

## **Understanding the Causes of War: Analysis and Recommendations on Self-Development for Military Professionals**

Christopher J. Heatherly, United States Army Europe (USAREUR)  
Wiesbaden, Hessen, Germany  
[christopher.j.heatherly.mil@mail.mil](mailto:christopher.j.heatherly.mil@mail.mil)

Ian Melendez, Washington State University (WSU) Army ROTC  
Sammamish, Washington, USA  
[iammelendez@gmail.com](mailto:iammelendez@gmail.com)

## Introduction

*War is eternal. Battle is not always inevitable.*

On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry from the US Army's storied 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division made its way into the Iraqi city of Najaf. The battalion's mission was twofold. First, the soldiers needed to locate a major Shia religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein Sistani, to ask his support in liberating and rebuilding Iraq. Second, the battalion had orders to secure the famed Imam Ali Mosque. All mosques are sacred, but the Imam Ali Mosque is the Shia faith's third holiest site with only Mecca and Medina holding greater spiritual importance. Unbeknownst to the 101<sup>st</sup> soldiers, anti-regime elements and former Ba'athists had spread rumor throughout Najaf the Americans planned to seize the mosque and arrest Sistani.<sup>1</sup> A crowd formed as the unit moved into Najaf. Initially, the Iraqis welcomed the US soldiers but the crowd's mood rapidly darkened as the 101<sup>st</sup> troopers moved closer to the mosque. The Iraqis blocked the road and began yelling in Arabic. Some threw rocks at the soldiers. The Americans were hot and exhausted from days of fighting. They were heavily armed. They did not understand the Arabic language. And – critically – they were well led by their battalion commander, then Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Christopher Hughes.

LTC Hughes had moments to decide what action his men should take and much depended upon those decisions. His actions on that fateful April morning would have far ranging consequences beyond the immediate tactical level as Hughes' decisions would directly impact the operational and strategic levels of war. Hughes did not order his men

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Bacon, "LtCol Hughes – Take a Knee," *Navy Times*, April 11, 2007, accessed January 17, 2018, <http://broadside.navytimes.com/2007/04/11/ltcol-hughes-take-a-knee/>.

to push forward in some Quixotic attempt to reach the mosque or to fire their weapons. Instead, LTC Hughes directed his men to take a knee, to smile and to point their weapons at the ground. The crowd, while still agitated and blocking the road, began to calm down. Hughes ordered his men to mount their vehicles and return to base. The meeting and mosque could wait. Before departing, LTC Hughes held his weapon by the barrel high in the air pointed toward the ground signaling his peaceful intent to the Iraqis. Hughes bowed to the crowd and led his soldiers back to their base. A short time later, Grand Ayatollah Sistani released a decree calling on the people of Najaf to welcome and work with the Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of this moment for LTC Hughes, his battalion, the citizens of Najaf, the Iraqi people and the United States cannot be overstated. Hughes himself said, "In terms of scale of significance, that is the mosque that would have probably not just have caused every Shia in that country to rise up against the coalition. It probably would have at least brought in the Syrians, if not the Iranians."<sup>3</sup> Bluntly stated, LTC Hughes' actions prevented the outbreak of a larger, regional war in an already complex conflict growing beyond any expectation of the Washington beltway's senior leadership. LTC Hughes was 42 years old and in his 20<sup>th</sup> year of military service when he commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. He was not an expert on tribal complexities or specifically trained on Arabic culture.<sup>4</sup> What made the critical difference for LTC Hughes in Najaf? A lifetime of development via professional schools, operational experience and rigorous

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<sup>2</sup> Ryan Chilcote, Commander shows restraint, prevents unnecessary violence, 2005, accessed January 17, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/heroes/chrishughes.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Tricia McDermott, A Calm Colonel's Strategic Victory, March 15, 2006, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-calm-colonels-strategic-victory/>.

