

WHO SPEAKS FOR OUR PROFESSION?

Military & Strategic Studies at the USAF Academy

THOMAS DROHAN AND STEVEN POMEROY

The Normandy invasion was based on a deep-seated faith in the power of the air forces, in overwhelming numbers, to intervene in the land battle...Without that air force, without the aid of its power, entirely aside from its ability to sweep the enemy air force out of the sky, without its ability to intervene in the land battle, that invasion would have been fantastic... Unless we had faith in the air power to intervene and to make safe that landing, it would have been more than fantastic, it would have been criminal.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower¹

War is our business. To do it well, our graduates must have a firm understanding of military power and its place within the American Republic. Since the 1954 founding of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), the study of the context, theory, and application of military power has remained central to the institution's mission. Indeed, one may argue such expertise is the essence of a military academy education. Nonetheless, throughout the Academy's existence, arguments have raged over the disciplinary content and organizational ownership of this essence. Just as the founders, leaders, and scholars of the Academy sought to blend officer education and training, the earliest stirrings of the Department of Military and Strategic Studies tried to reconcile the theoretical aspects of military power with practical applications. Today, this Department is one of only a handful at North American undergraduate or graduate institutions offering an accredited disciplinary

major focused on understanding the theory and application of military power regardless of time and context. Given the importance of military power to American security, the broader scholarly enterprise warrants castigation for its neglect.

At the time of USAFA's founding, American national security girded upon then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower's policy of the New Look, meaning a near-exclusive reliance upon the deterrent value of air-delivered atomic weapons.

the peace, God willing, it will keep on doing so. This Academy, we are founding today, will carry forward that great effort."² Eisenhower concurred. In his 1955 dedication message, he foresaw the Air Force Academy, "taking its place beside West Point and Annapolis."³ He set USAFA's benchmark high, commenting, "the Air Force Academy joins a proud company. The honored histories of the two older institutions [West Point and Annapolis] provide a peerless standard against which, in future years,

...the Academy is a bridge to the future, gleaming with promise of peace in a stable, sane world...Our airpower has kept the peace... It is keeping the peace, God willing, it will keep on doing so.

- Harold Talbott, former Secretary of the Air Force

Because of this, understanding military power was of the highest national concern. As a West Point graduate, Eisenhower valued the necessity of educating professional military officers within a service-unique academy environment. A year later, Secretary of the Air Force Harold E. Talbott reflected this belief in his July 11, 1955, testimony before the House Subcommittee Hearings. Talbott commented, "the Air Force Academy is built upon a proud foundation and so it should be. For the Academy is a bridge to the future, gleaming with promise of peace in a stable, sane world...Our airpower has kept the peace...It is keeping

the excellence of the new Academy will be measured and found worthy."⁴ It was now up to the Academy's founders and first cadre to ensure they educated and trained cadets to meet the "peerless standard" of "the two older institutions."

Military Studies was one of the three areas specified by the Stearns-

Colonel Thomas Drohan is Professor and Department Head of Military & Strategic Studies. Lt Colonel Steven Pomeroy is an Associate Professor of Military & Strategic Studies, and the Departments's Deputy Head for Curriculum.

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Eisenhower Board (1954) establishing a balanced curriculum in the new Air Force Academy. Despite the centrality military studies held in the minds of USAFA's founders, little consensus existed among faculty and staff regarding what the content ought to be and who ought to teach it. The Dean's faculty (DF) tended to adopt broad academic perspectives, while the Commandant's Cadet Wing (CW) cadre focused on practical training applications. As a result, Military Studies emerged in the sixties reflecting Cold War mind sets and tactical perspectives. The Commandant's daily priority was training cadets, which suppressed Military Studies as an evolving scholarly discipline. Regarding what Military Studies should be, the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz commented "the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."⁵ The successful officer, therefore, had to distinguish carefully the dynamics of war's ever-changing character while relating to the enduring nature of war. Certain mid-twentieth century intellectuals, including the famed American historian, social critic, and commentator Lewis Mumford claimed, "the Army has usually been the refuge of third-rate minds."⁶ Clearly, the Academy preferred Clausewitz to Mumford, but neither DF nor CW could agree how to achieve this. Through the 1970s, military training priorities battered, buffeted, and strangled the academic credibility of Military Studies. Mumford was winning.

