

God and Caesar

Biblical Faith and Political Action

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9 Military Service

War!

There is probably no subject that has aroused more controversy throughout two thousand years of church history than the Christian attitude toward war.

Christians follow the Lord Jesus Christ, who is described in Isaiah 9:6 as the "Prince of Peace" but in Revelation 19:11-21 as the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" who slays the armies of the wicked with a sword that proceeds out of his mouth. Christian martyrs have included pacifists and warriors alike. Maximilian the Martyr, who at Carthage around A.D. 295 accepted death by execution rather than service in the army of Rome, declared, "I cannot serve as a soldier; I cannot do evil. I am a Christian."¹ On the other hand, Archbishop Turpin of Reims around A.D. 778 fought valiantly on behalf of Charlemagne and the forces of Christendom against the Saracens, slaying hundreds after having been mortally wounded. He was eulogized in the *Song of Roland*: "In great battles and in beautiful sermons, all his life he was a champion of Christendom against the pagans. May God grant him His holy blessing!"²

Why so much confusion? Partly because war necessarily involves strong emotions of fear and anger, loyalty and love. Partly because war involves strong and conflicting loyalties: respect for life, concern for suffering, devotion to country, preservation of honor. And largely because too many Christians approach the question from human viewpoint rather than from God's viewpoint, asking "What do we think?" instead of "What saith the Scriptures?" One believer will say, "A Christian shouldn't engage in bloodshed!" while another will just as adamantly argue that "A Christian must serve his country!" All too often both sides fail to look to the Scriptures for guidance.

In dealing with a topic as important and controversial as this, I must remind the reader once again that a position is neither Christian nor moral unless it is supported directly or indirectly by the Scriptures. I believe this analysis will demonstrate that the Scriptures do justify war and military service, at least under some circumstances.³

Just Warfare Is at Times a Legitimate Exercise of National Policy

King Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 3:8 that there is "a time of war, and a time of peace." Certainly it is wrong to make war when it is time for peace, but it is just as wrong to insist upon peace when it is time for war.

Isaiah spoke longingly of a time when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isaiah 2:4). But he wasn't speaking of his day or of ours; he was speaking of the Millennium when Christ himself shall rule. Joel said just the opposite in Joel 3:10—"Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears." But he, too, was speaking to a particular people at a particular time and place. There is a time of war, and a time of peace. Considering the "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6, 7) that are to plague the world up through the end of the age, we must recognize this age as potentially a time for war and prepare accordingly. The false priests and prophets who cry "Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11) do a disservice to themselves, to the nation, and to God.

A Strong Defense Deters Aggression and Helps to Preserve Peace

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are at peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. (Luke 11:21, 22)

In this passage, Jesus was not speaking primarily about war. Rather, he was speaking about demon possession and the power of God through Christ to cast out demons. The "strong man" of verse 21 is Satan and/or a demon, and the "stronger" in verse 22 is the Lord Jesus Christ. When the "stronger" (Jesus) overcomes the "strong" man (Satan), Satan is driven out and defeated.

But to illustrate his point, Jesus used an analogy. He employed a commonly understood principle of deterrence—that military strength deters aggression and prevents war. An aggressive nation, like a neighborhood bully, is likely to attack someone who is weak and vacillating rather than someone who is strong and capable of using his strength. By keeping its defenses strong, a nation is more likely to deter warlike aggressors and enjoy peace.

The principle of deterrence is illustrated in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, a Jew in the palace of the Persian king, returned to Jerusalem after the exile to inspect the condition of the city (Nehemiah 2). Finding its walls in disrepair, Nehemiah organized the people for the purpose of rebuilding them. But as they did so, several hostile kings from the surrounding area plotted to stop their work:

But it came to pass that, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, they were very wroth, and conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. . . . And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. (Nehemiah 4:7, 8, 11)

So after prayer (4:9), Nehemiah mobilized his forces and prepared them for war:

Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. . . . Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. (vv. 9, 13)

With all his forces on alert and ready to defend Jerusalem against attack, Nehemiah addressed his people:

Be ye not afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. (v. 14)

And the enemy was deterred! Because of Nehemiah's military preparedness, the enemies saw that the Israelites were ready for battle, so they called off their attack:

And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. (v. 15)

But Nehemiah was not lulled into a false sense of security. He kept half his troops on alert, while the remainder were on standby reserve, working at their civilian occupations (construction) but keeping their weapons ready in case they should be needed for battle:

And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare

burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. (Nehemiah 4:16-18)

Note that the entire crisis passed without the shedding of a single drop of blood. It could easily have been otherwise. Had Nehemiah not been prepared, the enemy would have attacked. A strong defense deters aggressors and helps to preserve peace. As Jesus said in Luke 14:31, 32:

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

Refusing to Fight for One's Country Can Be a Sin Against God

Preachers commonly thunder, "Be sure your sin will find you out!" The last time you heard your preacher use that phrase, what sin was he rebuking? Drinking? Smoking? Promiscuity? Very likely he was not referring to a refusal to fight. But let's look at the way the phrase is used in the Bible.