<sup>4</sup> War Story – Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes, October 25, 2010, accessed January 17, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeM6PL3m\\_Sg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeM6PL3m_Sg).

self-study ensured Hughes was prepared for what English poet Rudyard Kipling called “the unforgiving minute.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Is Warfare Unavoidable?**

War is man’s oldest profession. The desire for conflict, between individuals, tribes, city states and nations to obtain land, resources or revenge is as much a part of the human experience as the burning desire to prevent conflict’s very existence. National leaders, religious figures and military theorists have all sought to understand the underlying *casus belli* to stop conflict before the first blow is struck. Mankind made noble attempts to prevent warfare through formal agreements such as the Treaty of Westphalia or Treaty of Versailles and through international organizations like the League of Nations or the United Nations. Each of these bodies were created with the same purpose in mind, namely to bring together the world’s major military powers to find peaceful solutions to regional or international issues. However, the historical record on this point is quite clear: conflict appears to be man’s natural state and humanity has seldom achieved long periods of peace. If that statement is true, what then is the role of military professionals to understand the underlying issues that lead to conflict? We posit a soldier has the duty, if not the obligation, to commit to a course of professional development allowing a more complete understanding of local, regional and international issues with the goals of increasing cooperation and decreasing conflict. While it is certain US soldiers will deploy again to combat, there is no requirement that victory may be found exclusively through battle. To use a blunt, but effective analogy, if

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<sup>5</sup> Kipling Society, accessed January 18, 2018, [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems\\_if.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_if.htm).

your only tool is a hammer then every problem looks like a nail. This paper argues that all soldiers, regardless of rank, position or component have the sacred responsibility to continually develop themselves through rigorous self-study throughout the entirety of their military careers. To continue the hammer and nail analogy, they must invest in themselves to better equip their personal toolbox. The ultimate goal of this self-development is two-fold. First, given the strategic and global responsibilities inherent in military service, Army leaders may be able to prevent or limit conflict in the future. Second, those same leaders will be prepared for battle when war is unavoidable. Commanders and leaders have an obligation to provide resources, time and opportunity for their assigned personnel to develop and pursue robust and lifelong courses of professional self-development. The soldiers in their charge and the civilians they will operate amongst in future warfare demand no less.

## **Historical Review**

Military theorists, national leaders and religious figures have long sought to understand the underlying causes of war to prevent conflict or limit the inevitable suffering associated with battle. One of the earliest military theorists, Sun Tzu, offered his wisdom in *The Art of War* writing, "Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."<sup>6</sup> Much later, statesman Mohandas Gandhi waged successful campaigns of passive resistance against British colonial rule in South Africa and later in his homeland of India.<sup>7</sup> Others, notably Prussian theorist Carl von

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<sup>6</sup> Good Reads, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/191048-to-fight-and-conquer-in-all-your-battles-is-not>.

<sup>7</sup> History.com, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/mahatma-gandhi>

Clausewitz, took a less hopeful, arguably more pragmatic, view of the human condition describing the permanence of war as a continuation of politics by other means.<sup>8</sup>

Kings, queens, emperors, presidents and prime minister have all attempted to put these theories into practice and develop practical, equitable solutions to prevent conflict albeit with mixed results. One such example is the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia which brought an end to the Thirty Years War.<sup>9</sup> This particular conflict, which ravaged Central Europe, killed an unprecedented 12 million people.<sup>10</sup> The Treaty of Westphalia attempted to balance the power of the major European powers of Spain, England, France, and Germany so that no one nation would have continental dominance. Treaty provisions included granting independence to the Spanish in modern day Holland and checking the power of the Catholic Church. These decisions however did not balance the powers of Europe as intended. Spain retained its former dominance in Italy and the Dutch Republic was forced to recognize Spanish control over the Southern Netherlands.<sup>11</sup> The French Bourbon Dynasty supplanted the Hapsburgs as the political powerhouse on the continent and the Holy Roman Empire was decentralized further paving the way for the Bourbons to control the endless game of chess on the continent. Just six years after signing the treaty, Spain and England were again at war to regain territory lost during the Thirty Years War and further their own influence on the continent. Spain, France, and England would achieve massive victories and also

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<sup>8</sup> Antullio J. Echevarria II, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Winter 1995-1996, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Echevarria/ECHJFQ.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> History.com, accessed February 5, 2018. <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/thirty-years-war-ends>.

<sup>10</sup> Civilian Military Intelligence Group, "The Thirty Years War Produced Astonishing Casualties," Daniel Russ, August 10, 2016, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://civilianmilitaryintelligencegroup.com/21865/the-thirty-years-war-produced-astonishing-casualties>

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Thirty Years War," accessed February 13, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Thirty-Years-War>.

suffered significant defeat following the Treaty of Westphalia.<sup>12</sup> One trait all but guaranteed the failure of the Treaty of Westphalia, namely individual European nations continued to view warfare as a primary opportunity to seize land, expand influence or secure resources.<sup>13</sup> Restated, greed outweighed the common good of mankind.

