



The *Letort* Papers

A “HOLLOW ARMY” REAPPRAISED: PRESIDENT CARTER, DEFENSE BUDGETS, AND THE POLITICS OF MILITARY READINESS

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The Letort Papers



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Letort Paper

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Frank L. Jones

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FOREWORD

The term “hollow army” became a part of the American political vocabulary more than 30 years ago, in another election year, 1980. Highlighted by a reporter in an article about the U.S. Army Chief of Staff’s congressional testimony concerning the fiscal year 1981 defense budget, the term became a metaphor for the Jimmy Carter administration’s alleged neglect of U.S. national security by political opponents as well as disapproving members of his own party in Congress, who believed him to be a liability. In the decades following, the expression broadened to a “hollow force” and its meaning expanded, serving as a way of describing the state of ill-prepared military forces in characterizing a presidential administration’s shortfall in the resources needed to meet U.S. military commitments.

Today, the term remains a relevant and potent idiom in this so-called “age of austerity,” with the U.S. defense budget in decline. Both the Barack Obama administration and its critics have used the term. The former to explain how its recent strategic guidance and budget priorities will prevent the “hollowing out” of U.S. forces and capabilities, the latter as an epithet suggesting that proposed budget reductions will create such a force.

In this Letort Paper, Professor Jones sets out to reexamine the existence of a “hollow army” but assessing it within the context of the Carter administration’s defense policy, strategy and budgets, and the challenges it faced in the early years of building an all-volunteer force. Using primary sources, including recently declassified documents, he presents a more nuanced picture of the political dynamics at work in both the executive and legislative branches as well

as the press. He argues that the notion of a “hollow army” represented a policy argument not only among members of the two branches of government but also between political actors: the commander in chief and a service chief.

Ultimately, this is a story of how the use of metaphor can create a dominant narrative existing for decades and how it is now time to regain perspective. This is especially true in the current budget environment, where national interests and risk must be examined soberly and rationally given the strategic and economic realities that the United States confronts in the coming decade.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr." in a cursive script.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANK L. JONES is Professor of Security Studies in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA. He is the General Dwight D. Eisenhower Chair in National Security and currently the director of the College's Theory of War and Strategy course. Professor Jones served for more than 30 years in federal service, first as a commissioned officer in the Vietnam-era United States Army and as a civilian, beginning as a President Management Intern in 1979 with the Department of the Army. In 2006, he retired from the Department of Defense (DoD) as a career member of the Senior Executive Service, where he held a number of positions in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. These included his appointment as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations Policy and Support, and Principal Director for Strategy, Plans, and Resources in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense. In the latter position, he led the interagency task force responsible for formulating the *National Strategy for Maritime Security* under President George W. Bush and was one of the principal authors of the Department of Defense's *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*. Professor Jones has published a number of articles and book chapters on national security policymaking, homeland security, and terrorism. His most recent work is "In Brzezinski's Forge: Fashioning the Carter Doctrine's Military Instrument," published in *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Naval Institute Press, 2012). He is the author of a forthcoming book on Robert "Blowtorch Bob" Komer, who is largely associated with U.S. pacification efforts during the Vietnam

War and as a member of the National Security Council staff in the Kennedy administration. Komer also served during the Carter administration as an advisor to Secretary of Defense Harold Brown for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) affairs, and later as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

SUMMARY

The term “hollow army” or the broader expression, “hollow force,” has as much currency today as it did when an Army Chief of Staff first uttered the phrase 3 decades ago. In this period of declining defense budgets, the President of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have articulated how the newly released strategic guidance and budget priorities represent a concerted effort not to “hollow out” U.S. forces. They have affirmed their dedication to preventing the re-creation of the ragged military and disastrous deterioration in defense capability the Jimmy Carter administration allowed to occur. Thus, more than 30 years later, the expression continues to be as politically potent as it was when first spoken. However, it is also time to re-examine the term “hollow army” and its meaning as the inevitable tug of war over defense spending gets underway.

This paper places the “hollow army” metaphor within its historical context: barely 5 years after the United States finally disengaged from a major war (Vietnam), a struggling economy, and an election year in which a President was only tenuously leading in the polls and also confronting substantial opposition from elements of his own political party. In conducting such an assessment, the paper argues that over the years a specific political reading of these events has taken hold. It is the purpose of this paper to re-read the historical events and in doing so, come to a better understanding of the domestic political and geostrategic environment during Carter’s presidency, the U.S. Cold War strategy, and the soundness of the assertions that military leaders made concerning the readiness of U.S. forces to perform their missions.

In undertaking this reappraisal, the paper explains how the term “hollow army” came into use. It contends that the Carter administration left the defense strategy of his predecessors, Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, intact, a strategy that the Army supported, but it also points out that the Ford administration increased the Army’s force structure without a commensurate increase in personnel or funding, a situation that Congress abetted. Second, it argues that the defense budgets of the Carter presidency honored the American commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as making a sizable down payment on the Army’s modernization and readiness. What hampered the meeting of personnel requirements was the end of the draft. Young men were not inclined to enlist in the new all-volunteer force. Further, there were a number of problems within the Army regarding its ability to measure readiness as well as missteps in the development and production of new weapon systems. To its credit, the Carter administration worked with the Army to improve its recruiting program and funded new systems consistent with production capabilities.

The paper underscores that Carter grappled with these issues in a highly politically charged atmosphere. Existing U.S. Government documents, some declassified at the author’s request, confirm the Congressional Budget Office’s 1994 conclusion that the “hollow force” argument was more the result of anecdote and press sensationalism. Further, the paper maintains that the normative assumption that defense policymaking is above politics, free from political contamination, is idle fancy. Defense policy is an arena of public policy with its own cultures, routines, and constituencies. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower,

who was no stranger to military culture, pointed out, every service chief wants additional resources and always will. This was certainly the case with respect to the “hollow army” debate.