In the seventies, Military Studies organized within a new CW organization, the Deputy Commandant for Military Instruction (CWI), which included training. Later in 1980, a Per-

manent Professor of Military Instruction (then-Col Philip D. Caine, formally a senior member of the Academy's history department) was established.⁷ Caine's leadership was instrumental in creating a new academic discipline. He developed a faculty foundation drawn from related fields, including history, political science, and education. In addition,



Carl Von Clausewitz

courtesy of Clausewitz.com

Caine established a Ph.D. selection process to generate and sustain expert faculty. Assiduous personnel planning also ensured the best operational experience entered the ranks of CWI. During the 1980s, the first curriculum benefited from greater continuity in military leadership, Ph.D. oversight (including Dr. Jim Titus, whose 1983 arrival marked the first Ph.D. and the first officer awarded tenure as Associate Professor status in CW), and energetic talent in instructional technology (Dr. Dorri Karolick, an educational technologist). In later years, Caine's prescience reaped benefits.

The benefits were yet to come, however. Meanwhile, tensions between the Academy's educational and training missions inhibited Military Studies ("Mil Stu" in cadet parlance). According to General Caine, Military Studies was at this time: "a branch of the Military

Training Division, which was a major problem. It left the Military Studies curriculum and personnel with the stigma of change, mediocre instruction, and fluid curriculum attached to Military Training programs. This was a major obstacle to gaining any kind of solid academic credibility for the Professional Military Studies [PMS, a fortunately short-lived moniker] program."⁸ Thus, Caine's first action upon becoming CWI was to split the organization into two divisions: the Military Studies Division (CWIS) and the Military Training Division (CWIT).

For the first time since 1961, a dedicated academic organization charged with developing academically sound and credible military education existed at USAFA.⁹

As Caine noted, Military Studies and its successors delivered a fluidly haphazard collection of courses whose content was determined by available faculty interests and expertise (perhaps abetted by a not-so-strategic Air Force assignment process) rather than by a coherent disciplinary major. CWI offered courses on a variety of strategic, doctrinal and operational topics but had not framed them to serve as a purposeful, integrated cadet program of study. For instance, CWI offered a course on "global strike" due mainly to the presence of a bomber pilot faculty member, but there was no treatment of other Air Force competencies or richer theoretical approaches to strategy and warfare. In response to Chief of Staff of the Air Force interest, an interdisciplinary minor, then major, prosaically (committee-created) entitled MDOS (Military Doctrine, Operations, and Strategy) was established in the 1990's.¹⁰ Given that an academic discipline results in a system of orderly behavior recognized as being characteristic of that discipline, the multidisciplinary "MDOS" did not fit the mold.¹¹ In fact, there was only one required MDOS course in the major,

reflecting a lack of depth in doctrine, operations and strategy. In 2000, Military Strategic Studies (MSS) replaced MDOS to provide cadets with a “scholarly approach to understanding and investigating new knowledge, ways of working, and perspectives on the world around them.”¹² Since its establishment, MSS has purposefully developed the context, theory and application of mili-

dent of the Naval Academy, to study the Academy’s social environment and recommend changes. Larson’s findings emphasized the Academy must remain “relevant to the larger Air Force” and focused “on the deliberate development of Air Force officers... The Academy ... must reflect the values and norms of the broader Air Force while maintaining the high academic standards of a world-class

ponent. Seeking to increase the professional relevance of cadet academics, his report’s ninth finding noted:

At the Air Force Academy, the Commandant is responsible for cadet training as well as an entire academic department and major-Military Strategic Studies (MSS)...This is in contrast to the other two service academies and promotes a separation of the education mission and blurs the distinction between education and training...In fact, we believe it creates the perception that the Dean’s faculty are neither good military role models nor informed and capable enough to oversee and teach the courses in the MSS major.¹⁷

Since its establishment, MSS has purposefully developed the context, theory and application of military power as the professionally relevant and academically rigorous framework of a new academic discipline.

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A study of other degree-awarding programs in military-related fields of study at universities across North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia highlighted the need for a contemporary-oriented military and strategic studies discipline.¹³ As such, there occurred a systematic program of course development in strategy providing context and theory and operations (application). Strategy courses included Developing the Military Strategist, Theory of Military Transformation, Theory of Air, Space, and Information Power, Civil-Military Relations, and Counterinsurgency Theory and Practice. Operations courses spanned Air Warfare, Space Operations and the Warfighter, Information Operations, and Special Operations. These efforts soon bore fruit. As the Academy experienced several years of increased Congressional scrutiny due to pressing gender and religious issues, outside investigations brought recommendations for changes that not only addressed social concerns but also military training and academics.