The centenary of the end of World War I highlights yet another attempt to prevent future conflict. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles brought the major Allied nations to Paris during formal talks on the expected Central Powers reparations including transfer of land and people, the redrawing of international boundaries and terms of occupation.<sup>14</sup> France and England in particular blamed Germany for the war and demanded harsh terms. Under their proposals, Germany would lose much of its industrial base, its military would be reduced to a small police force, the Rhineland would be demilitarized, the Allies would occupy the country and Germany would be forced to repay severe war reparations until 2010.<sup>15</sup> These terms forced Germany into a state of desperation followed by civil war, political unrest, populism and the existential conditions necessary for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party.

The American contingent, under the leadership of President Woodrow Wilson, recognized no one nation was entirely at fault and attempted to bring about a fair restitution against Germany while at the same time allowing the defeated powers a

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<sup>12</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, "Thirty Years War," accessed February 13, 2018,

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Thirty-Years-War>.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Thirty Years War," accessed February 13, 2018,

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Thirty-Years-War>

<sup>14</sup> Yale Law School, "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points of Peace," accessed February 11, 2018,

[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp).

<sup>15</sup> ABC News, "Germany Set to Make Final World War I Reparation Payments," David Crossland, September 29, 2010, accessed February 11, 2018, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/germany-makes-final-reparation-payments-world-war/story?id=11755920>.

chance to rebuild their shattered economies. The English and the French delegations were not satisfied with this approach and deemed it too gentle for their liking. While not adopted by the Allies, President Woodrow Wilson's efforts to forge a lasting peace through his Fourteen Points did lead to the creation of the League of Nations in 1920. Sadly, the League failed in its objective to prevent future conflicts and make WWI "the war to end all wars" as it lacked an enforcement mechanism to bring potential combatants to the discussion table or punish warring nations. The League stood powerless to stop the dozens of regional conflicts, such as the Rif War, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War or the Japanese invasion of China that occurred between WWI and WWII.

Following the unparalleled devastation of World War II, America led the effort to establish the United Nations (UN) to replace the League of Nations. The UN learned from the League of Nations' mistakes by developing a central organ built around the victors of WWII to enforce policy of the UN. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), as it would come to be known, is the single most powerful international group of nations in history. The UNSC's core includes the United States, United Kingdom, France, China and Russia along with 10 other rotational nations holding two-year terms.<sup>16</sup> The UN Charter expressly states in Article 2 Section 4, "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."<sup>17</sup> While not able to guarantee global peace, the UN

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations, "Security Council," accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/>.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, "UN Charter," accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/>.



has successfully prevented the outbreak of a third world war. Unfortunately, the UN has been unable to prevent numerous smaller – if no less deadly – conflicts, civil wars and insurgencies. Peace remains elusive. The US Council for Foreign Relations currently lists 28 ongoing conflicts on three continents.<sup>18</sup> There are numerous other hotspots, such as Venezuela or South Africa, with the potential to add to that list. Ultimately and despite humanity's efforts to build a lasting peace, man continues to wage war. Plato put it best some 2,500 year ago noting, "That only the dead have seen the end of war."<sup>19</sup>

## **Review of Current Army Doctrine on Leader Development**

If war is inevitable, it stands to reason a military leader must be prepared and trained to deploy, fight and win at a moment's notice. The US Army's approach to leader development is based upon three broad categories comprised of the operational, institutional and self-development domain. While all three domains include training, experience and education variables they form distinct categories. The operational domain "encompasses training activities that unit leaders schedule, and individuals, units and organizations undertake" including rotations to combat training centers (CTC), exercises and during the conduct of real world operations.<sup>20</sup> The institutional domain consists of "Army centers/schools that provide initial training and subsequent functional and professional military education for Soldiers, military leaders, and Army Civilians.

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<sup>18</sup> Global Conflict Tracker, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/global-conflict-tracker>.

<sup>19</sup> Good Reads, accessed 02 March 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/35420-only-the-dead-have-seen-the-end-of-war>.

<sup>20</sup> Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, (Department of the Army, 2014) page 3, accessed January 20, 2018, [http://www.dami.army.pentagon.mil/g2Docs/Foundry/r350\\_1.pdf](http://www.dami.army.pentagon.mil/g2Docs/Foundry/r350_1.pdf).