Before they crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, the Israelites fought many battles against their enemies, usually at the Lord's command (Numbers 31:1-3, for example). As the Israelites prepare to cross the Jordan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad saw the fertile lands they had conquered east of the Jordan, and they decided these lands would make excellent pasture for their cattle. So they asked Moses if they could stay there and make that land their inheritance (Numbers 32:1-5). Moses at first understood them to say that they did not want to join the other ten tribes in the battle for the Promised Land. Disturbed, he challenged them: "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" (Numbers 32:6). Moses compared their attitude to that of the spies who discouraged Israel from conquering the land at Kadesh-Barnea, which resulted in forty more years in the wilderness.

However, the children of Reuben and Gad assured Moses that they were indeed willing to cross the Jordan and fight for Israel; they asked only for the right to return to these lands after the entire conquest was completed. Moses found this agreeable:

And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the Lord to war, and will go all of you armed over the Jordan before the Lord, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, and the land be subdued before the Lord: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the Lord, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. (Numbers 32:20-22)

But Moses added a stern warning.

But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out. (Numbers 32:23; cf. Jeremiah 48:10)

That phrase, "Be sure your sin will find you out," may have many legitimate applications today. But in its original context it refers to the sin of refusing to fight for one's country.

Neither the Ten Commandments Nor the Sermon on The Mount Prohibits Just Warfare

When asked to justify their position with Scripture, those who believe a Christian should not engage in military service cite Exodus 20:13 more frequently than any other passage. But if "Thou shalt not kill" prohibits all forms of killing, then there is a contradiction in Scripture, for many other passages of Scripture justify or even command killing. Exodus 21:12, for example, commands that a murderer be executed. In Exodus 32:27 God commanded the sons of Levi to slay many of the Israelites because they had turned to idolatry while Moses was on Mt. Sinai. And in 1 Samuel 15:3 God commanded Saul and the Israelites to go to war against the Amalekites and "slay" them. How could God give these commands if he had previously forbidden all killing?

An examination of the original languages clearly shows that there is no such contradiction. In the Hebrew language there are at least nine words which roughly mean "kill," and each has a slightly different shade of meaning. *Muth* and *qatal* are very general terms for killing, and *nakah* is used in Numbers 35:15 for an accidental killing. Terms such as *harag* (Exodus 32:27) and *chahal* are frequently used for killing in war. Still others, like *zavvagh*, *tabach*, and *shachat* are commonly used for animal sacrifice. But the word used in Exodus 20:13 for "Thou shalt not kill" is *ratsach*, a very strong verb indicating an intentional and unjustified act of murder. This is not the same word as is used for killing in war, and thus killing in war is not covered by that commandment. The *New American Standard Bible* has translated Exodus 20:13 "You shall not murder," as has the *King James II Version*. The *Living Bible* renders the passage, "You must not murder," and both J. N. Darby's translation and Scofield's edition contain notes to the effect that the literal translation is "murder."⁴

The same distinction appears in the New Testament Greek. Whenever the commandment is reiterated in the New Testament (Matthew 5:21; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; James 2:11), the Greek word is *phoneuo*, which normally means "to murder," though it can involve acts which are the moral equivalent of murder even though they do not involve violence or killing. But when the New

Testament speaks of killing in war, it uses different words: *apokteino*, a more general word for killing (Revelation 9:15, 18; 11:7; 19:21); and *sphatto*, meaning "slay" or "slaughter" (Revelation 6:4; 13:3).⁵ All murder is killing, but not all killing is murder. The Decalogue pertains only to murder. In fact, the Old Testament seems to justify self-defense:

If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution: if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. (Exodus 22:2, 3)

Some might argue that these Old Testament concepts are modified or updated by Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:38, 39)

Jesus did not contradict the Old Testament law; rather, he corrected a contemporary Jewish distortion of it. The *lex talionis*, or law of like punishment, was an enlightened principle that limited the authority of government to punish criminals; it provided that the punishment must fit the crime. Jesus did not contradict this. But the Jews of his day had distorted this principle, so as to justify taking the law into one's own hands and taking personal revenge upon one's enemies, or punishing alleged criminals with a "lynch mob" mentality, as seems to have been the case with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11). Jesus inveighed against individuals taking personal revenge, not against government punishing offenders.