In 2005, Congress selected Admiral Charles Larson, former Superinten-

dent of the Naval Academy, to study the Academy’s social environment and recommend changes. Larson saw an “organizational drift and academic split” because USAFA was the only service academy with an academic department under the Commandant.¹⁵

The admiral advocated separating the education and training functions as the best way to ensure in-depth and comprehensive excellence. In his mind, placing an education function within CW, an organization focused on training, diluted scholarship and faculty expertise, thereby inhibiting cadet intellectual potential. The growth of Military Strategic Studies within the Commandant’s realm therefore struck him as an “approach [that] fragments rather than integrates cadet development,” a point General Caine made years earlier.¹⁶ To fix this, he recommended transferring MSS from the Cadet Wing to the Dean of Faculty. This led to the inactivation of the 34th Education Group and the establishment of the Department of Military Strategic Studies (DFMI). His recommendation replicated how a joint force integrates expertise to create operational synergies. Within the joint construct, each air, ground, and maritime component delivers unique excellence, and to Larson, this meant academics logically fit within the Academy’s academic com-

Larson believed MSS as a professionally relevant academic department would flourish within the Dean of Faculty and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of cross-integrated and internally consistent mission elements with each focused on its distinctive capabilities.

Military Strategic Studies also featured prominently in Larson’s second finding, which described the need for separate mission element capabilities aligned through a common Academy mission and vision. He stated:

The Academy Mission Elements are Not Well Integrated—Historically, there has been competition rather than cooperation between the Academy’s three mission elements or “pillars”—academic, athletic, and military training. Although the Air Force Academy has its own mission statement, each element, in turn, has developed separate visions and mission statements that reinforce rather than integrate their distinctive contributions to the overall mission. This stovepiped approach fragments rather than integrates cadet development.¹⁸

To prevent further fragmentation, DF’s newest academic department had to become fully emplaced within the Academy’s disciplinary majors. Larson’s recommendations, including aligning the Department of Military and Strategic Studies within the Dean of Faculty and securing its equality with its peers in the basic sciences, engineering, humanities, and social sciences, therefore helped

answer Eisenhower's dedication benchmark to educate Air Force officers to a "peerless standard."

A comparative look at MSS begins best by noting differences relative to its academy antecedents. At USMA, the Commandant's Department of Military

applies concepts in contemporary and future decision-making scenarios. As in the social sciences, MSS uses methods to evaluate operational concepts and strategic frameworks. As in the humanities, MSS addresses the human struggle of warfare. Literally, MSS is

humanities and social sciences disciplines, including history, economics, public policy, strategy, and education, among others. An active faculty development program includes professional development seminars each semester, monthly theorist seminars, auditing requirements, classroom visitations, a faculty resource center, and lesson-by-lesson assessment of learning and associated data collection and analysis.

The summation of the efforts by the Department of Military & Strategic Studies provides for the young strategist's education. Consistent with Betts's model, the discipline contends there must be a balance of the formal reasoning of the social sciences and the informal reasoning of the humanities, which is one reason why MSS faculty draws equally from each. Although some would argue this creates a dichotomy, the reality is different. Returning to the time of USAFA's founding, the "American Clausewitz," Bernard Brodie ruminated:

Economists ...have a theoretical training that in its fundamentals bears many striking parallels to strategic concepts... The usual training in economics has its own characteristic limitations, among which is the tendency to make its possessor insensitive to and often intolerant of political considerations that get in the way of his theory of calculations. He is normally extremely weak in either diplomatic or military history or even in contemporary politics, and is rarely aware of how important a deficiency this is for strategic insight...The devotees of a science like economics, which is clearly the most impressive of the social sciences in terms of theoretical structure, tend to develop a certain disdain and even arrogance concerning other social science fields, which seem to them primitive in their techniques and intellectually unworthy.¹⁹

Brodie, a social scientist who clamored for scientific rigor in national security strategy, realized the important utility of disciplines whose methods lacked a formal theoretical and predictive structure. For MSS, the humanities matter for the perspective they provide

The successful strategist therefore requires knowledge residing in both the social sciences and the humanities. Teaching the context, theory, and application of military power demands, as Larson and Caine understood, that this admixture occurs in the context of a discipline focused upon strategy.