Army schools ensure Soldiers, leaders, and Army Civilians can perform critical tasks to prescribed standards throughout their careers, and support units on a continuous basis.”<sup>21</sup> Examples from this domain include basic training, advanced individual training and the entirety of both the NCO education system (NCOES) and officer education system (OES). The final and arguably most critical domain, self-development, “recognizes that Army service requires continuous, life-long learning and that structured training activities in Army schools and in operational units often will not meet every individual’s need for content or time.”<sup>22</sup> (See figure 1, below)

Both the institutional and operational domains are centrally managed at multiple points across the Army and individual soldier’s careers through a variety of human resource systems. That said, the Army’s education system is long overdue for a complete overhaul. The 2018 National Defense Strategy accurately describes the current Professional Military Education (PME) system as, “stagnated, focused more on the accomplishment of mandatory credit at the expense of lethality and ingenuity.”<sup>23</sup> The self-development domain, however, is almost entirely left to the individual soldier’s initiative, desire, and means to plan, resource, execute and assess. The governing manual for leader development, Army Regulation 350-1, places clear emphasis on the need for self-development and offers some advice to shape and scope a proper course but there are no formal benchmarks or requirements for soldiers to adhere to or use. Soldiers are left to determine their own course of professional growth – or professional

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<sup>21</sup> Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, (Department of the Army, 2014) page 3, accessed January 20, 2018, [http://www.dami.army.pentagon.mil/g2Docs/Foundry/r350\\_1.pdf](http://www.dami.army.pentagon.mil/g2Docs/Foundry/r350_1.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, (Department of the Army, 2014) page 3-4, accessed January 20, 2018, [http://www.dami.army.pentagon.mil/g2Docs/Foundry/r350\\_1.pdf](http://www.dami.army.pentagon.mil/g2Docs/Foundry/r350_1.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

stagnation – shaped by an informal system of mentorship, trial and error or the school of hard knocks.

### **Past Successful and Unsuccessful Examples of Professional Development Using the Army Leader Development Model**

Two of the US Army's most effective officers, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and General George Patton, provide sterling examples of the advantages gained through continued, rigorous professional development using the Army Leader Development Model. General MacArthur's post World War II administration of occupied Japan was successful as he understood the Japanese mindset and the all-important role played by Emperor Hirohito. MacArthur's Operational and Self-Development "bubbles" were quite robust given he lived abroad for much of his nearly 50 years of military service including a lengthy period from his arrival in the Philippines after initially retiring in 1935 to his relief during the Korean War in 1951.<sup>24</sup> This sustained exposure to the cultures of other nations offered MacArthur the chance to learn how to work with soldiers and government officials from entirely different cultures and societies.

This experience paid vast dividends during his command during the US occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1951. MacArthur understood the need to work through and with Emperor Hirohito while making it clear he retained the ultimate authority in postwar Japan. Prior to surrender, the Japanese military were known for their near fanatical resistance in battle which only increased as US forces approached the home islands. Japanese casualty rates on Iwo Jima, for example, approached 100%

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<sup>24</sup> Leary, William M., ed. (2001). MacArthur and the American Century: A Reader. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

with just 216 POWs captured out of 18,000 soldiers defending the volcanic island.<sup>25</sup> Japanese civilians were expected to fiercely resist during the planned US invasion of Japan using bamboo spears and kamikaze weaponry against the powerful and well equipped American forces. Japan, however, surrendered unconditionally after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which preempted the need for a seaborne invasion. Given the level of Japanese resistance and fanatical devotion demonstrated throughout the Pacific Campaign, MacArthur might have expected to encounter an insurgency, lone wolf attacks or even passive resistance to his command. However, MacArthur knew his opponent's culture and mindset. MacArthur landed in Japan with just a small retinue of soldiers and kept to a regular routine as the Supreme Commander. According to LTC(R) Robert Ehlen, who served as a bodyguard to MacArthur in 1945-1946, there was never an attempt – let alone a successful attack – against MacArthur or his command.<sup>26</sup> Despite taking over a nation shattered by war, MacArthur's oversaw the rapid disarmament of the Japanese military, the successful rebuilding of the economy and infrastructure, the implementation of a new constitution and expansion of women's rights. His lifelong devotion to professional self-development ensured the successful US occupation of Japan and remains the cornerstone to modern US-Japan relations.