**A “HOLLOW ARMY” REAPPRAISED:
PRESIDENT CARTER, DEFENSE BUDGETS,
AND THE POLITICS OF MILITARY READINESS**

The term “hollow army” entered the political vocabulary at a congressional hearing in May 1980, but it soon became a term used to characterize President Jimmy Carter’s presidency with respect to the security of the United States: naïve, misguided, and disastrous. In the view of Carter’s opponents in both political parties, the President allowed America’s military strength to deteriorate as part of a “decade of neglect.”¹ The conventional wisdom is that President Ronald Reagan and the Congress rectified this period of disregard, negligence, and inattention by the enactment of large defense budgets that would ultimately lead to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

After Carter’s presidency, the term broadened to include all the U.S. military services—i.e., a “hollow force”—an expression so expansive that it came to mean an “understaffed, underfunded, or outdated military.”² Even after the Cold War ended, American political and military leaders’ obsession with maintaining high readiness levels persisted, although defense budgets plummeted. “They shuddered,” commented political scientist Richard Betts, “at the specter of ‘hollow’ armed forces, the image first invoked with devastating political effect by General Edward Meyer in 1980 to describe the threadbare state of the Army after post-Vietnam budget cuts.”³

The term remains pertinent as reflected in the current debate about proposed Department of Defense (DoD) budget decreases. “What is happening under Obama is exactly what happened under Carter after the Vietnam War,” wrote James Jay Carafano, a Heri-

tage Foundation analyst, in 2010. "Cutting back just made the military 'hollow'."⁴ According to Carafano's Heritage Foundation colleague Baker Spring, the Barack Obama Defense Budget would not provide adequate resources for the military, "particularly the core defense program," by reducing it to 3 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the end of the decade. Further, in Spring's view, such a reduced level would produce holes in the U.S. defense position, including some mixture of an insufficient force structure, a deficient operational capability, retarded modernization, a "hollow military strategy," and likely deterioration of U.S. security commitments.⁵

These assertions were enlarged a few months later in a paper entitled "Warning: Hollow Force Ahead," published by the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Foreign Policy Initiative. The authors claimed that the Obama administration's proposed defense budget cuts would have a deleterious effect on the "future of America's armed forces and national security," creating a "'hollow force' characterized by fewer personnel and weapons systems, slowed military modernization, reduced readiness for operations, and continued stress on the all-volunteer force." Such a modern-day "hollow force" would be "less capable of securing America's interests and preserving the international leadership role that rests upon military preeminence."⁶ However, some of the strength of this argument was weakened by passage of the Budget Control Act of 2011, in which Congress mandated reductions in federal spending, including defense spending: \$487 billion in savings from the defense base budget over the next 10 years; more that \$250 billion of those reductions in the Future Years Defense Program (fiscal years 2013-17).

Nonetheless, the potency of the “hollow force” metaphor was not lost on the Obama administration, which recognized that defense budget reductions in the 2012 election year would likely unleash invectives from political opponents similar to what Carter suffered 3 decades previously. To soften any criticism as to how the fiscal year 2013 defense budget cuts were made or perhaps to preclude end-runs to Congress and fractious arguments within the DoD, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta underscored that President Obama “insisted that reductions in defense spending be driven by strategy and rigorous analysis, not by the numbers alone.”⁷ General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasized the collaborative and inclusive effort of the military and civilians involved in fashioning the DoD’s new strategic guidance and stressed that the document had “buy-in among our senior military and civilian leadership.”⁸

The White House’s sensitivity to this problem is apparent. In the cover letter President Obama signed that accompanies the January 2012 DoD strategic guidance, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, he states, “Going forward, we will also remember the lessons of history and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past when our military was ill-prepared for the future.”⁹ The DoD, however, is more transparent in its discussion of the new guidance. It underscored that one of its four basic guiding principles in formulating the strategic guidance was to “avoid hollowing out the force.”¹⁰ In its view, a “smaller, ready military is preferable to a larger force that is ill-prepared because resources are not made available for training, maintenance, and modernization relative to force structure.”¹¹ Thus, for the current DoD leadership, a hollow force is defined as

preserving greater force structure than can be fully equipped or adequately trained. Consequently, its intent in devising the fiscal year 2013 budget was to undertake suitable and discriminating reductions in overall capacity and force structure, but to continue making the investments needed to ensure that the U.S. military remains “strong, agile, and capable.”¹² Given that commitment, the budget would protect resources for force readiness to avoid a hollow force.¹³

The Obama administration’s attentiveness to the possibility of being criticized for “hollowing out the force” underscores the established view of the historical events surrounding the Carter administration and thus reflects a particular political reading of those events. However, that proposition needs to re-read.¹⁴ In the 3 decades since the first utterance of the term “hollow army,” it is time for a more thoughtful examination of its meaning since it (and its variant, “hollow force”) has become a catchphrase in the American political lexicon. Such an examination must take into consideration the political context, but other factors as well. These elements include the domestic political and geostrategic environment during Carter’s presidency, the U.S. Cold War strategy during his term of office, and the validity of the assertions made by military leaders regarding the readiness of U.S. forces to perform their missions.

Setting the Stage.

On the morning of May 29, 1980, Samuel Stratton, a Democrat from New York and chairman of the House Armed Services Committee’s Investigations Subcommittee, called the subcommittee to order. Stratton, a conservative with a reputation for supporting large

defense budgets helpful to the businesses and military installations in his district, framed the purpose of the hearing in his opening remarks. While the intent was seemingly innocuous, to examine the national defense funding levels for fiscal year 1981, he laid out his concern in a more dramatic fashion. He claimed that the subcommittee for the “last couple of years” questioned “whether the uniformed military leaders were actually being consulted” by the President and the Secretary of Defense and “*whether their advice was being followed* (emphasis added) in connection with the more important military decisions being made by the administration and the Pentagon.”¹⁵ He and the other committee members maintained that Carter ignored the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s advice, resulting in a “very unfortunate situation since, if you are going to have advisors but consistently don’t take their advice, something is radically wrong and needs changing.”¹⁶

Stratton then articulated what had really prompted the hearing. The President and the Secretary of Defense, in what was likely an unprecedented step, had written directly to the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee urging the Senate to delete many of the “add-ons” that had been included in the legislation the House of Representatives had ratified. Stratton was particularly incensed with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown’s letter. Brown contended that the increased funding the House Armed Services Committee recommended (\$5.1 billion) created “a serious imbalance in the President’s defense programs, places unique undue stress on our scarce economic resources, and jeopardizes the added military capability we all seek.”¹⁷ Brown then specified the objectionable additional items in the House defense authorization bill. The President sent a similar letter stating his opposition to specific defense programs.¹⁸

Stratton viewed the content of these letters as an insult to the House of Representatives and an attack on the Armed Services committee. The administration was charging the Committee with being irresponsible.¹⁹ He wanted to know what advice the President and Secretary had relied on to come to these conclusions, particularly when the President had only recently stated that the United States was confronting the “greatest challenge [to its] national security since Pearl Harbor.”²⁰

Stratton then posed a series of questions to the Service chiefs about the letter and the President’s proposed fiscal year 1981 defense budget, beginning with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones, followed by Air Force Chief of Staff General Lew Allen, and then Army Chief of Staff General Edward C. Meyer. Meyer would become the central figure in this budgetary tug of war between the House Armed Services Committee and the Carter administration.

