetheless, it is the US Army that faces the most difficult problems.

Until recently we felt that the fundamental issue about military professionalism from the troubling years of the Vietnam War had been resolved or was being resolved. President Reagan's affirmation of the Vietnam War as a "noble cause," the end of the Cold War, and the success in the Persian Gulf War I offered a solid basis for our view. However, much has taken place since then, including conflicts in Somalia and the Balkans, and terrorist attacks in East Africa, among others. The election and re-election of President George W. Bush and his 2005 inaugural address and 2005 State of the Union Address expanded the Bush Doctrine, and added considerably to the concept of national interests and national security.

The theme in this book is that the political-military system and its internal relationships are changing (and have changed) and are having a major impact on the meaning of military professionalism. Military culture as it was conceived earlier is struggling with the challenges of the first decades of the twenty-first century. And this goes beyond the military culture that existed prior to September 11, 2001. Not only is this true with respect to the international security landscape, but the traditional military professional posture made it extremely difficult to respond to domestic political-social issues and to interact harmoniously with the American political system in this new era.

Compounding this problem is that the new generation of American political leaders and much of the population, in general, have little, if any, military experience. This also applies to many in the media. While this may not necessarily lead to inappropriate national strategy, it does create a gray area in understanding and responding to the military.

We do not focus specifically on the role of the media. The media do have an important role in impacting on civil–military relations. With electronic technology and journalists located all over the world, the media are able to quickly transmit pictures and reports to the American public, as well as to the rest of the world, about US military activities, both good and bad. This has some impact on the views of Americans regarding the role of their military.

However, this volume is not intended to serve as an operational manual to implement programs and training designed to maintain and expand professionalism. One will not find, for example, what changes of curricula are needed in senior service schools to develop the dimensions of professionalism

advocated here. And as stated earlier, this volume will not delve deeply into the specifics within each military service. The last part of this book summarizes elements of the military culture and the new concept of military professionalism. This is viewed from a broad perspective aimed at the philosophical and political underpinnings and the military professional ethos.

Admittedly, no clear picture of the characteristics of military professionalism is emerging in the twenty-first century and in the era of the "new war." There are a number of matters that have an impact on the military system, matters that in themselves are not clear in their dimensions. Transformation, new military weaponry, demands of the American political system, international turmoil, Total Force policy, and changing education and leadership demands within the military system, to name but a few considerations, make it extremely difficult to define a clear military professional system. But we believe that to develop a basic understanding of where the military profession has been and some of the steps it is going through for the twenty-first century and the new security environment, we need to have roots in what was published in the first edition of this book. We stress that this is the basis for our assessment of the military profession into the twenty-first century.

There are four parts to this book: Part I: "The US military in a fragmented world"; Part II: "American society and the military"; Part III: "The new world order and the utility of military force"; Part IV: "Conclusions".

Part I is an introduction of two chapters: an overview of the twenty-first-century strategic landscape and concept of the military profession. These chapters stress the need to assess the components of the new-era dilemma facing the United States in the aggregate and how they affect military professionalism.

Part II consists of four chapters focusing on the relationship of the US military to American society. This includes an historical overview of civilian and military cultures and how the military relates to the American national security system. In the broader framework, this part studies civil–military relations, the way in which domestic political-social forces are spilling over from society into the military, and the military's efforts to respond accordingly. The final chapter in this part is a study of the US national security system: its changes and the challenges in the new era.

Part III has five chapters focusing on the new world order, not only what has changed but the challenges of non-state actors, including international terrorism. All of this is viewed in the context of national interests and strategy, and the challenges that have evolved in the transition from old war to new war. The US role in Afghanistan and Iraq is briefly reviewed. This is intended not as a case study, but rather as an overview analyzing US military doctrine and internal military issues. Also included is a study of the US military system, and how this has been shaped by the "new war" and the challenges of international terrorism. The effectiveness of the military across the conflict spectrum is addressed. The last chapter focuses on the mainstream military system and how the special operations system differs from it.

How this relates to the prevailing views of the national leadership, the National Command Authority, and the American public is part of this theme.

Part IV comprises three chapters, summarizing the main themes in each part and highlighting the dilemma facing the military profession. It stresses the fact that as of this writing (2005) there is no clearly defined picture of the military profession in the new war era. To develop a more acceptable relationship between the military and society, these final chapters focus on the need for constructive political engagement and understanding of the role of the President, civilian and military cultures, and the proper role for a political-military system. Constructive political engagement stresses the need for a new military professionalism challenging the traditional view of a "wall" between the military and politics. It also challenges the view of a military profession disengaged from the political realm – a view that is even more incongruent in the twenty-first century.