MacArthur possessed an equally developed institutional bubble as he strongly believed in sharing his personal experiences and self-study with future Army leaders. Following his assignments on the Western Front during World War I, MacArthur was

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<sup>25</sup> "The Battle for Iwo Jima," The National WWII Museum, accessed January 21, 2018, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/iwo-jima-fact-sheet.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Ehlen, Robert. Interviewed by author. Monmouth, IL, August 22, 2002.

appointed as the Superintendent of West Point. With varying degrees of success, MacArthur attempted to reform the stagnant academy curriculum by adding in non-military subjects for the cadets including writing and economics. Perhaps his most critical reform came in offering more contemporary lessons in warfare based on the WWI as opposed to the American Civil War. MacArthur's attempts to institute change were strongly resisted by the Army's old guard, no doubt in part due to his being both the service's youngest major general and the youngest superintendent in over a century.<sup>27</sup>

Not to be outdone by his colleague and rival, General George S. Patton pursued a rigorous course of self-development throughout his professional career. Patton, who suffered from then undiagnosed dyslexia, spent his life in study to make up for a wrongly perceived intellectual gap.<sup>28</sup> He took to memorizing entire passages of history, spoke fluent French, read and wrote upon military affairs and military history and was even a US Olympian in the 1912 games.<sup>29</sup> He designed the last US cavalry saber, refined his horse riding skills through polo and graduated from the prestigious French Cavalry School. Patton formed the Army's first armored unit in France during the Great War. In the interwar years, Patton learned to fly small aircraft to better observe large unit formations and training exercises. With US entry into WWII looking more likely, the Army chose Patton to stand up the Army's first desert training center.

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<sup>27</sup> James, D. Clayton (1970). Volume 1, 1880–1941. The Years of MacArthur. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>28</sup> "George Patton," The University of Michigan Dyslexia Success Stories, accessed January 21, 2018, <http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/success-stories/george-patton>.

<sup>29</sup> "George Patton," Sports References, accessed January 21, 2018, <https://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/pa/george-patton-1.html>.

Patton's lifetime of self-development ensured he was prepared, indeed much better prepared than many of his peers, to fight modern combined arms battles on a hitherto unprecedented scale. A veteran of the US Punitive Expedition into Mexico and World War I, Patton spent his leave studying historical invasion routes across France in the expectation of both the advent of mechanized warfare and another global conflict centered in Europe. Recognizing the next war would not be fought in the trenches, Patton studied the German Army's blitzkrieg tactics and read books written by German military leaders.<sup>30</sup> Patton knew war against the Axis was unavoidable if Europe were to be liberated from Nazi rule. A skilled operational level commander, Patton relied upon this lifetime of professional development throughout his successful campaigns in the North African, Italian and European theaters during World War II.<sup>31</sup> As testament to his prowess in battle, the Germans feared Patton more than any other Allied commander. Speaking of his former enemy, Wehrmacht General Gunther Blumentritt said, "We regarded general Patton extremely highly as the most aggressive panzer-general of the Allies. . . His operations impressed us enormously, probably because he came closest to our own concept of the classical military commander. He even improved on Napoleon's basic tenet — *activité, vitesse — vitesse*."<sup>32</sup> Where MacArthur was able to prevent future bloodshed in post war Japan, Patton was able to defeat his enemy in battle; robust courses of professional development ensured their success in war and peace.

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<sup>30</sup> Henrik Bering, "The German View of Patton," *Policy Review*, February 1, 2012, accessed January 23, 2018, <https://www.hoover.org/research/german-view-patton>.

<sup>31</sup> John Mikolsevek, "Patton in WWI," *Warfare History Network*, June 17, 2016, accessed January 23, 2018, <http://warfarehistorynetwork.com/daily/military-history/patton-in-wwi/>.

<sup>32</sup> Henrik Bering, "The German View of Patton," *Policy Review*, February 1, 2012, accessed January 23, 2018, <https://www.hoover.org/research/german-view-patton>.

Self-development is not a uniquely American concept. MacArthur's former opponent, Admiral Isoruko Yamamoto, while assigned as an attaché in the United States learned English and even made a cross-country drive across the USA to better understand the American people. Amongst Japan's senior leadership, Yamamoto was perhaps the only figure who understood American culture and appreciated the United States' industrial capacity for war. These experiences gave Yamamoto a distinct intellectual edge over his American counterparts who initially held little appreciation of their enemies' military capabilities. When tasked to lead the attack on Pearl Harbor, Yamamoto uniquely understood America's visceral reaction and ability to wage war on a scale few Japanese leaders would have believed possible.<sup>33</sup>