There is also a difference between returning insult for insult, and legitimate self-defense. As the *Interpreters' Bible* explains, "A blow on the right cheek was an insult—with the back of the hand, so that the palm of the hand could return with a blow on the left cheek."⁶ The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* adds,

The oriental guards with jealous care his cheek from touch or defilement. Therefore a stroke on the cheek was, and is to this day, regarded as an act of extreme rudeness of behavior, a deadly affront. Our Saviour, however, teaches us in Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29 that even this insult is to be ignored and pardoned.⁷

The blow on the cheek was an insult, not an injury. It did not place one in danger of death or serious bodily harm. Jesus simply says that Christians are not to return insult for insult; he does not prohibit

Christians from defending themselves when under genuine physical attack.

One might also distinguish between the individual right of resistance and the collective right of resistance. A person under attack might personally choose not to resist the attack and thus expose himself to danger. For the reasons stated above, I do not believe the Scriptures command him to do so, but that is one option for him. But what if the attack is directed, not against him personally, but against his loved ones—his wife or children? Must he—indeed, may he—then opt for nonresistance and thus expose them to danger? Furthermore, if a person may defend himself or his loved ones from physical attack, then may not a nation defend its citizens from attack through the collective use of force? I believe a nation which fails to do so has betrayed its responsibility to its citizens.

War and Military Service Are Not Incompatible with the Words and Character of Jesus Christ

I served in the Air Force during the close of the Vietnam war years. During that time someone asked me, "Can you imagine the Lord Jesus Christ wearing a military uniform and carrying an M-16?"

Over the years I have reflected a great deal on that question, and after careful study of the Scriptures my answer is an unhesitating "Yes"—though he would probably wear the uniform of a general rather than that of a private.

Near the opening of Jesus' public ministry, shortly after he had changed water to wine at the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus cleansed the temple with a strong display of force:

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. (John 2:15, 16)

The scourge (*phragellion*) was a whiplike device with a handle and several cords attached to it, often with jagged pieces of bone or metal affixed to the cords. It was often used by the Romans for severe bodily punishment. Lenski demonstrates that the tenses of the Greek verbs accentuate the decisiveness of the action:

The aorists of the narrative are impressive; they state what was done, done in short order, done decisively and completely, begun and finished then and there. . . . Tender souls have imagined that Jesus only menaced with the scourge, at least that he struck only the animals. They are answered by *pantas ekebalen*, and *pantas* is masculine, its antecedent being *tous po-*

lountas and *tous kermatistas*, the men who were selling and the money-changers. With fiery indignation Jesus applied the scourge right and left to these men. Then also to the sheep and oxen.⁸

Mayfield adds,

What Jesus did here is entirely in keeping with His nature and character. There are some who think that all that can be said about Him is "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." It is true that He is loving and forgiving. He does describe Himself as "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt 11:29). But there is more than that, and in this incident one sees another aspect of His nature. He does not deal easily nor light-handedly with evil. . . . He took the scourge of small cords and drove them all out of the temple. The word translated "drove" is a strong term that means "He threw them out of the Temple." This has been described as a "wild scene, with cowering figures clutching desperately at their tables, as these were flung here and there; or running after their spilled coins, as these rolled hither and thither; or shrinking from the lash that had no mercy till the holy place was cleansed."⁹

And Jesus cleansed the temple again toward the close of his public ministry, as recorded in Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-17; and Luke 19:45, 46.

At his Second Coming, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth with another display of force. At that time he will appear mounted on a white horse, clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, with a sharp sword going out of his mouth, leading the armies of heaven behind him. It appears these armies are composed of both angels (Matthew 25:31) and deceased believers (Jude 14). He will slay armies of the wicked, and he will consign the beast and false prophet to the lake of fire (Revelation 19:11-21). Undoubtedly many pacifists today are true Christians and will be in heaven when Armageddon takes place. One cannot help wondering whether they will ask to be excused as conscientious objectors!

Certainly Jesus promised peace (John 14:27). But the peace he promised was a spiritual peace with God, not a worldly peace in the sense of absence of physical warfare. It is a peace one can have in one's heart even under heavy fire on a battlefield. Jesus also said that the gospel would at times cause conflict and division: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I come not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34-36). The "sword" here does not necessarily mean physical violence, but it certainly indicates conflict.