Meyer informed Stratton that he was not aware of Secretary Brown’s letter until a week before when he read about it in the newspaper and had received a copy of the letter only recently. Brown had not consulted with him about its contents. Stratton then asked if it was Meyer’s personal opinion that the additional funds jeopardized the nation’s defense. Meyer replied, “No, sir, not in the case of the Army. I have testified before your committee, and others, that I think we have inadequate funds to provide the type of Army we need. I believe the requested funds are not excessive. We need more to do the things we have to do in manpower and modernization.”²¹

After nearly an hour of questioning by the subcommittee members present, Stratton recognized Representative Gillespie V. “Sonny” Montgomery,

a Democrat from Mississippi. Montgomery was not a member of the subcommittee, but the chairman of another Armed Services subcommittee. Montgomery, a major general in the Mississippi Army National Guard, was strongly pro-defense like Stratton.

Montgomery recounted to Meyer how he had just returned from Fort Hood, Texas, where he had talked with personnel in the infantry and armored divisions. He noted that the number of tanks in each company of the armored division was below the authorized level, 12 tanks per company instead of the requisite 17 per company. Meyer responded that his impression was correct. Montgomery repeated Meyers' words, "That is correct." Meyer continued:

Right now, as I have said before, we have a *hollow Army* [emphasis added]. Our forward deployed forces are at full strength in Europe, in Panama, and in Korea. Our tactical forces in the United States are some 17,000 under strength. Therefore, anywhere you go in the United States, except for the 82nd Airborne Division, which is also filled up, you will find companies and platoons which have been zeroed out.²²

The questioning of the Joint Chiefs continued with Representative Robin Beard, a Republican from Tennessee, summarizing the subcommittee's views and the overall tone of the hearing:

I think the straw that breaks the camel's back is a letter from the Secretary of Defense and a letter from the President which read like third-grade readers. It's an insult. These letters are an insult to the Congress; they're an insult to the military leadership; and they're an insult to the American people. These letters are absolutely, totally insane.

Beard then went on to question whether Secretary of the Army Clifford Alexander had the courage to appear before the subcommittee in a few weeks.²³ Shortly thereafter, Stratton adjourned the hearing. It had lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes, but it was hardly the end of the issue.

The headline for the front-page article in the *Washington Post* the next morning read, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Break with Carter on Budget Planning for Defense Needs." George Wilson, who wrote the article, led with a sentence that claimed the Joint Chiefs had broken publicly with their commander in chief "by declaring that President Carter's new defense budget [fiscal year 1981] is not big enough to meet the Soviet threat." While Wilson admitted that the Chiefs had been "dragooned into the battle of the budget" by Stratton, he followed that observation with the Meyer quotation, which Wilson termed "the bluntest response." He further quoted Meyer as stating, "I don't believe the current budget responds to the Army's needs for the 1980s." Wilson then added another Meyer quote: "'There's a tremendous shortfall in the ability to modernize quickly,' in response to the Soviet threat." Later in the article, Wilson quoted Meyer as stating that while forces in Europe were at strength, the units in the United States had inadequate numbers of combat soldiers. Meyer told the subcommittee members that there was a shortfall of approximately 20,000 soldiers and the nation was either "going to have to go to the draft, or an adequately resourced all-volunteer force. Today we have neither."²⁴

What Does Hollow Mean?

The dictionary definition of hollow is “enclosing an empty space, not solid.”²⁵ The connotation was that by 1980, the U.S. Army was an empty vessel, fragile, and when hit forcefully, would easily shatter. In the years since Meyer uttered that term, analysts have examined this issue and interpreted his statement. One interpretation from the late 1990s is that Meyer’s comment referred to a lack of qualified personnel and the imbalance that existed between the number of Army divisions and the number of personnel available to fill those divisions.²⁶ Another, more contemporary, construction is that “hollow” refers to a point where “military readiness declines and the military lacks the financial resources to provide trained and ready forces, support ongoing operations, and modernize.” However, even analysts who define the term in this broad manner interpret Meyer’s comment as stemming from a “difference between a force that merely looks good on paper and one that is properly staffed and trained.” In their view, Meyer’s comment relates to personnel shortages, “that many units had insufficient troops. . . .”²⁷ Are either of these interpretations valid?

The article by *Washington Post* writer Wilson that incited the political conflagration presents a misleading picture. Wilson quotes Meyer as stating that the fiscal year 1981 Defense budget did not respond to the “Army’s needs for the 1980s,” and that a “tremendous shortfall” existed in the Army’s “‘ability to modernize quickly’ in response to the Soviet threat.” However, Wilson’s quotes are from different points in Meyer’s testimony. Meyer’s statement about modernization was in response to Representative Robin Beard who

asks the following leading question: "You have a tremendous shortfall, do you not, in the Army procurement budget?" To which Meyer replies, "We have a tremendous shortfall in our ability to modernize the Army quickly as I believe we must in order to respond to the threat." Here Meyer is offering his professional judgment regarding modernization, but he does not elaborate on why a shortfall exists with respect to the capacity to modernize rapidly. Second, the threat Meyer refers to is ambiguous. It is a likely reference to the Soviet threat, but that is not explicit. Even if it is the Soviet threat, it is unclear what aspect of that threat is of concern and in what region of the world this threat is considered a problem.

As indicated earlier, Meyer made his comment about the hollow army in response to Montgomery's question about the number of tanks in an armored division specifically with respect to a unit at Fort Hood, Texas. After he remarked, "we have a hollow Army," Wilson did not include the following words from the testimony which are important and worth reiterating:

Our forward forces are at full strength in Europe, in Panama and in Korea. Our tactical forces in the United States are some 17,000 under strength. Therefore, anywhere you go in the United States, except for the 82nd Airborne Division, which is also filled up, you will find companies and platoons which have been zeroed out.²⁸

In response to a follow-on question from Montgomery, Meyer stated that the Army has a shortfall in the number of personnel in the combat arms branches (infantry, armor, and artillery). He then added:

Although from a pure numbers point of view, if you believe pure numbers, enlistments for the combat arms are up this year because that is where we focused our recruiting effort. Right now, we have filled the infantry requirements.

This statement alone raises pertinent questions that the committee members do not investigate. First, why would the Army Chief of Staff doubt the numbers of his own Recruiting Command? Second, did the Army recognize that it would be thousands of personnel short of its requirements, and, if so, why did it wait until the current year to concentrate its recruiting efforts on the combat arms? Third, if it is 17,000 personnel short, how did such a shortfall occur and how could it be remedied? Further, even if there was such a shortfall, did it mean that U.S. Army forces were incapable of executing their responsibilities as directed in U.S. national security policy and strategy? Lastly, had the risk of having such a shortfall been examined in view of U.S. defense commitments? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine Carter's defense policy, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) strategy, the commitments the United States had made to NATO, and the Carter administration's defense budgets to provide the resources to meet these commitments, including such issues as force readiness and recruiting the all-volunteer force after the cessation of the draft.

Carter's Defense Policy.

