

Topics: In Defense of the Pentagon

By THOMAS S. POWER

There seems to be quite a difference of opinion about the proper size and role of the military. It varies from doing away with it entirely to dramatically increasing its size and influence. As in most things the answer lies somewhere between the two extremes. The extremists are vitally interested in our military posture but for different reasons.

We can solve all of the problems facing us today, i.e., inflation, pollution, poverty, racial unrest, the war in Vietnam, drug addiction, law and order, etc., and still lose everything if we fail to prevent nuclear war or nuclear blackmail.

Every citizen in this country should ask himself the following two questions: First, do you think both the Soviet Union and Communist China have abandoned their stated goal of world domination and destruction of the capitalist system? Second, can you guarantee that they or some other "ism" will not sometime in the future resume such a goal?

If either answer is negative then you should become more knowledgeable about the primary mission of our military forces which is "the prevention of war" or, better stated, "nu-

clear deterrence." First, let me state that I strongly believe in the two basic principles that a democracy can not exist without, namely, freedom of the press and civilian control of the military. Despite all the hue and cry about Vice President Agnew's recent criticism of the press and the scare outcry about the unholy alliance of the military-industrial complex, let me assure you that there is not a single major country that enjoys a more favorable position in this regard than the United States.

Answerable to President

Let us look at the Pentagon. At the top is a large group of civilians appointed by the President and the Secretary of Defense. These men are in complete charge of all military operations. They exercise this authority through the Joint Chiefs of Staff consisting of the ranking officers of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. The Joint Chiefs act as a staff for the Secretary of Defense. He is the final authority in the Pentagon and, in turn, answerable to the President.

I do not think it is widely understood that there is not a single military man in this country who has any authority to do anything given to him

by law by the people of this country. This authority is held entirely by civilians and is only delegated to the military at their discretion and subject to their veto. Keep this in mind when inclined to raise a fuss about too much military influence.

Deterrent Equation

I assume that we will not become involved in future Vietnams in the same manner as our involvement in South Vietnam. I agree with our involvement, but not its execution. Wars should be avoided if at all possible without loss of honor or sovereignty. But if the top civilian authority decides to resort to the use of military force then go in with the goal of winning as soon as possible at the least cost to us in men and matériel. You cannot separate political from military.

To stop Communist aggression we have made defense treaties with a number of nations. We are pledged to come to their aid. To live up to these obligations requires a military posture able to handle the different levels of combat. Our present foreign policy as stated by President Nixon at Guam will, in the future, consist primarily of furnishing aid through military advisers and hardware

rather than large ground forces in the so-called limited wars. While this policy is sound it does not take care of the major problem I referred to when I spoke of nuclear deterrence.

The strength of our nuclear strategic forces is the factor I had in mind. We must keep all potential aggressors convinced that if they resort to the use of nuclear weapons they will be defeated. The deterrent equation is not a static situation. It is influenced not only by what we do but more importantly by what potential aggressors do. For example, by passing to the Soviet Union and Red China the prerogative of striking first, we more than double their relative nuclear strength. Historically aggressors strike first.

There is a tendency today to think that a nuclear disarmament pact with the Soviet Union will solve the problem of nuclear war. I disagree. This is wishful thinking. Our collective answer to the two questions I asked could be the most important decision we ever made.

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