In another passage Jesus commanded military preparedness:

Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. . . . And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords, And he said unto them, It is enough. (Luke 22:36, 38)

Some have tried to spiritualize the sword as the "sword of the Spirit." But if we spiritualize the sword, we must also spiritualize the purse, the scrip or bag, and the garment. There is no warrant for such an exegesis other than an aversion to the plain meaning of the Word of God.

Nor does it make sense to make "sword" refer to a dinner-knife to be used during the Passover feast. The word is *machaira*, which everywhere else in Scripture refers either to a weapon or to violent death by the sword, and which is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for sword, *herebh*. Furthermore, such a translation would render Christ's words to Peter later that evening an absurdity: "All they that take the dinner-knife (*machaira* again) shall perish by the dinner-knife" (Matthew 26:52).¹⁰

The plain meaning of Jesus' order in Luke 22 was that the disciples were to carry swords for self-defense. The obvious reason is that it was dangerous to travel in those days, and especially dangerous for those who were followers of Jesus.¹¹

The Bible Tells of Many Among God's People Who Were in Military Service

Many of the great spiritual giants of the Old Testament were soldiers and military commanders: Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Jonathan, Gideon, Nehemiah, Josiah, and many others. In Genesis 14:14-17 we read that after Lot had been taken captive by Chedorlaomer and three other kings, Lot's uncle Abraham organized a daring commando raid and successfully rescued his hostage nephew. For this he received a blessing from Melchizedek, king of Salem (Genesis 14:17-24), who is later described as a type of Christ (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1-22).

David is described in Scripture as a man after God's own heart. Yet the Israelites lauded him as having slain ten thousand while Saul had only slain thousands (1 Samuel 18:7; 21:11; 29:5). David himself attributed his skill in battle to the Lord: "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms" (Psalm 18:34; cf. 2 Samuel 22:35). And, "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight" (Psalm 144:1).

In the New Testament at least two centurions became followers of Christ. (A centurion served as a soldier in time of war and as a soldier-policeman in time of peace. His title was derived from the fact that he commanded approximately one hundred soldiers.) One such centurion is found in Matthew 8:5-13. Jesus commended the centurion for his great faith, a contrast to the unbelief and half-belief that Jesus found around him:

Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. (Matthew 8:10)

Perhaps because of his military training and experience, this centurion was able to understand better than most people the absolute authority of Jesus Christ over sickness. He knew that his ailing servant did not have to touch the hem of Jesus' garment or even be within seeing distance in order to be healed. Just as the centurion could simply command his soldiers and expect instant obedience, he knew that the Son of God could command disease to leave his servant: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." And unlike many of the self-righteous Jews, the centurion was well aware of his unworthiness before Christ: "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." Augustine says of this centurion,

... counting himself unworthy that Christ should enter into his doors, he was counted worthy that Christ should enter into his heart. . . . He did not receive him into his house, but he had received him already into his heart.¹²

The second centurion was Cornelius, described in Acts 10:1, 2 as "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." God founded the first Gentile church in this centurion's home (Acts 10, 11).

There was also a centurion who crucified Christ, thus (perhaps unknowingly) playing a role in God's plan for the salvation of the human race. Unlike the contemptuous religious leaders and the despairing faithful remnant, this hardened centurion seems to have recognized Jesus Christ for who he really was. Luke tells us that the centurion "glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47); and Matthew records him as saying, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).¹³

To these might be added a fourth centurion, one who is not recorded as having trusted in Christ but who is commended in Acts 27:43 for his willingness to save Paul's life in the face of shipwreck.

The significance of these centurions is this: at no time was any of them ever told by Jesus or any man of God that his participation in military service was wrong. The harlot was told to "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Thieves are told to steal no more (Ephesians 4:28). The publican who had enriched himself by cheating others showed his repentance by promising restitution to those whom he had wronged (Luke 19:1-10). Yet nowhere do we read any similar condemnation of military service, and so far as we know all of these centurions remained in military service after they were converted. Military service is an honorable profession in which a Christian can proudly engage.

The Best Way to End a War Is to Win It Decisively

The unpopularity of the Vietnam war was due largely to the indecision and irresolution of American leadership. America couldn't decide whether it wanted to be in or out; whatever force was applied was always too little and too late. When, in 1972, President Nixon finally ordered large-scale B-52 bombing raids against North Vietnam, the Communists quickly began serious negotiations at the conference table. But on the verge of victory, America accepted a peace treaty that not only fell short of ultimate victory but even allowed the Communists to keep their troops in the south. The result, as many predicted, was that the Communists gathered strength for a few years and then began a final offensive that overran not only South Vietnam, but Laos and Cambodia as well. There followed a horrid bloodbath, a mass exodus, the "boat people," and the rest. The final chapters have yet to be written.