In mid-February 1977, less than a month after his inauguration, President Carter directed a comprehensive examination of (1) U.S. national strategy, and (2)

capabilities (Program Review Memorandum [PRM]-10). With respect to the second component, Carter directed Secretary Brown to examine a range of alternative military strategies and construct alternative military force postures and programs, including their budgetary implications, in support of the strategies.²⁹

Three months later in early May, Carter made his initial overseas trip to Great Britain, meeting first at an economic summit with heads of G-7 and then attending the NATO summit.³⁰ Carter, in his address to the other leaders at the NATO summit, issued a call for increased defense spending by NATO members, thereby setting the character and tempo for the meeting and restoring vital American leadership in the alliance, after the turbulent U.S. entanglement in Vietnam.³¹

Within weeks after the NATO summit, on June 5, 1977, Brown submitted the PRM-10 Force Posture Study. The study developed alternative integrated military strategies (AIMS) in five areas: (1) a NATO-Warsaw Pact (WP) conflict in Europe (including NATO flanks and the North Atlantic); (2) operations outside Europe during a NATO-WP war; (3) operations in East Asia; (4) peacekeeping activities and potential local wars; and (5) a U.S.-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) nuclear conflict. The study authors made six fundamental assumptions regarding U.S. policy and the international environment: (1) the Soviet Union posed the principal threat to the security of the United States and to its global interests; (2) the United States would continue to view the security of Europe as a vital interest and would continue to participate actively in the defense of NATO, which the WP threatened; (3) the United States would continue to regard aggression against Japan as a threat to vital

interests; (4) the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union would not achieve a rapprochement adequate to permit a sizable decrease in forces arrayed against each other; (5) that as long as Sino-Soviet antagonism endured, the United States would not need to obtain specific conventional forces to oppose a PRC military threat; and (6) in an interdependent environment the United States would continue to have major global interests.³² However, as noted by the study authors, the security of Europe against the WP was the principal aim of U.S. defense policy:

Without such a threat, U.S. military strategy would be profoundly different. No matter what outcome may result from MBFR [Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions], there will still remain a threat and a need for NATO military forces; and the U.S., with its strategic nuclear capability, will play a leading role in NATO.³³

Further, the study emphasized that the outcome of a conventional war in Europe depended on the "deterrent value of our theater and strategic nuclear forces as well as the warfighting capabilities of U.S. general purpose forces – and those of our Allies."³⁴ WP planners had to consider the "prospect of nuclear escalation as a hedge against unexpected conventional failure."³⁵ NATO's conventional force posture depended highly on nuclear forces designed to deter nuclear attacks, and "NATO nuclear forces were generally considered adequate for deterrence of any immediate Pact escalation to this level of warfare."³⁶ The study found little to indicate that U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces could not defeat a surprise North Korean attack on South Korea, provided the Soviets and Chinese provided logistical support only.³⁷ Although the study did not reach any specific conclusions or recommen-

dations about the various alternative strategies, it was clear that the primary thrust of U.S. military strategy should remain the defense of Western Europe.

On August 24, 1977, Carter signed Presidential Directive/National Security Council-18, *U.S. National Strategy*. The directive noted U.S. advantages in “economic strength, technological superiority, and popular political support” and the administration’s determination for the United States to “maintain an overall balance of military power between the United States and its allies on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and its allies on the other, at least as favorable as that that now exists.” To that end, it would seek to counterbalance Soviet military power and influence in three key areas: Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. Further, Carter claimed that the United States would “fulfill its commitment to its NATO allies to raise the level of defense spending by approximately 3 percent per year in real terms along with our allies.”³⁸

In effect, Carter retained the national defense strategy of his predecessors, Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford — one and a half wars — a major war in Central Europe and a minor war in East Asia (Korea).³⁹ This concept would remain U.S. strategy until early 1980 when events in the Persian Gulf catalyzed changes. Thus, from the beginning of the Carter presidency, the focus was on winning the one and a half wars specified in the strategy. The Chairman of the Joint Staff and the service chiefs, including Meyer’s predecessor General Bernard Rogers, agreed to its findings, especially the conclusion that the emphasis should be on NATO. Further, the Carter administration made no reductions of the Army’s force structure of 24 divisions (16 active divisions and 8 reserve divisions) that the Ford administration had decided on in

fiscal year 1975 nor of the number of units dedicated to the defense of NATO. Rogers had made a decision during his tenure as Chief of Staff to increase the number of Army personnel in Europe so that they would be over-strength, understanding fully that to attain this personnel level in that theater, units in the United States would be at less than full strength.⁴⁰ In increasing the number of active component to 16 divisions, the Ford administration sought no increase in personnel ceilings, and the Congress did not offer to fund such an increase. In essence, the Ford administration added three divisions to the Army's force structure without a commensurate increase in personnel. The Army, according to a 1977 General Accounting Office (GAO) report, exacerbated this problem by inadequately planning for this reorganization. Further, it may have activated too many units prematurely since units activated more than 1 year earlier still did not have the proper mix of personnel and equipment to conduct effective training.⁴¹ To compensate, the Army increased its combat forces by cutting back on the support structure of the active component and by relying on the reserve component to replace the sustaining capability traded off in the active component.⁴² The Army in 1973, under then Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams, made a deliberate decision to implement the Total Force concept by integrating the reserves into the active component. The active force could not deploy without calling up reserve units. Abrams held that this concept would force politicians to call up the reserves, which President Lyndon Johnson had refused to do during the Vietnam War.⁴³

In a series of studies that the Ford administration commissioned during its 2 and 1/2-year tenure, it was apparent that the deficiency in Europe was not per-

sonnel but supplies such as ammunition, fuel, etc. U.S. Army forces in Europe did not have sufficient supplies and other materiel to execute the wartime plan. The NATO plan called for stabilizing a defensive line in Central Europe, holding this position and then awaiting forces from the United States to counterattack and recover the lost territory.⁴⁴ Holding ground until reinforcements arrived, however, required sufficient supplies to sustain European forces for weeks. Consequently, the Carter administration increased spending on war reserve supplies in Europe.

Carter's Defense Budgets.