The chapters vary in length, according to the scope and dimensions of the subjects covered. For example, while the first chapter is lengthy and comprehensive, Chapter 12, "The President: Civilian and military cultures," is relatively short. The brevity of Chapter 12 is based on the assumption that most are aware of the President's role as commander-in-chief and his relationship to the military profession.

In writing this book we have attempted to combine our experience as military professionals with our years in academia. That is, we have tried to follow the guidelines of scholarly research with participant-observer insights. At the same time, we have tried to be sensitive to the views of colleagues in academia and military professionals and former professionals, and have discussed with a number of them a variety of the subjects covered in this volume. We have also studied assessments from appropriate literature. Hopefully, all of this has led to a book that reflects a reasonably balanced assessment and not that of a classroom theoretician lecturing the military profession. Nonetheless, what is written here is likely to challenge a number of views of military professionalism that exist in both military and civilian circles. Of course, some will read this volume with an eye to placing our views in a particular part of the political spectrum. This is to be expected given the book's political dimensions. And some will be critical of this volume because what is presented differs considerably from their own views.

To be clear, this is primarily a book of reflection. It is not organized around an extensive research effort, nor is it based on quantitative analysis. Conclusions are based on reflection of what we have written before and our views of the direction needed in the remainder of this decade and in the twenty-first century.

We have interpreted the impact of September 11, 2001, the US military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the concept of new war in terms of each chapter of the first edition. We have not simply added a paragraph about September 11, Afghanistan and/or Iraq. Rather, we have analyzed

what was in the first edition and how this has changed or remained relevant in the new security landscape of the twenty-first century in the aftermath of the "new war." It does not purport to extol some magic formula for solving the problems of the military and the military profession. It is fundamentally an effort to define a reasonable starting point for the military profession in responding to the challenges of the international strategic landscape and remaining within the orbit of the American political system. In the process we have tried to assess as fairly as possible what many others have written about the American armed forces and the military profession.

Again, this book stresses the following: the need to revitalize the notion of the military profession to go beyond battlefield skills and mind-sets; advocacy of a positive political-military dimension to the profession; the need for a much more vigorous professional role in public airing of the military perspectives on strategy, doctrine and combat effectiveness; and a revitalized professional and institutional memory in responding to conflicts across the spectrum and particularly operations other than war. Without such dimensions, we fail to see how the military profession can respond effectively to the internal issues within the military system, and respond to American society, much less deal with the new strategic landscape.

Sam C. Sarkesian
Robert E. Connor, Jr.

Part I

The US military in a fragmented world

1 War, peace and politics

In the first years of the twenty-first century, the US military faces challenging and troubling issues. The strategic landscape remains unsettled, American society is changing, and military contingencies have become embroiled in what many call non-traditional missions, while the military is struggling to respond to a variety of internal issues, remain effective across the conflict spectrum, and respond to the "new war." All of this is taking place as budgetary issues, societal expectations and homeland security seem to dominate the domestic political landscape. Thus, the US military faces a dilemma: How to respond to the uncertainties of the new strategic landscape, with particular attention to the "new war," and maintain a proper relationship with society. Equally challenging is to do all of this while retaining its *raison d'être*.

In trying to cope with this dilemma, much attention has been given to civil–military relations in the post-Cold War period spilling over into the new era. The international terrorist attack on the United States in 2001 changed much of this landscape. The study of military professionalism during the same period has been generally subsumed under other matters, although it is the military profession that holds the key to how the US military will respond to this dilemma.[1]

While the dilemma encompasses any number of considerations, the most critical is the military professional ethos in the twenty-first century. This has its roots in two important issues: the relationship of the military to American society and the utility of military force in a new world order. The troubling dimensions of such issues have revealed the need for a more assertive military profession within the political sphere, an assertiveness that is clearly necessary to clarify the military perspective to the American public and elected officials. Although the military profession is not the only actor shaping and affecting these matters, it is *the* critical actor by virtue of its unique purpose.

It is the thesis here that the first step in resolving this dilemma is for the military profession to develop a more comprehensive view of the meaning of politics and the driving force underpinning the US political system, and adapt its doctrine on the basis of constructive political engagement.[2] This may trigger criticism from segments within the profession and civilian

circles. However, prudent political involvement by the military profession will reinforce the notion of civilian control, provide a more incisive concept of military professionalism, and place the military profession in a position to more effectively respond to the twenty-first century's domestic and strategic landscapes.

The remainder of this chapter is an introduction to the issues examined in this book: The relationship of the military to American society and the utility of the military in the new strategic landscape and the "new war." Subsequent chapters examine these issues in more detail. But first it is important to place them in a historical context.