That's not the way wars were fought in the Bible. As the Israelites took the Promised Land, they had a well-planned strategy, and they pursued it vigorously. As Leon Wood writes,

Moses' strategy for taking Canaan, no doubt revealed to him by God, clearly had been to attack the land at its approximate midpoint, coming in from the east, and divide it into a south and north section, that each might be conquered separately. We may assume that Moses had shared this thinking with Joshua, so that the new leader had the plan in mind as the people prepared for crossing the Jordan.¹⁴

The Israelites went forth in battle after battle, attacking swiftly, fighting fiercely, winning decisively, and usually utterly destroying their enemies (Joshua 6:21; 8:25; 10:28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 39, 40; 11:12)—all by the Lord's command (Joshua 8:1, 2; 11:20). The biblical account of the conquest of Canaan closes with these words:

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war. (Joshua 11:23)

And the land rested from war! Peace came at last, but only through military victory. Not a permanent peace, of course—there is no permanent peace in this world short of Christ's return—but a temporary peace at least. In the Book of Judges we twice find the phrase, "And the land had rest forty years" (Judges 3:11; 8:28)—each time following a decisive military victory.

Military Service Is Not for Everyone

Before you rush down to your local recruiter, consider this: military service is not for everyone; military service may not be right for you.

Old Testament Israel granted certain exemptions from military service:

And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart. (Deuteronomy 20:8)

The "fearful and faint-hearted" were not conscientious objectors; they were persons whose temperament was such that they simply would not make good soldiers, and their fearfulness would affect others and hinder good discipline. Exemptions were also granted to newlyweds (Deuteronomy 20:5; 24:5), engaged persons (Deuteronomy 20:7), and persons in certain occupations (Deuteronomy 20:6). These persons had their minds on other things besides fighting, and their inattentiveness could be a danger to others in the ranks.

Every believer must seriously consider military service, but he must consider whether his country needs him in military service, and whether he is "right" for the military. In peacetime, when there is no draft, it may be that the armed forces have all the personnel they need, and you can serve your country better in another capacity. If you are handicapped, or if you have serious emotional or psychological problems, military service might not be right for you. If you are highly individualistic and don't submit well to authority or work well with others, you may have problems in the service—although military training and discipline might do you a world of good! You will have to determine whether military service is God's plan for you, and this is a decision to be made with much thought and prayer.

In time of war or national need though, you should willingly serve unless you are physically or mentally unable to do so. It is your civic and Christian responsibility.

HARRY SUMMERS

Moral authority as a first line of defense

“Don’t go down into that draw.” That’s the warning his platoon sergeant gave Lt. Richard E. Cavazos on the front line in Korea in 1951. “If you do, the Chinese will get you for sure.” Years later then Gen. Cavazos, one of the Army’s most distinguished combat soldiers, recalled that those words had triggered a profound insight into the fundamentals of war.

It was obvious from the sergeant’s warning, he said, that the Chinese owned that draw. Whether they had one soldier down there, or a thousand soldiers, or no soldiers at all, that draw belonged to them. And that’s what military power is all about — establishing moral authority over a piece of real estate.

That same sentiment was reflected in our 1776 Revolutionary War battle flag with its coiled rattlesnake about to strike and the motto “Don’t Tread on Me.” And it is reflected as well by “noli me tangere,” the motto of the 2nd U.S. Infantry Regiment in whose ranks I served during the Vietnam War.

Roughly translated as “touch me not,” that regimental motto could have served as the watchword of our military forces in Somalia last December. My youngest son, an Army major, told me that when he was posted there with the Marine Task Force last year he could walk anywhere through the streets of Mogadishu without fear. While he was the target of hostile stares, no one dared harm him, for he was protected by the awesome moral authority of the United States of America.

Moral authority is stronger than steel, for it provided more protection than an M1A1 Abrams tank could provide today. But it is also flimsier than gossamer, for its strength depends on the perceptions of others and thus can quickly dissipate.

When Somalians believed terri-

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ble things would happen to them if they harmed a U.S. citizen, Americans were relatively safe in Mogadishu. When Somalians found they could strike U.S. citizens with impunity, it became open season on Americans.

It was a return to the bad old days. While the United States emerged from the Vietnam War with one of the most powerful military arsenals in the world, the perception was that it lacked the backbone to use it.