Carter's presidential campaign pledge was to reduce the defense budget by \$7 billion and submit a balanced budget in fiscal year 1981. Secretary Brown, while respectful of Carter's goals, believed that the reductions should be more moderate. Shortly after Carter's inauguration, Brown and Bert Lance, Carter's director of the Office of Management and Budget, proposed cutting almost \$3 billion from the defense budget that would be acceptable to the armed services, slowing the procurement of major weapons systems but not terminating them.⁴⁵ Carter accepted the proposed reductions, but he felt that Brown had not undertaken the type of budget review he had wanted. However, less than 3 weeks later, Carter submitted his proposed revisions to the Ford administration's fiscal year 1978 budget proposal, announcing "the planned increase in defense spending has been reduced while our real military strength is enhanced."⁴⁶

As one analyst observed of the revised budget proposal, Ford had requested a defense budget of \$123 billion, \$13 billion more than the previous year, or

an increase of \$7 billion (6 percent) allowing for inflation. Further, the Ford budget would have shown real growth of \$16.5 billion, or 16 percent, from fiscal year 1975 (considered the turning point in defense expenditures), most of which would have been earmarked for investment in new military hardware and expansion of research and development. "President Carter's amendments to the 1978 budget would not change this picture very much."⁴⁷ While the Carter administration trimmed the budget, the revised figure left real growth at about 3 percent. Further, the Carter budget put less emphasis on strategic nuclear weapons and more weight on readiness of military units for combat, required better examination of the costs associated with expensive weapons, and signaled a continued resolve to strengthen U.S. military capabilities in Europe.⁴⁸ Carter believed that the duplication of weapon systems among the services was costing the U.S. Government \$50 billion or more per year and blamed the Joint Chiefs and service rivalry for expensive hardware.⁴⁹ Overall, the Carter administration's revised defense budget did not constitute "a clear departure in force planning" or "necessarily presage future reductions in military spending. In effect, the new administration had not yet articulated the direction of its defense planning."⁵⁰ It is important to note that the fiscal year 1978 budget was principally a Ford administration financial plan. The Carter administration had a mere few weeks to review and modify the Ford proposal.

Carter's campaign promise to reduce defense spending went largely unfulfilled during the remainder of his tenure although critics have argued the opposite. Their arguments, however, are based on two questionable claims. The first is that Carter's proposed

defense spending over the 5-year defense program (the DoD projects its budgets 4 years into the future and the upcoming fiscal year) were less than the Ford administration's proposal.⁵¹ This is true, but it is also misleading. The President proposes a budget to the Congress; he is making a request. There is no reason to assume that Congress would have merely acquiesced to Ford's request. Additionally, the only year for which the claim has any validity is the upcoming fiscal year. Funding for the future years is simply a proposal for how funds will be allocated taking inflation into consideration.

The second claim is that Carter's defense budgets did not show any real growth, i.e., increases after allowing for inflation. It is important to recall that during Carter's tenure, the economy was in recession and Congress was under intense pressure (as was the President) by the electorate to fight inflation by balancing the budget.⁵² Inflation was running at double digits and was difficult to forecast with any precision; it was driving up the costs of fuel and the weapons in development and production, but it was also eroding a substantial part of the increases in defense spending.⁵³ Nonetheless, in fiscal year 1980, Carter kept his promise to his NATO allies by increasing real defense outlays by 3.1 percent. Joseph Pechman, an expert on the federal budget, characterized the growth as a "sharp increase in defense spending. . . ."⁵⁴ The evidence is also clear that the fiscal year 1981 budget increased defense spending (\$8.1 billion in real terms over fiscal year 1980).⁵⁵

There was also little sentiment in Congress for boosting military spending until 1980 (the fiscal year 1981 budget), when Iranian revolutionaries took American Embassy personnel hostage in November

1979 after deposing the Shah months earlier, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Congress reduced Carter's first three budget requests (fiscal year 1978-80) by a total of \$6 billion.⁵⁶ In addressing the issue of real growth, according to the Carter administration's inflation estimates, the administration's proposed fiscal year 1981 budget request of \$158.7 billion represented real growth of 5.4 percent over the \$138.6 billion that it expected to spend in fiscal year 1980, after Congress passed a 1980 supplemental funding bill the administration requested.⁵⁷ In other words, the Carter administration was not only requesting a budget with real growth, but it was also maintaining its commitment to NATO of 3 percent real growth per annum.

The proposed fiscal year 1981 budget for the Army, the one General Meyer claimed was inadequate, contained funding for large-scale production of several expensive Army weapons intended to counter the Soviet Union's numerical superiority, especially in central Europe.⁵⁸ These weapons included the new XM-1 tank, armored troop carriers equipped with anti-tank missiles, additional stand-alone anti-tank missiles, howitzers, and laser-guided artillery shells that could home in on a tank 10 miles away, production of large-scale rockets that were also designed for anti-tank purposes, anti-tank attack helicopters, the Hellfire missile which the attack helicopter would carry, as well as funding to modernize a portion of the Army's existing M-60 tanks with a more accurate gun-aiming system.⁵⁹

In terms of funding readiness, another Army concern, Congress made substantial cuts in the fiscal year 1980 operations and maintenance account, the account that funds this activity. The DoD fought energetically

to protect its fiscal year 1981 request. However, the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee had long considered this account as packed with wasteful programs that made it opportune for trimming without damaging national defense. Its hearings on the proposed budget indicated negligible change in its position.⁶⁰

Regarding Army procurement funding, Congress reduced the requested funding for aircraft, missiles, and tracked combat vehicles for fiscal year 1978.⁶¹ In the fiscal year 1979 request, however, Congress added funding for aircraft, but reduced the funds requested for missiles, tracked combat vehicles, and other weapons. As noted by *Congressional Quarterly*, in fiscal year 1979, essentially Carter's first budget, Congress demonstrated "no fundamental disagreement with the administration's plans for providing U.S. forces in Europe with more sophisticated weapons."⁶² For fiscal year 1980, Congress approved the Army's planned procurement of tracked combat vehicles with the exception of the M-60 tank, which it cut by approximately 75 percent and instead, added funding for modernization of the existing inventory of M-60 tanks.⁶³

In view of changed circumstances in the strategic environment, the Carter administration's fiscal year 1981 budget request was not an aberration in terms of maintaining U.S. military capability. For example, its fiscal year 1979 budget request reflected its priority to increase the U.S. capacity to conduct an air/land war in Europe, consistent with its defense strategy of contributing to NATO's ability to deter a Warsaw Pact attack on Western Europe. In the view of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), it accomplished this objective "while maintaining at current levels the U.S. capacity to 'project power' elsewhere." The funding

for enhancing NATO capability sought to remedy the apparent misallocation of ground forces in Central Europe, move additional U.S. forces to Europe quickly at a time of crisis, secure additional funding of military construction funds to preposition equipment for one division and procure equipment to improve the coordination, agility, and staying power of U.S. forces. Overall, the fiscal year 1979 request emphasized ground forces for NATO.⁶⁴

As to fiscal year 1980, President Carter continued to honor the U.S. commitment to NATO to increase defense spending by 3 percent in real terms. The development and procurement of new weapons and associated facilities were the primary area where there was significant real growth in the 1980 defense budget. In the Army, the major increases were for missiles and tracked combat vehicles. Funding for missiles increased \$485 million or 63.5 percent because of initial production of the Patriot Air Defense Missile and the General Support Rocket System (GSRs) and large increases in the production of the Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) antitank missile and the Roland air defense missile. Funds requested for Army weapons and tracked combat vehicles increased by 25 percent or \$378 million. This increase was largely due to the introduction of a new family of armored combat vehicles (the Infantry and Cavalry Fighting Vehicles) that were now ready for production, with substantially higher unit costs than the vehicles they replaced. The Carter administration trebled the number of XM-1 tanks planned for procurement.⁶⁵

