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PME: PREPARING MILITARY LEADERS FOR THE FUTURE

(AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare sponsors a series of small conferences to examine defense topics impacting on the U.S. Army. This paper presents a synopsis of the titled conference presented by HON Edwin Dorn, Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) on 6 August 1996.)

People have been asking questions about Professional Military Education (PME) recently. Critics have been asking: Why is DoD spending on PME growing as our military force is shrinking? It's a good question. And a good answer is required if PME is to be protected from reductions.

PME is important; it deserves full support. But there are still some important choices to be made about PME. The relevant questions are:

- ◆ What will the international security picture look like in the future?
- ◆ What kind of education do military leaders need to be effective in that future?
- ◆ How should resources be allocated to support PME's various programs?

The answer to the first question is contained in the Bottom-Up Review (BUR) and in the strategy documents that have grown out of the BUR. What has not been done in a systematic fashion is to connect the BUR strategy to education and training. U.S. strategy calls for forces capable of dealing with a variety of operations, including two nearly-simultaneous regional conflicts. What does that imply for PME?

The world is a messy place and we Americans are right in the middle of it because we have interests all over the world.

From this, certain things follow about our national security interests and about the kind of military we

need to protect those interests. As we move a few steps down the logic train, we get to issues about PME.

How can military leaders best be prepared to protect our interests in an unpredictable and dangerous world? Here's an argument we've all heard: The best way to learn military leadership is by doing it — by spending as much time as possible in the field, training soldiers.

According to this perspective, the roughly \$200 million spent each year on formal classroom education does nothing but keep military men and women from performing their real missions. PME, according to this view, is a distraction from what military service is all about — winning wars. Instead of sharpening leaders' instincts, it dulls them. As one critic put it a few years ago, instead of producing real commanders, we're producing a bunch of "Wharton MBAs" and "Kennedy School policy wonks." We're producing good administrators, but not good leaders.

People with that point of view would be especially bothered by recent trends in PME. The proportion of officers being pulled out of their tanks and cockpits and stuck in a classroom is growing. Even though our overall officer end strength has been reduced by more than 20 percent since 1990, the number of officers engaged in PME has actually increased. In 1995, there were almost 3,600 officers in resident PME programs — 200 more than five years ago.

What could justify increased spending on PME when severe budget cuts are hitting other programs? Wouldn't a few additional strike aircraft provide more real security? Does a potential enemy really fear us because our officers have master's degrees? And finally, even if we accept the need for some classroom training, shouldn't it be specialized and job-focused? Why does a soldier need graduate-level courses in economics or diplomatic history — unless he or she is being prepared for a position in which those disciplines play a prominent role?

The answer is driven by the earlier observation that the world is messy and its unpredictable state will remain so. If the world were more tidy, then we could do a much better job of tailoring the professional development of our officers and NCOs. We would be able to plan ahead much better. We'd know which officers and NCOs would spend their careers as warfighters, for example, and we'd try to keep them with the troops. Arguably, one doesn't need an advanced degree to lead an infantry brigade into battle; nor does one need to spend time at the Pentagon.

But let's do a reality check. What do our warfighters really do? How does an infantry brigade commander really spend his time?

Training in the field, to be sure. But today's troops are different than they were during the military draft era of the 1950s and 1960s. Our enlisted men and women are far better educated. And, partly because they are volunteers, they have more sophisticated expectations of their commanders.

Thus, a commander in garrison is more than a warfighter; he or she is also the leader of a diverse, demanding community. The commander of the 1st Armored Division (AD), for example, probably spends as much time on — and probably devotes as much intellectual capital to — community concerns as on warfighting. At least he did until the 1st AD was deployed to Bosnia.