America was seen as a “paper tiger,” fierce in appearance but lacking the will to defend its interests. The perception was well founded. American ambassadors were assassinated abroad, and the United States did nothing. A CIA station chief was tortured to death, and the United States did nothing. An official emissary of the United States, Marine Col. William Higgins, was kidnaped, murdered and his corpse flaunted on television, and the United States did

nothing.

When tiny countries like Grenada and Panama dismissed our warnings with contempt and disdain, we should have known we were in big trouble. America’s physical military capability — the size and strength of our armed forces — had never been in question. But its moral authority — the perception that it had the will to use that capability — was at an all-time low.

For that reason, disputes that be-

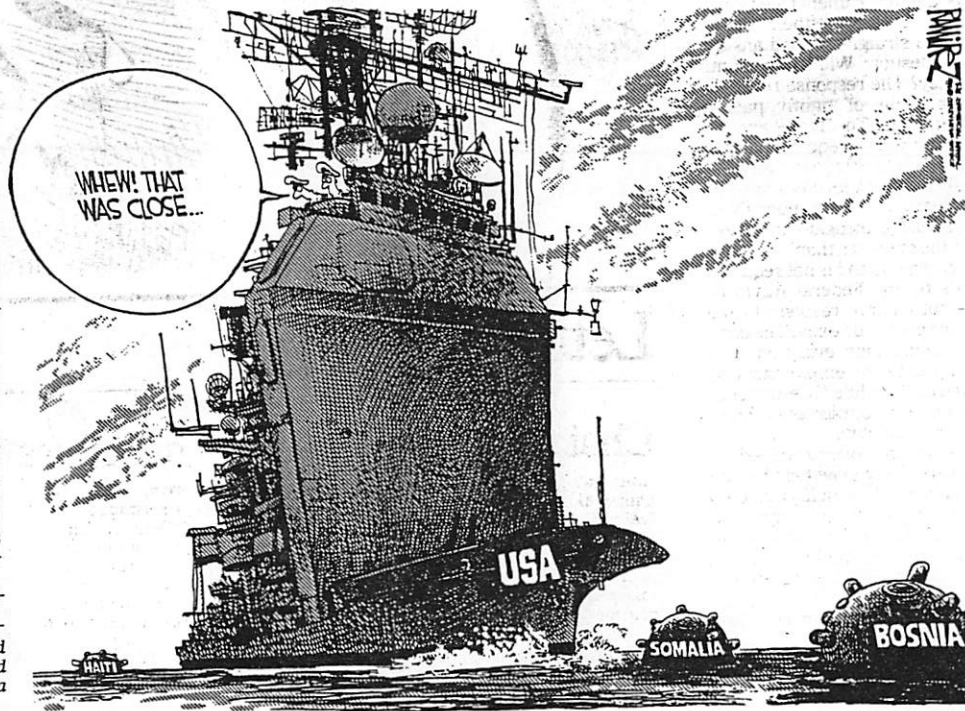
fore Vietnam could have been resolved with a word from Washington now required the commitment of American military force. Troops had to be sent into combat in Grenada and Panama to demonstrate conclusively that U.S. remonstrances were not just so much hot air.

And we had to do it again on a massive scale in the Persian Gulf. At long last America’s moral authority appeared to have been restored. But it almost immediately dissipated. First President Bush and then President Clinton began frittering it away in Somalia and Bosnia, “signifying” how strong we were and how we were going to whip their tails. And then we did nothing.

America soon became worse than a “paper tiger” — it became a papier-mache clown, an object of derision to friend and foe alike. Humiliated by two-bit Somalian warlords who dragged the mutilated bodies of our soldiers through the streets for all the world to see, we were then frightened away by a mob of street thugs in Port-au-Prince in Haiti.

Mr. Clinton only made the situation worse with his initial alert of 100 Marines at Guantanamo. The Haitians must have laughed themselves silly. What could 100 Marines do except get themselves killed? If Mr. Clinton were serious, he would have alerted the II Marine Expeditionary Force or the XVIII Airborne Corps and applied enough force to ensure compliance. But he obviously hasn’t mastered the basics of military action.

This is an extremely dangerous situation, for somehow Mr. Clinton must re-establish the moral authority of the United States. If he does, he can conduct foreign affairs with a timely word. If he does not, as President Reagan found with Grenada and President Bush found with Panama and Iraq, he will eventually have to resort to armed combat to enforce his writ.