The fiscal year 1980 budget also requested funds: (1) to accelerate the rate at which the Army could deploy heavy divisions (those with tanks and other heavy equipment) to Europe; (2) to enhance the readi-

ness of “home-based and forward-deployed forces”; (3) to maintain forces for a prolonged conflict (sustainability) by building sizable stockpiles of materiel in Europe, a commitment the Carter administration initiated in 1979; and, (4) to maintain funding for reserve components at its fiscal year 1979 level of \$2.7 billion since the Army deactivated some active support units to supply personnel for the three new divisions and two new brigades established during the Ford administration.⁶⁶

Further, Meyer’s concerns were apparently addressed, at least to some degree, since the fiscal year 1981 defense budget included funds for large-scale production of several expensive Army weapons intended to counter Warsaw Pact capabilities in Europe, readiness, and recruiting and retaining a quality force.⁶⁷ Meyer admitted in a 1988 interview that the Army obtained a “big plus up” in the fiscal year 1981 budget based on his plea to President Carter.⁶⁸ Thus, an examination of the three fiscal year budget requests for which Carter was responsible indicates that there were indeed substantial increases in the Army’s budget for modernizing the force and for ensuring it could fulfill its responsibilities as specified in the defense strategy.

Recruiting the All-Volunteer Force.

The other major concern General Meyer mentioned in his testimony was the lack of sufficient personnel. He believed that recruiting had been made more difficult by Congress’ decision to end the Vietnam-era G.I. bill, which contained attractive educational benefits. Additionally, the Ford administration made the reduction of funding for recruiting a major element of

its fiscal year 1977 budget request because of “escalating manpower costs.” For example, the proposed fiscal year 1977 budget reduced enlistment bonuses from \$72 million the previous year level of \$29 million. There were also reductions to funds for advertising.⁶⁹ General Maxwell Thurman, the commander of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command from 1979 to 1981, recounted years later that the rationale for these decreases was that “recruiting resources as a whole were thought to be at least adequate, if not excessive, and those became targets for cost-cutting.”⁷⁰

The recruiting problems that the Army confronted were not solely the result of funding decisions. As early as 1974, analysts recognized a “declining civilian manpower pool” due to demographic changes as well as new attitudes among the general population about military service that arose with the end of conscription in June 1973. Now, the military had to compete for qualified personnel in the marketplace and had to retain in its ranks sufficient numbers of qualified personnel at a cost that the American public was willing to support.⁷¹

In 1977, a few months after Carter’s inauguration, Lieutenant General Harold Moore, the Army’s Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, told senators on the Armed Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel, “Today we have a combat-ready active force of which the nation can be justifiably proud.” Moore also stated, “Furthermore, for the first time since the end of the Vietnam War, all major combat units achieved their personnel readiness goals during fiscal year 1976.” Moore admitted that since January 1976, there had been a downward trend in quality and that the Army was not meeting its recruiting objectives for nonprior service males. He contend-

ed, however, that the Army believed that these trends could be reversed and that required active component end strengths could be maintained at required levels over the next few years. Additionally, there were problems in recruiting for the reserve components. The Army had inadequate recruiting resources for fiscal year 1977, which needed to be rectified along with pay, bonuses, and benefits to attract and retain personnel. Moore recognized as well that the success in meeting recruiting goals depended on a favorable recruiting environment.⁷²

In testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel in March 1978, Lieutenant General DeWitt Smith, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Moore's successor, indicated that there were challenges in recruiting for the reserve components and that the recruiting pool of males 17-24 years of age was small. Only one out of four young men was qualified and available for service. He noted as well that there was a declining market and a waning interest in military service. "Nonetheless, the Army believes it will continue its recruiting success."⁷³ Smith also addressed a salient point about readiness: "While it is not necessary that all our units be maintained at the same state of readiness all the time, a suitable number must be prepared to engage in localized conflict with little or no warning. The remainder of the active and reserve component forces must be maintained in a sufficiently high state of readiness to permit response to a major conflict within the pre-attack warning time we expect our intelligence system to provide."⁷⁴ Smith's testimony specifically discussed the criticality of Army units being capable of defending NATO.

A year later, in March 1979, Smith's successor, Lieutenant General Robert Yerks, testified before the same Senate subcommittee that the Army had only a small shortfall, 3,062 soldiers, below its authorized strength in fiscal year 1978. The Army was also requesting Congress to provide a slightly higher level of end strength in fiscal year 1980 over its 1979 level, but Yerks noted, "Significant combat readiness and early deployment enhancements are programmed. Combat power in NATO will be improved. . . ." ⁷⁵ He too stated, and referred to testimony by then Army Chief of Staff Rogers, that the "Total Army strength is derived from a scenario involving the defense of NATO." ⁷⁶

In April 1980, the picture that Yerks, now with General Meyer as Chief of Staff, presented to the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Defense, was dramatically different. He warned that "current manpower shortages merit close attention" and that the fiscal year 1981 request "reflects recognition not only of that competitive market, but also the need to provide a long-term remedy in addition to short-term 'fixes' on existing shortfalls." Yerks stated that the active component was able to maintain its strength within 1 percent of the authorized levels, through almost 6 years of the volunteer environment. ⁷⁷

However, toward the end of fiscal year 1978, the Army was no longer meeting its recruiting objectives. The situation deteriorated further in fiscal year 1979 despite Army initiatives and additional funding Congress had provided for recruiting. Fiscal year 1979 ended with Army strength of 15,444 soldiers fewer than the congressionally authorized end strength. Thus, this dire situation was not because of a lack of funding but rather because the market for recruiting had changed—a declining age 17-to-22 male popula-

tion and increased competition with the other military services, civilian employers, and colleges and universities. Additionally, the Army was experiencing a downward trend in both the number of high school graduates and recruits in the upper mental category, a trend in evidence since fiscal year 1976. Now it would have to increase its accessions to compensate for the existing shortfall and the need to bring new personnel into its ranks, an increase of 35,000 over its fiscal year recruiting level. Thus, the Army requested increased funding for recruiting and legislative authority for increasing enlistment and reenlistment bonuses for fiscal year 1981.⁷⁸ But what was actually occurring was more disturbing than even these trends. The Army Recruiting Command was recruiting the least desirable candidates, aiming to recruit 17-year-olds without a high school diploma, and lowering its standards in other regards to increase volume.⁷⁹ Meyer became so distressed about this situation that in November 1979, with 2 weeks of notice, he told Major General Maxwell Thurman that he was being reassigned as the commander of the floundering Army Recruiting Command, which not only was failing to meet its recruiting goals, but suffering the ignominy of being charged with cheating.⁸⁰ The Carter administration was equally concerned about the Army's failure to recruit sufficient enlistees. A Carter political appointee in the Office of the Secretary of Defense helped Thurman by introducing the general to first-rate advertising consultants, which Thurman appreciated.⁸¹ Thurman is largely credited with being the principal architect of the all-volunteer Army and developing the recruiting campaign that eventually turned around the service's recruiting problems.⁸²

Assessing Readiness.