Instruction teaches Military Science but not Military and Strategic Studies. As General Caine commented, the Air Force Academy tried this approach at USAFA for fifty years, during which it attempted to pursue academic excellence in a CW organization characterized by a high operations tempo and an unstable faculty corps due to the military assignment process. Meanwhile, to improve its education, USMA has established an interdisciplinary Military Defense and Strategic Studies major that resembles USAFA's earlier interdisciplinary MDOS, with courses provided by multiple departments. At the United States Naval Academy, an academic dean oversees a Department of Professional Development (Professional Programs, Seamanship & Navigation, Waterfront Readiness). There is no military/nautical studies discipline or major, or sight of it on Annapolis's horizon. During an era in which the United States demands more high quality strategic thinkers steeped in the context, theory, and application of military power, USAFA has earned lessons to which its peers should pay heed.

Within USAFA, MSS starts where political science ends with respect to military strategy, uses historical and other approaches to evaluate theory, and

the "military" portion of "strategic studies." In this, the discipline adopted scholar-strategist Richard Betts's distinctions among military studies, strategic studies, and security studies to propose "MSS" as an appropriate description for military studies at USAFA. As a military profession-focused academic discipline, MSS differs in content and methods from other departmental offerings, yet shares some sources. In this, MSS is as complementary to other disciplines as Clausewitz's Trinity is to Sun Zi's maxims.

Reflecting its interdisciplinary heritage, MSS faculty possesses diverse operational experiences and academic backgrounds, which fuels innovation and responsiveness to contemporary and notional future strategic needs. The Department's active duty faculty blends rated officers from multiple flying communities with space operators, nuclear operators, intelligence, and multiple mission support career fields. Exchange officers from the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, Royal Air Force, and Japan Air Self-Defense Force add joint and coalition perspectives on combined operations. The Department's first sponsored PhD's began to return in 2006, establishing a cycle of developing MSS associate professors. Doctoral degrees comprise

in educating strategists. Brodie decried the lack of this in his day's strategists, lamenting:

Thus, where the great strategic writers and teachers of the past...based the development of their art almost entirely on a broad and perceptive reading of history, in the case of Clausewitz and Jomini mostly recent history but exceptionally rich for their needs, the present generation of "civilian strategists" are with markedly few exceptions singularly devoid of history.²⁰

The successful strategist therefore requires knowledge residing in both the social sciences and the humanities. Teaching the context, theory, and application of military power demands, as Larson and Caine understood, that this admixture occurs in the context of a discipline focused upon strategy.

As educators, these are not easy tasks. The discipline of Military and Strategic Studies as practiced at the United States Air Force Academy blends the approaches of the social sciences and humanities to sustain a new discipline central to a military academy's value-added mission. Failure to do so would result in an incomplete education. This generates creative scholarly and administrative tensions, but if the strategist is to be educated properly, the tensions are necessary. Lack of scientific rigor or the perspectives needed to understand the human mind precede strategic failure. It is not enough to equip the minds of Academy-graduated strategists with specialization in solely the social sciences or humanities. They need both. In part, the core curriculum serves to provide this; however, individual courses in behavioral science, history, political science, and the like cannot refract their disciplines through the prisms of strategy and military theory as well as a discipline designed for that purpose. Although courses such as these may touch upon the strategy and the context, theory, and application of military power to explain their unique concepts, they cannot provide the education in

how to synthesize these varied thoughts and apply them to contemporary and notional future strategic problems. This is the business of those teaching Military and Strategic Studies.²¹

As such, the pedagogy of MSS requires applying to our military profession Plutarch's ancient advice: *the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled*. To serve the nation best, the mind's passions must continuously develop, for study and reflection upon these permit decisions and actions for the better. Thus, in answering the popular conventional wisdom questioning the state-of-thought within American military and strategic studies, we in the arena of such an enterprise must speak for our profession. If our actions are to speak louder than our words, our protégés need to have done their thinking well, too. This is the essence of harmonizing the "strategic lieutenant" with the increasing intellectual demands

*The mind is not a vessel
to be filled but a fire to be
kindled.*

- Plutarch

of competitive military thinking, a major desired outcome of Military and Strategic Studies.

To this, the Department of Military and Strategic Studies provides a humanistic and scientifically rigorous approach focused on military and strategic studies expertise to prepare well the young officer strategist for service to the nation. But there is something of deeper import here. The strength of a free people comes from their education. For it is through education the people learn to ask courageous questions and to answer them with credible depth of knowledge. As productive members of the American Republic, it is up to all citizens to do this, because in such a republic, we all speak with equal import,

thereby rendering the judgment "war is too important to be left to the generals" as ridiculous as saying "war is too important to be left to the politicians." War, perhaps the most human of all activities, is the thinking business of all departments at the Air Force Academy, a responsibility for which the Department of Military and Strategic Studies contributes its unique voice as we prepare cadets for the most consequential profession of all, the profession of arms.