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Who controls the military? *Clinton directive worries some Congressmen*

On May 5th President Clinton signed a Presidential Decision Directive (PDD-25) that asserts his authority "to place U.S. forces under the operational control of a foreign commander." The President classified the directive, thereby preventing the public, including Congressmen, from

knowing the details of its content. Some Congressmen, however, after reading the press releases have questioned Clinton's actions. One such Congressman, Jim Lightfoot of Iowa, is on the Subcommittee that funds Foreign Operations.

Earlier drafts of PDD-25 were

written when General Colin Powell was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Lightfoot, Powell had inserted language into the draft that would protect American troops. Lightfoot believes the Administration waited until after Powell retired to remove those same security measures.

General Powell had enumerated three instances when U.S. commanders under U.N. command need not comply with orders: 1) when orders were outside the scope of the mission, 2) when orders would be illegal under U.S. law, or 3) when orders were militarily imprudent or unsound.

Powell's items were deleted. Instead, commanders of U.S. forces will not be allowed to act on their own initiative and training. If an order given by a foreign

(continued on page 2)

Military (continued from page 1)

commander is in question, a U.S. officer must refer the matter to higher U.S. authorities. Sen. Strom Thurmond has criticized this policy referring to it as the "phone home" clause.

"It's easy to imagine needless deaths because of the time spent 'phoning home,'" says Lightfoot, with regards to questionable orders given by a foreign commander to American troops.

In August of 1993, a similar directive was prepared for Clinton to sign, PDD-13. According to Phyllis Schlafly, "...history intervened to delay it. In Somalia, U.S. troops were killed, wounded, captured, and dragged through the streets in humiliation. Adverse Congressional reaction put PDD-13 in a temporary deep freeze."

According to the new directive, it is now the job of the U.S. military to

combat "current threats to peace," which include "territorial disputes, armed ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and the collapse of governmental authority in some states." President Clinton's definition of peacekeeping in his PDD includes "promoting democracy, regional security, and economic growth."

And the Clinton directive allows the Department of Defense to pay the U.N. bills. Clinton can say the defense budget is not being cut, while at the same time diverting U.S. defense money to the U.N.'s projects.

Intelligent look into the future; more on 'civil-military' debate



It's not every day you get the director of central intelligence enthusiastically recommending a magazine article on intelligence.

But at a recent luncheon at the House Rayburn Office Building, **James Woolsey** recommends "Peering into the Future" in the July-August **Foreign Affairs** by **Joseph Nye**, chairman of the National Intelligence Council. It's about the role of intelligence estimates in the future, giving some Cold War background as to how they used to be formed.

"It is the nature of intelligence that successes often remain hidden, while failures become public," Mr. Nye writes. He also comes down strongly for the need for estimative intelligence even though there is no longer one overriding threat, i.e. the Soviet Union.

Admittedly during the Cold War the world was bipolar, with most political issues influenced by the Soviet Union and the United States.

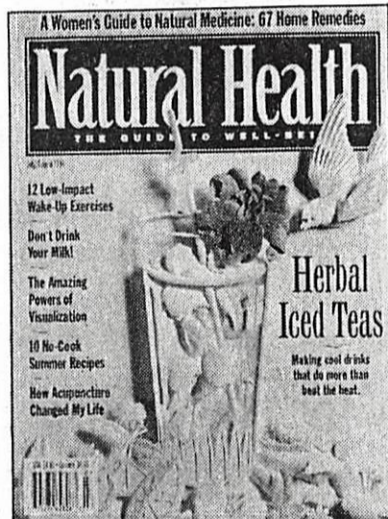
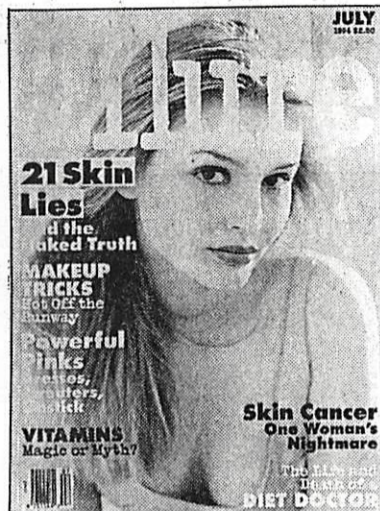
Today, as Mr. Nye felicitously puts it, "the structure of power is like a three-dimensional chess game."

And yes, Mr. Nye incidentally makes a most cogent argument for the necessity for the existence of a CIA. He asks readers to remember though that "estimators are not fortune-tellers; they are educators." Instead of predicting the future, estimators should deal with heightened uncertainty by presenting alternative scenarios, investigating as well significant detours from those scenarios.