General Meyer warned that a substantial number of Army divisions were not fully capable because of personnel deficiencies. Journalist James Kitfield reported that in 1979, Meyer informed the President that only four of 10 active divisions stationed in the United States were capable of deploying overseas in a contingency.⁸³ In fact, the historical record indicates Meyer brought this issue to the attention of the commander in chief and Secretary Brown at a November 24, 1979, meeting at Camp David with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the other service chiefs. The meeting lasted 3 hours.⁸⁴

At the meeting for which there is no transcript but which Meyer recalled in an 1988 interview, he told the President and the others present that there were adequate Army personnel to create only four divisions, although there were 12 divisions in the Army's force structure. He also stated that the Army's budget was insufficient and had told Carter and the others, "We had a hollow army. Hollow people. Hollow equipment. Hollow sustainability. Hollow quality. I pleaded for more money." He later added in that same interview:

That was the only year of the 4 years of the Carter administration there was any sort of [resource increase]. The last couple of years President Carter was in office, because of Afghanistan, [and] Iran, were all good years, because from then on we got lots of money for the defense program.⁸⁵

These two sentences contradict each other.

What is evident from statements General Meyer made in the 1988 interview is that he was concerned about the portion of the defense budget allocated to the Army: "What you look at then is seeing where you get your fair share of conventional resources." He later commented in that same interview that the U.S. Army was not receiving its "fair share chance at the resources." When he met with Carter in November 1979, he told his interviewer, "I pleaded for more money. Out of that budget, we did get more money."⁸⁶

Surprisingly, Carter merely remarked in his diary about the meeting with the Joint Chiefs:

. . . in general all were pleased with what I had done since I've been in office. They thought the '81 budget as now being discussed was adequate, and that there had been 15 years of neglect before prior to my administration.⁸⁷

It is odd that such a stunning revelation regarding the number of capable divisions did not compel Carter to make note of it in his diary. Whether General Meyer specifically informed the President that only a few U.S.-based divisions were ready for deployment to Europe in response to a contingency is unknown exactly, and the record remains contested. Nonetheless, President Carter, at least according to Meyer's own words in the 1988 interview, met the Chief of Staff's plea for additional funding.

Meyer's claim remains a perplexing comment. Such degradation in readiness is unlikely to have come about in the 5 months between Meyer's becoming Chief of Staff and the Camp David meeting. Further, if force readiness was in such a dire condition, it is a stinging commentary on his predecessor's tenure to have allowed such a development and to fail to ad-

dress it. Overall, anecdote has once again been given credence as persuasive, empirical evidence.⁸⁸ However, the historical record does present an uneven picture of the state of Army readiness leading up to the May 1980 hearing.

In June 1978, during classified testimony before the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on NATO Standardization, Interoperability, and Readiness, then Lieutenant General Meyer as Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (DCSOPS) gave no indication that Army forces were not capable of executing its responsibilities in the defense of NATO. The hearing transcript reads, "Back here in the States we have our combat units reasonably well oriented for the first 30 days [of combat]." Meyer does indicate his concern with the later deploying reserve units as "not ready to meet requirement dates, and it's principally today because of their inability to man that force." He reiterates later in his testimony that "the active forces forward deployed and the CONUS [continental United States] reinforcing forces, those that are required for the first 30 days, are in reasonably good condition." Moreover, he is asked the question: "By D+30 how many active divisions could be in Europe?" Meyer responds: "With 4 to 8 days warning, we could have 12 to 13 divisions there."⁸⁹ There is no comment during the hearing that the reinforcements from the United States are not ready for combat.

In January and February 1979, General Meyer, still in his capacity as DCSOPS, and the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (ADCSOPS), another general officer,⁹⁰ made classified presentations to U.S. students at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College, and in neither case did the two generals make

mention of readiness deficiencies. Meyer states in the script for his January presentation that “manpower” levels are “okay in the AC [active component],” but a “severe problem in RC [reserve component].” The most important point Meyer makes concerns readiness reporting. He remarks that the old readiness reporting system had been changed because it “was not believable by reporters and readers.” The ratings were “seen as too high, too many assumptions, and unrelated snapshots (past vs. present vs. future).” The script indicates that the “new system eliminates causes”: “equipment readiness now reported against monthly average, assumptions removed, motion picture over time.” Overall, the initial reaction to the new system is “positive but some fixes required.” Readiness “ratings [are] lower because more things are measured and unit authorizations have changed—most active component units have dropped one ‘C’ rating.” In other words, with the introduction of a new readiness reporting system, most units are now evaluated as less ready than previously. Recognizing this change, Meyer states that the emphasis will be on improving the readiness of units based in the United States that are committed for deployment to Europe, both active and reserve units.⁹¹

On February 1, 1980, Secretary of the Army Clifford Alexander and General Meyer, now as Chief of Staff, presented the Army’s posture statement before the House Armed Services Committee. The text made clear that readiness measurements “are not precise,” but they “do provide a framework for assessing the Army’s strengths and shortcomings.” The text also noted that force readiness “does not in itself determine battlefield effectiveness,” that other factors pertain.⁹² While both the posture statement and Meyer’s

testimony suggest there were shortcomings, neither the document nor Meyer raised the issue of “hollowness” or an inability of the Army to execute its missions. One of the subcommittee members mentioned the unfavorable impact that House Appropriations Committee reductions in the Army’s operations and maintenance budget accounts have had on training and supplies, with which the general agreed. General Meyer later mentioned that he was not satisfied with the level of training in the Army, noting that the training is “spotty,” that there had been progress but not to the degree he would have preferred.⁹³

Testifying before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Defense, 4 days later, General Meyer reiterated that while the fiscal year 1981 advanced the Army’s capabilities, “there is still considerable to do.”⁹⁴ He also stated that as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was not “satisfied that we have sufficient air, land, or sea forces to respond to the needs of today.” Further, “I do not personally believe that there are adequate land forces to meet our portion of the defense requirements today.” He stated that budget restrictions were the reason, later observing that Congress had a role in setting those same authorized personnel levels, but admitting that the Army was having trouble meeting the current levels owing to recruiting shortfalls deriving from inadequate compensation.⁹⁵ Meyer also noted for the record how the Army’s budget request had been developed, concluding that the “Army’s \$39.1 billion budget request is the result of the Secretary of the Defense’s and the President’s best judgment as to the optimum use of resources to insure the defense of the Nation.” Meyer informed one member that the budget request was not, in his judgment, satisfactory.