NOTES

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1948), 261.

² Testimony of Harold E. Talbott, Secretary of the Air Force, U.S., Congress, House of Representatives, Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 84th Congress, 1st Session, 1955, 224.

³ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, July 11, 1955, Dedication Message.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

⁶ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1934), 95. Mumford certainly was critical of the military, but he was also one of the few American intellectuals who supported an early American entry into World War Two.

⁷ Caine retired as a Brigadier General and his hereafter referred to by his retired rank.

⁸ Brigadier General Philip D. Caine, CWI 1980 - 1992 End of Tour Report, 13-14. General Caine's tenure at USAFA saw many significant changes and evolutions. His perspective on the development of Military Studies into the Department of Military and Strategic Studies is peerless. Professional Military Studies later became "Military Art and Science," an appellation blindly adopted from the United States Military Academy and Army Reserve Officer Training Corps.

⁹ During the Academy's formative period, Military Studies transferred to the Dean of the Faculty for a year, a Directorate of Military Affairs was established, and an academic major planned. By 1960, a new Commandant's priorities prompted its return, so CW reacquired the responsibility. See Paul T. Ringenbach, *Battling Tradition: Robert F. McDermott and Shaping the U.S. Air Force Academy* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 2006), 169.

¹⁰ CWIS and MDOS continued evolving as part of the 34th Education Group (EDG). Until reorganization under the Objective Wing Concept in 1994, the 34 EDG organized as a Division of Military Instruction that included training under CWIT. This organization designed and taught all military education courses, managed the Commandant's educational enhancement programs, and generally taught School of Advanced Air and Spacepower Studies concepts at the undergraduate level. Organized into two squadrons, a profound conceptual leap occurred in January 2001. The mission became "producing aerospace officers schooled in the application of military and aerospace power," a clearly innovative step towards the current Department of Military and Strategic Studies mission of "developing Air Force officers educated in the context, theory, and application of military power. See Colonel Thomas A. Drohan, "EDG Options Historical Brief," Department of Military and Strategic Studies, Historical Records.

¹¹ Marietta Del Favero, "What is an Academic Discipline," available at www.answers.com/topic/academic-disciplines, accessed 1 July 2008.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ A short list of example programs includes: 1) in North America, Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies, the University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, Missouri State University's Defense and Strategic Studies, National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, and the Royal Military College of Canada's Military and Strategic Studies program; 2) in Europe, King's College's War Studies Program and London's International Institute for Strategic Studies; 3) in Asia, the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies in Singapore, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies in Sri Lanka, the Institute of Strategic

and International Studies in Malaysia, and India's Centre for Asian Strategic Studies; 4) in Australia, the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

¹⁴ Quotes in this paragraph from Agenda for Change, <http://www.usafa.edu/index.cfm?catname=Scouting>. Accessed March 18, 2010. Both the Agenda for Change and the Larson Report emerged at a complex time in the Academy's history. Under intense public and Congressional observation resulting from several highly publicized sexual assaults, the Agenda for Change and Larson Report expanded in scope to examine and report on multiple areas of cadet experience, of which academics were only one.

¹⁵ Department of the Air Force, "A Study and Report Related to Permanent Professors at the United States Air Force Academy," (April 2004), 3-8. This study, commissioned by the Secretary of the Air Force is known informally as the Larson Report, and is hereafter cited as such. Chapter and page are the basis of the document's pagination. Thus, 3-8 equates to chapter three, page eight.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-1. Admiral Larson contended that concentrating like functions within the appropriate mission element delivered a given element's best product. Thus, by including all majors within DF, he attempted to ensure the best possible education. Concentrating training within CW provided focus on officer training. .

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-1. See also Finding Nine, page 5-3, Recommendation Two, page 6-1, and Recommendation Twelve, page 6-3.

¹⁹ Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), 474 – 475.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 475.

²¹ The reality of human thought is that ideas know no boundaries, meaning a history course, for example, may well require a discussion of strategy to understand a topic. Conversely, a military and strategic studies course may examine the past of human thought, i.e. history, to test the relevance and validity of an idea.



THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY CHAPEL