Kohn job

That admirable Washington-based quarterly, **The National Interest**, has just brought out its summer issue, literally brimming with articles of a compelling interest. There's a dandy dust-up from the likes of **Collin Powell**, **John Lehman**, **William Odom**, and **Samuel Huntington** responding to the article by **Richard Kohn**, "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," in the magazine's spring issue. Mr. Kohn deftly defends himself without giving way on any of his essential arguments.

In addition, you have "Giving Russia Its Due," in which Sovietologist **Stephen Sestanovich** compares Russia of today with the France of the immediate postwar, as analyzed some 30 years ago by **Henry Kissinger**. Mr. Kissinger saw the attempt to reclaim French grandeur as more a matter of bold assertion than true power, which did not



tering its most visible electoral setbacks within the grouping of countries where death rates are up most sharply: Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine.

threaten U.S. interests, but helped France make the transition from its "absurd dreams of military self-sufficiency." This, sees Mr. Sestanovich, is the transition that Russia is struggling to make in the 1990s.

Must-reading immediately before or after the Sestanovich piece is **Nicholas Eberstadt** on "Post-Communist Demographic Disaster." And what a truly chilling disaster that is, according to Mr. Eberstadt, with radically falling birth rates and rising death rates.

He notes that it may be more than coincidental that political liberalism appears to be moving forward most smoothly in the Czech Republic; the region of the former Warsaw Pact where post-communist demographic shocks have been mildest, and encour-

Bush denounces military critics

BATH, Maine — Former President Bush denounced “anti-military critics” and “know-it-all talking heads” who want to cut the Navy fleet.

“I’m particularly concerned by those who call for us to drastically reduce the Navy — fewer carriers, fewer of these Aegis destroyers,” he said Saturday at the commissioning of the USS John S. McCain, the nation’s newest warship. “Those voices . . . will lead us down a very dangerous path.”

The McCain, a guided-missile Aegis destroyer, is named after two John S. McCains: Adm. John S. McCain, a World War II task force commander, and his son, Adm. John S. McCain Jr., commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command — the grandfather and father of Sen. John McCain, Arizona Republican.

MOVIES / Gary Arnold

Gay perspective on World War II

“Coming Out Under Fire,” a short documentary feature that obviously would be more compatible with advocacy-friendly public television than the theatrical marketplace, derives from a book of the same title by Allan Berube. The subtitle clarifies the subject matter without euphemistic coyness: “The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II.”

Mr. Berube served as the consultant to filmmaker Arthur Dong, whose movie is in the nature of an illustrated supplement to the book.

Clearly strapped for funds, Mr. Dong must resort to frequent makeshifts while re-creating the period with fragments of newsreel footage and War Department propaganda shorts. Some of the miscellaneous illustration never begins to match up adequately with the commentary, especially when the filmmakers need to clarify the most painful and controversial aspects of the historical record: the sanctions imposed on suspected homosexuals in the armed forces toward the end of World War II, when military authorities found it expedient to enforce the regulations that explicitly proscribed homosexual behavior.

There is one weirdly revealing relic: a VD education short that includes a line of dialogue, cheerfully urging condom vigilance, which could never have been uttered for mass audience consumption during the war years.

Although the film attempts to maintain a sober and righteously indignant tone as often as feasible, the passage of time adds an inevitable speculative note about the casting choices in many of the government’s vignettes. It seems doubtful two generations later that all these roguishly cheebic comrades would be prowling exclusively for dames.

The movie’s strongest documentary resource is straightforward reminiscence. About half a dozen participants prove exceptional memoirists when confiding to the camera.

The most disarming and elo-



The late Phyllis Abry when she was a WAC radio technician.

★★

TITLE: “Coming Out Under Fire”

RATING: Not rated (adult subject matter about homosexual experiences)

CREDITS: Directed by Arthur Dong

RUNNING TIME: 71 minutes

MAXIMUM RATING: FOUR STARS

quent witnesses include Marvin Liebman and Stuart Loomis, among several men, and Phyllis Abry and Sarah Davis, the lone women.

Mr. Liebman demonstrates near genius at personal narrative while recalling his Brooklyn homecoming after a dishonorable discharge. Miss Abry, who died before the film was completed, is

memorialized in an official dedication, but her chronicle is memorably ambiguous in its own right.

Despite the grand lesbian passion of her World War II service as a WAC radio technician, Miss Abry later married and had four kids. She reflects that she was reasonably happy with that conventional dispensation while it lasted.

“Coming Out” is formulated to reinforce a modern, gay-rights political agenda, but spending time with the best camera subjects tends to persuade you that each case history is unique, dramatically compelling and a big inconvenience to confident social generalization or policy formation.