Now, the 1st AD is in Bosnia. The 1st AD's commander, MG Bill Nash, is the head of Task Force Eagle. He oversees the military aspects of NATO's Operation Joint Endeavor to resolve a very nasty three-way ethnic conflict. His troops come from 11 different nations, including Russia. He reports to a British three-star general, who is under the supervision of a U.S. Navy admiral. His responsibilities include dealing with dozens of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), helping

thousands of people who have been displaced by the war, and maintaining strict even-handedness toward the ethnic factions in the area. He and his troops are doing all those things under the gaze of the omnipresent CNN camera. This situation tells us something about the mix of skills needed in an operation such as Joint Endeavor. It also suggests how important it is to have officers whose education has prepared them to innovate.

General Nash and each of his senior commanders were asked the following question: "How did you learn to do what you're doing here?" General Nash and his senior officers all gave pretty much the same responses, in the same order. First, they said, they learned from their training and discipline as warfighters. Second, from the formal education that turned them into critical thinkers. They mentioned war college courses that gave them a joint perspective and an understanding of national security strategy. Most of them also mentioned graduate courses in particular disciplines — business, history, and so on. What was more important than the course content, they felt, was the facility they developed for taking a mass of information, processing it in an orderly fashion, applying a healthy dose of skepticism, and making sense of it — that is, thinking critically.

The character of the Bosnia mission has much in common with several other recent operations in Somalia, Haiti and the Persian Gulf region. The operations are joint, they are combined, they involve NGOs; they require communication at several levels with the local population; and they are carried out in full view of the news media. They require use of the tactics, discipline and materiel of warfighting; but doing them well requires both more and less than warfighting.

Several years ago GEN Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explained that in the post-Cold War world, the challenge for the military was to prepare for the unpredictable. If it is done well, PME should provide an understanding of this nation's place and role in this messy world; instill critical thinking skills; and equip leaders to cope with diversity.

In the current American political vocabulary, the word "diversity" connotes race, gender or religion. We need to keep working on that aspect of diversity, because this is a dynamic arena. But there is more to "diversity" than just race and religion and gender.

Joint and combined operations also represent a form of diversity. Think of our recent contingency operations: Provide Comfort, Restore Democracy, Deny Flight, Southern Watch, Joint Endeavor. None of them involved just one service, and none of them was solely a U.S. operation.

Technology represents yet another aspect of diversity. The challenge isn't just to learn to make use of the newest gadgets, such as computer and communications systems that give commanders near-instantaneous access to visual and signal intelligence. The real challenge is in using that technology in combination with human intelligence and other forms of information-gathering.

We know that the future is fraught with diverse challenges to our national interests. We know that our armed forces must be prepared to perform a wide range of missions. And we know that the best way to prepare people to meet those diverse challenges is through a combination, over the course of a career, of warfighting skills, specialized training and PME. The mix of experiences is designed to produce well-rounded military leaders.

Further, we believe that we have the right patterns for PME, i.e., multistage process, beginning with precommissioning education, proceeding through education for company- and field-grade officers, and culminating with Capstone. {The Capstone course continues the professional education of newly selected general and flag officers through a six-week program designed to increase the Fellows' effectiveness in

planning and employing U.S. forces in joint and combined operations in support of national strategic goals and objectives.} We also have the right structures, i.e., the three major commissioning sources, the service-specific PME in the lower grades and the joint PME in the higher grades. (Incidentally, last year we looked at the possibility of combining several PME colleges. Our assessment is that whatever educational advantages might accrue would be more than offset by the costs of relocation.)

In conclusion, and for thought, it is useful to point out what kinds of things the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) is wondering about.

- ◆ First, we need a better sense of the quality of education being offered. Are some schools/curricula simply better or more challenging or more relevant than others?
- ◆ Second, what should we expect of our officers in terms of PME participation? Consider that a much smaller percentage of Naval officers attend PME than those of other services.
- ◆ Third, are our service colleges making the best use of technology, particularly of interactive or distance learning technology?
- ◆ Fourth, should OSD play a more active role in the PME arena? Historically, PME has been the purview of the separate services. Since Goldwater-Nichols, the Joint Staff has taken a greater interest in the joint aspects of PME, especially the offerings at the National Defense University.

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