Historical context

The problems facing the military and the military profession are not new phenomena. Troubling times have been part and parcel of military history.[3] And this has not been confined to the US military. In the post-Napoleonic period in France, for example, Victor-Alfred de Vigny, of noble birth and a one-time soldier, lamented the fate of the army:

> It is cut off from the main body of the nation, and trails behind like a child, undeveloped in mind and forbidden to grow up. When a modern army ceases to be at war, it becomes a kind of constabulary. It feels ashamed and knows neither what it is nor what it is supposed to do, whether it rules the state or is its slave. It is a body searching high and low for its soul and unable to find it.[4]

While the historical periods may differ, the reasons for troubling times for the military usually evolve from generally similar circumstances. These historical periods need to be studied and the right lessons drawn regarding military and civilian responses. They can then serve as reference points for the current period. Here we limit our reference points from the founding of the American Republic to the end of the nineteenth century. It was during this period that much of the groundwork was laid for the political–military intermix of later years.

From the Revolution to the post-Civil War period

The notion of civil supremacy over the military was established by the Founding Fathers and spelled out in the Constitution. The role of George Washington in expressing the subordinate role of the military to civilian leadership seemed to settle the notion of civilian supremacy. But this did not mean that there was a distinct wall between civilian and military life. The concept of the military profession had not developed into one sharply distinct from civilian life. Indeed, it was a common practice for individuals to move directly from civilian life into senior military positions.

Senior military officers were embroiled in politics before and during the Civil War. Their activities ranged from trying to assert their authority over the President and various members of Congress to setting themselves up to run for political office. The political entanglements of Generals Winfield Scott and George McClellan are well known. The point is that the period from the American Revolution through the Civil War era was replete with political involvement in one form or another by senior military officers. (This was also seen in the Mexican War, with President Polk asserting his authority to select one general over another, driven by political motives.)

In the aftermath of the Civil War (1870–1890) the US military faced difficult times. The Army went through what has been termed the "dark ages" and the Navy a "period of naval stagnation."[5]

> The postbellum era has been tagged by military historians as "the dark ages" of the United States Army. Considering political–military relations, there is little wonder. Criticisms from business apologists, labor antagonists, and rededicated pacifists converged on Washington; and what one finds in the Congressional records is a conglomerate of unappealing sketches of the army and its leaders.[6]

Also during this period Congress passed the First Reconstruction Act, setting the stage for the Army to become governors, police and judges throughout much of the old Confederacy.[7] There was no external threat to the United States, and the Army was relegated primarily to coastal defense, Indian wars, expansion to the West, and taming the old Confederacy. During the same period, the Army was also involved in domestic labor strife. The *raison d'être* of the Army seemed out of fashion. According to Kemble,

> Prior to the 70s regular army units had rarely been called upon to quell civil disorders. But between the first great wave of protests in 1877 and the Pullman strike of 1894, they were used repeatedly – in more than three hundred separate labor disputes, according to most accounts. State militias, immediately available to the governors, were employed even more.[8]

However, the Navy emerged out of the stagnation of the post-Civil War period as the United States evolved into a world power in the aftermath of the Spanish–American War. In the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century the Navy became the prominent service as the notion of "Island America" became the security posture. The Navy's purpose was to keep the seas open for maritime commerce and to keep potential adversaries far from America's shores. In the process, naval officers remained distant from society. This external mission (including the Marine Corps) relegated the Army to a coastal defense mission.[9] With the Spanish–American War and into World War I, the Army's role shifted to external considerations. Indeed, with

the acquisition of territories resulting from the Spanish–American War, the United States acquired the trappings of empire.

The United States as a world power

The revitalization of the US military in defeating Spain and in developing into a major world power led to new dimensions of US military policy. This "represented a fundamental change."[10] It also led to a new dimension in civil–military relations, with the US military gaining a more professional status and respect from the American political elite.

But shortly following World War I, the United States returned to its "Island America" concept of isolation. President Harding's call for "normalcy" resonated throughout the American people. Disillusioned with the "old world" in the aftermath of World War I, the United States turned inward.[11] When the war ended, one historian wrote, "The army was hastily demobilized, pouring millions of bored trainees and battle-shaken veterans into the job market without plan."[12]

In between the two world wars, the Navy was seen as the first line of defense while the Army Air force was a fledgling service arm. For the most part this changed little until the 1930s and into World War II.[13] In the main, during periods of US strategic withdrawal the military profession became more distant from society, turned inwards, and found it difficult to gain a respectable place in the American political-social system. Clearly World War II changed all of that.