Nor does professional development only matter to the abilities of the generals or admirals. USMC Private Guy Gabaldon single handedly convinced over 1,000 Japanese soldiers to surrender during the Battle of Saipan during WWII. Working largely alone on one of the deadliest battlefields of the Pacific Campaign, Gabaldon routinely ventured into enemy held territory. Gabaldon used the Japanese language skills and cultural knowledge he learned growing up in Los Angeles to great effect by promising captured soldiers "would be treated with dignity, and that we would make sure that they were taken back to Japan after the war." Gabaldon may not have won the battle, but his actions prevented thousands of additional casualties on Saipan.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, given the decentralized nature of 21st century warfare, cultural and language skills will

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<sup>33</sup> Ian W. Toll, "A Reluctant Enemy," *New York Times*, December 6, 2011, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/07/opinion/a-reluctant-enemy.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Goldstein, "Guy Gabaldon, 80, Hero of Battle of Saipan, Dies," *New York Times*, September 4, 2006, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/04/us/04gabaldon.html>.

take on greater prominence in any future conflict. US Army Chief of Staff General Mark A. Milley envisions the next war as being fought by smaller units routinely on the move, cut off from their headquarters and willing to disobey orders in an incredibly lethal environment, the role of individual soldiers will take on greater prominence.<sup>35</sup> Tactical level leaders will not have the time or often the means to contact their higher headquarters for guidance and their actions will have consequences beyond the immediate moment of their orders. These soldiers will require significant cultural knowledge, language ability, education and experience for success in their assigned missions.

## **Challenges**

If professional development is vital to US Army leaders, why then do soldiers find it so difficult to successfully achieve? There are several factors, both internal and external to the armed forces, that inhibit self-development at the soldier and unit level. The United States has no warrior caste or system of mandatory national service. The military is an all-volunteer force comprised almost exclusively from its citizenry and a small pool of immigrants. The talent pool available for US military service, already limited by America's general malaise towards physical fitness, requires expensive and time consuming educational investment to make up for the lack of formal education, language ability and overseas experience prior to commissioning or enlisting.

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<sup>35</sup> Sydney J. Friedberg, "Miserable, Disobedient & Victorious: Gen. Milley's Future US Soldier," *Breaking Defense*, October 25, 2016, accessed 27 March, 2018, <https://breakingdefense.com/2016/10/miserable-disobedient-victorious-gen-milleys-future-us-soldier/>.



While no longer practicing isolationism, the American people are generally ill informed on world affairs. For example, a 2015 *Atlantic* article highlighted several critical facts regarding American's knowledge beyond its own borders. First, less than 1% of Americans speak a foreign language and 95% of those that studied a foreign language in college pursued European languages spoken by fewer people when compared to Asiatic languages.<sup>36</sup> Per the US Department of State, just 36% of Americans have a passport and almost 1/3 have never been abroad.<sup>37</sup> Nearly 14% of Americans were born abroad which offers some hope to the future that US citizens will take greater interest and have better knowledge of international affairs.<sup>38</sup>

These facts show some improvement when we examine the military leadership charged to defend the United States against the myriad threats facing our nation today. Within the Army's most senior ranks, 35% of the lieutenant generals and 45% of generals speak a foreign language. However, of those officers, just three speak more than two languages. Major generals fare worse with just 14.5% with foreign language ability while only 12% of brigadier generals speak another language. Despite 17 years of sustained combat operations in the Middle East only seven generals speak Arabic, another Urdu and only one speaks Dari. The numbers are no better when looking at the United States primary global competitors as just six general officers speak Russian and another three are fluent in Mandarin Chinese.<sup>39</sup> A 2008 study (the latest available

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<sup>36</sup> Amelia Friedman, "America's Lacking Language Skills," *The Atlantic*, May 10, 2015, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/05/filling-americas-language-education-potholes/392876/>.

<sup>37</sup> Ginger Adams Otis, "America Less Likely to Travel Abroad," *New York Daily News*, November 11, 2015, accessed January 20, 2018, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/americans-travel-survey-article-1.2431648>.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Gomez, "U.S Foreign Born Population Nears High," *USA Today*, September 28, 2015, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/09/28/us-foreign-born-population-nears-high/72814674/>.