Immediately following World War II, the draft was abolished, albeit for only a short time, and again America looked to a return to normalcy. The assumption was that the military would revert to a prewar posture. But the Cold War changed the strategic landscape. With its onset and the rise of a superpower world, the military gained a highly respectable place in the American domestic scene as well as in most international circles. Involvement in Korea was a watershed, marking the change from World War II euphoria to a more conflict-ridden world. A variety of lesser conflicts engaged the US military. The Vietnam War created another watershed – one that lingers today, spilling over into US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Vietnam era

In the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, the Vietnam War created a particularly troubling time for the military establishment. The ambiguities of the war and the "Age of Aquarius" created an anti-military sentiment among very vocal groups in the United States, spilling over into society in general.

> The Age of Aquarius is not a happy time for the U.S. military establishment.

> Flower children are in the streets. Wars are unfashionable.
>
> In circles of the New Left, men in uniform have come to symbolize the corruption of American life, the distortion of national priorities, the darker impulses of the American soul.
>
> In colleges and high schools, new heroes have emerged whose battle cry is, "Resist!" Politicians decry militarism, priests and doctors and lawyers encourage draft evasion, military recruiters are driven from college campuses, ROTC buildings are stoned and burned.[14]

During the same period, a number of published books and articles reflected suspicion of and concern about the military establishment, pinpointing waste and mismanagement, and portraying inflexible and immature military perspectives.[15] All of these matters tarnished the military image and that of military professionals. This was also the case within the military, where distinctions were made between draftees and "lifers" – career military men. Some of these same issues emerged during the presidential election campaign in 2004.

A paper delivered in 1970 stated:

> The anti-military sentiments that have surfaced during the past few years have created in the minds of many, a rather distorted image as to the relationship of the military to the problems of US society. . . . From the sociological viewpoint, one can point to a number of indicators with respect to the diminished military image. . . . The My Lai massacres, the alleged graft and corruption associated with the highest circles of senior enlisted men, the charge of military-industrial collusion, and the stress of mass media on military activities within Vietnam, create the type of image which makes duty, honor, country sound hollow.[16]

Looking back at Vietnam, where he had served two tours of duty, General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of coalition forces in the 1991 Gulf War, wrote, "We in the military hadn't chosen the enemy or written the order – our elected leaders had. Nevertheless, we were taking much of the blame . . . I couldn't shake the feeling that America had betrayed the South Vietnamese."[17]

Contrary to much of the material published during the Vietnam War period, the General Schwarzkopf view is seen in later studies of America and Vietnam. One of the most poignant statements is by Lieutenant-General Hal Moore and Joseph Galloway:

> The class of 1965 came out of the old America, a nation that disappeared forever in the smoke that billowed off the jungle battlegrounds where we fought and bled. The country that sent us off to war was not there to welcome us home. It no longer existed. We answered the call of one President who was now dead; we followed the orders of another

> who would be hounded out of office, and haunted, by the war he mismanaged so badly.[18]

While the reality of Vietnam may recede into the background, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a constant reminder to every generation of Americans of the sacrifices and calamity of that war. Moreover, because of the divisive nature of the war and the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam leaving its ally to face the enemy with little US material backing, the Vietnam War remains an enduring memory, particularly to those who served in the US military and to military professionals. It is also a reminder to the current generation of the possibility of what the US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq may create.

The Vietnam War had a marked negative impact on civil–military relations and on the military profession. "It convinced the officer corps of the need to politicize military interests. It helped to . . . foster greater 'separation' of the military from certain segments of society."[19] Yet other military professionals felt that "politics" had subordinated military considerations, leading them to argue for a continuing wall between the military and politics.

The need to speak out and provide a realistic military perspective was a major issue in the Vietnam War. In the decision to go to war and in its conduct the Chiefs of Staff played a role aptly portrayed by McMaster as that of "five silent men."[20]

> The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of the *New York Times* or on college campuses. It was lost in Washington, D.C. . . . The disaster in Vietnam was not the result of impersonal forces but a uniquely human failure, the responsibility for which was shared by President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisers. The failings were many and reinforcing: arrogance, weakness, lying in the pursuit of self-interest, and, above all, the abdication of responsibility to the American people.[21]

This view is shared by Jeffrey Record, who concluded that in the Vietnam War, "The military, by virtue of its constitutional role as an instrument of civilian authority, was relegated to the role of accomplice in what amounted to the most strategically reckless American enterprise of the twentieth century."[22] He concluded that "If the country was poorly served in Southeast Asia in the 1960s by its civilian leaders, those leaders were in turn poorly served by the professional military."[23]

One cannot help but wonder how the American involvement in the war might have changed or the conduct of the war differed if the Joint Chiefs had, indeed, practiced constructive political engagement and aired their concerns about the Vietnam War – that is, if the Joint Chiefs had pressed such views on President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara, as well as the American public and elected officials.[24]