<sup>39</sup> US Army General Officer Management Office, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.gomo.army.mil/Ext/Portal/Officer/Masterprint.aspx>.

source) at the height of the Global War on Terror found that just over 1% of the military spoke a foreign language qualifying them for incentive pay.<sup>40</sup> The lack of foreign language proficiency points to several potential problems from a continual (and expensive) requirement for interpreters to the more critical such as developing allies, international partnerships and developing the cultural knowledge required to operate overseas in war or peacetime. This is not to say our senior leadership are uninformed or uneducated, but the lack of direct, personal knowledge on “how the other thinks” places limitations on their ability to understand or make decisions more effectively. A secondary effect is senior officers must often rely upon outside expertise that may not be available in the moment of crisis. Within the Department of Defense, civilian expertise development is further impacted by archaic, industrial age personnel policies limiting their overseas tour lengths with no centralized replacement plan and little in terms of professional development opportunities.

The Army’s longstanding personnel management system further contributes to the gap in Army leader cultural expertise and language knowledge. The Army’s rebasing strategy in the 1990s reduced the number overseas service opportunities. US Army Europe, for example, is a shadow of its former self with approximately 34,000 assigned soldiers compared to nearly 500,000 at its zenith.<sup>41</sup> USAREUR’s decremented manning means fewer soldiers have overseas assignments in Europe and those lucky few able to secure a position have fewer years abroad than soldiers a generation prior.

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<sup>40</sup> Will Bardenwerper, “For Military, Slow Progress in Foreign Language Push,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2008, accessed January 21, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/22/washington/22language.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Jeff Desjardins, “U.S. Military Deployments by Country,” Visual Capitalist, March 18, 2017, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.visualcapitalist.com/u-s-military-personnel-deployments-country/>.

Other overseas duty locations, such as Korea, have experienced similar personnel reductions while bases in Panama and the Philippines are long since closed. It should be noted these facts are somewhat offset by the number of other, but far smaller, deployments across the globe. Often these deployments are short in duration offering limited contact with the host nation's people, culture and language. This situation is exacerbated by the Army's PCS cycle requiring soldiers to move every few years and often annually for senior personnel. The frequency of short assignments, combined with a brutal operational tempo limit soldiers' ability to develop true expertise in a given region.

## **Recommendations**

Army doctrine clearly supports and advocates for continued and consistent self-development although too often without a clear road map for success. We recommend a more prescriptive approach that still affords flexibility based upon the innumerable factors that shape individual soldier's career paths and choices. Self-study must be encouraged, incentivized, resourced and practiced by professional soldier from the first moments of their career. Using ROTC, the primary entry point for officers, as an example, we advocate for the inclusion of additional social science classes beyond that currently required. In addition to one military science class per month, ROTC cadets are mandated to take a single military history prior to commissioning. We believe cadets should take a required mix of history, social sciences, sociology, foreign language and sociology classes before formally joining the officer corps.

Ideally, all soldiers should have a demonstrated proficiency in at least one foreign language by the time they join the ranks as a field grade officer, mid-level warrant officer

or NCO. Reliance upon existing military language schools will be insufficient to meet this objective. A 2016 report found just 3,500 military personnel, representing less than 1% of the total strength from all four services, were enrolled at the Defense Language Institute.<sup>42</sup> By comparison, the vast bulk of US foreign allies routinely speak two or more languages and are equally conversant with their associated cultures. True, our allies enjoy the benefits of geography and multiculturalism but the number of tutors, software programs or traditional brick and mortar colleges offering language courses provide numerous options. We further posit that critical, high demand language skills should continue to be incentivized through foreign language proficiency pay.

The Army should change the current Tuition Assistance (TA) program regulations to allow and incentivize the pursuit of foreign language study, advanced educational degrees and certificates. Current TA rules limit a soldier to one bachelor and master degree along with a foreign language qualification. The Army provides 75% of the tuition cost with an associated additional duty service obligation (ADSO) requiring the servicemember to remain in uniform to “repay” the cost. The majority of this coursework occurs on weekends or after duty hours with little impact to the soldier’s work schedule or the unit’s readiness. We recommend the Army restructure TA to allow the completion of further professional education. An important stipulation of this initiative is to specify the type of acceptable degree or certificates to prevent a “check the block” mentality where soldiers attend “diploma mill” schools. The Army should focus TA on the humanities, particularly history, sociology and cultures or foreign languages as well

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<sup>42</sup> Voice of America, “Languages Help Improve Military, International Relations,” May 26, 2016, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/us-soldiers-study-languages-and-culture-diplomacy/3347369.html>.

as practical skill sets like negotiations or diplomacy. An added benefit of this program is the additional duty service obligation ensures the Army retains the best educated personnel in its ranks.

We strongly believe the US Army should incorporate greater use of exchange assignments with partner nations. While these opportunities exist today, they are too few in number and tend to be at the division and higher levels. Although unit commanders are understandably loath to lose soldiers, the benefits of such exchanges are quite clear. Participating soldiers will gain unique insight into the culture, military doctrine and capabilities of our allies that comes only through such immersive experiences. They will return to their own units having developed the bonds of friendship found between soldiers and having learned new ways to approach the common problems experienced by any military force.

The Army must place greater interest upon and more closely monitor soldier career development from the first line supervisor to the career managers assigned to the US Army Human Resources Command. We recommend the Army develop a culture which advocates for and recognizes leaders who serve in mentorship roles. We further advocate for a greater system of checks to ensure every soldier maintains a balance in their careers, that individual timelines are met for self-development goals and requires overseas assignments. The Army should provide direct guidance to central selection list and promotion boards to ensure personnel meet these requirements as well as using similar criteria for branch managers when developing assignment slates. The authors further believe the Army change PCS policy guidelines to lengthen duty assignment lengths from the usual three years to five years for accompanied tours. This suggestion

is especially important to overseas assignments as the increased time will allow soldiers to become more immersed in another culture, develop bonds with the host nations military and learn important language skills.

While the US Army emphasizes career development and performance counseling, the actual truth is that too much of both is simply “pencil whipped” to meet a requirement without being conducted properly. This unfortunate habit is learned quite early in a soldier’s career. Consider the following example. During their junior year of college, ROTC cadets are required to select a professor of military science (normally a LTC or MAJ) as a mentor in a career branch of interest. There are only two steps to this task. The cadet must select a mentor and the officer must agree to the request. During his time as a professor of military science, LTC Heatherly received and agreed to over 30 mentor requests. He contacted all of the cadets to offer his assistance and developed an email distribution list as to generate a discussion group. Exactly one cadet responded to this offer and none participated in the discussion group.

Army leadership must continually update Army Regulation 350-1 training to focus on the most critical events required to succeed in an operational or combat environment. Deliberate and effective prioritization will allow subordinate unit commanders the ability to provide time and resources for their soldiers to complete self-development goals. Senior Army leaders must also afford their subordinates the “white space” on their respective training calendars to plan, resource, execute and assess their own training programs. Recognizing that most self-development is done in already limited free time, commanders must provide opportunity for their assigned personnel to pursue self-development. Finally, the Army should place greater emphasis on cultural

competency, language skills training and history in every phase of the officer education and non-commissioned officer education systems from point of entry through retirement. We applaud the Pentagon's move to restructure PME that emphasizes, "intellectual leadership and military professionalism in the art and science of warfighting, deepening our knowledge of history while embracing new technology and techniques to counter competitors."<sup>43</sup>

As a reward mechanism, the Army should incentivize professional development through unambiguous guidance to Central Selection List command, school and promotion boards that chose those leaders with a proven record of self-development. Benchmarks should include foreign language ability, advanced degrees in the humanities and liberal arts to include history, languages, sociology, cultural studies, as well as overseas assignments and professional writing. The Army should place further priority on teaching assignments in the Army's Training and Doctrine Command too frequently deemed "career risky" by Army officers. This emphasis will ensure the Army's best and brightest seek out teaching duties where they may impart the value of their own self-development experience to the next generations of Army leadership while having opportunity to interact with professionals from a myriad number of fields apart from military service. This exposure will provide soldiers with a variety of different experiences, viewpoints and exchanges away from the too oft cloistered military circle.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>43</sup> US Department of Defense, "National Defense Strategy," accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

The authors strongly believe all professional soldiers have the lifelong responsibility to follow a rigorous course of self-development with the ultimate goal of comprehending past, present and potential causes of war at the local, regional or international levels. Despite man's best efforts to find lasting peace, war is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. International agreements and organizations may limit conflict in scope or scale but will be unable to prevent war in its entirety. While we cannot know the location, date and enemy of the next war this much is certain: the US Army will fight again in battle. We believe every military professional has the solemn obligation to pursue a lifelong course of professional development aimed at understanding the root causes of conflict. Army leaders may be able to prevent or limit conflict and will be equally ready to fight when battle cannot be avoided.

*The opinions expressed in the article are solely those of the authors and do not reflect those of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, or the United States Army.*