In a written reply for the record on what an adequate request would be, he stated that the amount would be substantial, as high as six billion dollars, but the officially requested amount was the best balanced program the Army could achieve within the FY 81 Federal Budget request."⁹⁶ He also informed the subcommittee members, responding to a question as to whether the Army was "ready to go to war today," that:

... right now the forward deployed units [Europe, Korea, and Panama] are in *excellent* condition [emphasis added]. . . . As the Secretary indicated, the later deploying units are *less* ready [emphasis added]. So, in responding to your question, it depends on the scenario. There are certain shortfalls, and I won't get into details, that respond to specific scenarios.⁹⁷

In a closed session the next day with the same subcommittee, Meyer repeated his belief the United States had improved its capability for a war in Western Europe, but expressed concern about contingencies in other parts of the world. However, he also mentioned Secretary of Defense Brown's remark that resolving the imbalance between U.S. and Soviet conventional capability required several years of adequate funding.⁹⁸

In late February 1980, Meyer testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee noting that the fiscal year 1981 budget request had been developed before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and that in his view, the "Army's portion of the budget is inadequate in several areas." However, with respect to responding to the events in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, the Army, he commented, has maintained a sizable unit set aside for use if needed with sufficient

support capability. The issue was one of how rapidly it could deploy and here the Army depended on the Air Force's and Navy's assets.⁹⁹ The general also noted that the United States did not have sufficient forces to meet its worldwide commitments, and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had made this point consistently.¹⁰⁰ In executive session, Meyer indicated that the forward-deployed units were fully capable but underscored that the units to reinforce NATO did not have adequate personnel to be at the highest level. He estimated that the cost to meet all requirements adequately would be an additional \$2.005 billion dollars in fiscal year 1980 (supplemental funding) and \$2.653 billion in fiscal year 1981, with most of the funding devoted to procuring additional new equipment.¹⁰¹ Meyer's testimony before May 1980 makes no mention of hollowness. In fact, it portrays realistically strengths and weaknesses in the Army's capabilities without resorting to histrionics. Thus, the "hollow army" comment seems out of place; it certainly remains inconclusive, given the other testimony that a poor state of readiness actually prevailed.

Readiness reporting is crucial to understanding the issue of a "hollow army." A review of GAO reports on the subject clearly underscores the Army's difficulties in assessing the readiness of its forces. As early as December 1977, the GAO identified several problems with military readiness reporting:

The interpretation of readiness reporting criteria was not uniform; the condition of equipment was not properly reported; the reporting system did not adequately reflect capability for each mission, and the reports did not always contain adequate information.

Additionally, the GAO stressed the inability of readiness reporting to relate readiness to funding require-

ments. While improvements were underway, further steps were necessary to overcome deficiencies that the audit agency had identified previously. The GAO noted that the Army was already implementing major new reporting procedures. A year earlier, the GAO reported that the Army had serious flaws in its systems for identifying the resources that combat units needed.¹⁰²

In 1978, GAO found that the Army's personnel requirements for combat units were unreliable because of faulty planning factors. The Army was using a system that "produced unacceptable results." The GAO also concluded that the Army recognized the problem and was trying to correct it, but the proposed solution would eliminate only some of the system's weaknesses. The problem persisted into 1980 when the GAO again reported that Army systems for identifying, monitoring, and reporting combat units' requirements were not accurate. Consequently, billions of dollars could have been wasted purchasing and maintaining the wrong equipment, providing the wrong skills to soldiers, disseminating resources to the wrong locations, and designing an Army that was "not organized and equipped to meet its mission."¹⁰³ The GAO questioned the validity of the reports that the Army was using to judge its readiness, which Chief of Staff Meyer defined in an October 1979 presentation as training and maintenance, not personnel levels. However, General Meyer did observe that manning the Army was the first of two major challenges: all the military services had recruiting shortfalls in 1979 but this could be overcome by adequate funding.¹⁰⁴

Modernizing the Force.

According to General Meyer, the Army's second major challenge was modernization of its combat equipment. More specifically, the problem was introducing the new generation of combat equipment into the "hands of the troops in sufficient quantities." In his view, all of the new items, which included combat vehicles, air defense systems, helicopters, radars, communications, and electronic warfare gear, were badly needed because over the preceding decade, the Army had lost its qualitative equipment lead to the Soviets. He contended that the fielding of these new systems would regain that advantage.¹⁰⁵

However, the issue of modernization was not just a matter of fielding new systems in sufficient quantities for Army forces. The Army had made a number of missteps in developing and producing these systems long before the Carter administration had taken office. When the Vietnam War ended, the Army began developing several new systems. However, development problems disrupted the plans the Army had for introducing them. The Army cancelled the MBT-70 tank and the Cheyenne helicopter programs because of cost and complexity, which meant, as analysts observed, that the Army had to "virtually start over again."¹⁰⁶ Further, the GAO in several reports identified problems with several of these new weapon systems. The XM-1 tank's reliability and durability had not been proven according to a January 1980 report although procurement of the Army's first increment of 110 tanks had begun; doubts remained despite modifications to improve acknowledged flaws.¹⁰⁷ The GAO also voiced concerns about the Army's Infantry Fighting Vehicle in a February 1980 study. It exam-

ined the vehicle's performance in operational and development testing, noting the vehicle could not meet the Army's ballistic protection requirements. This was a crucial deficiency since the vehicle was intended to provide infantry units with mobility in a combat environment with better armor and increased firepower compared to the existing armored personnel carrier.¹⁰⁸

Further, in June 1980, the GAO observed that Congress, the military, and industry expressed concern that many of the new weapon systems were too technologically complex to permit a reasonable degree of confidence that they would function properly when needed. GAO held that the sophistication of many of the systems contributed to "budget problems, inventory shortfalls, and a low state of readiness for certain combat categories." GAO agreed that the military should seek the advantages of technologically advanced weaponry as opposed to less complex, lower-performing, or cheaper weapons. However, it believed that a better balance between performance and reliability was needed. The XM-1 tank was one of the systems cited as having reliability, availability, and maintainability problems, which could lead to readiness issues since the equipment broke down more frequently.¹⁰⁹ Earlier that month, the GAO published a summary report of earlier reviews that identified problems with other Army systems: the Multiple Launched Rocket System needed further testing before production; more critical data about the operational performance of the Division Air Defense System (DIVAD) was needed before it should be produced; and the Army should consider procuring additional existing armored personnel carriers rather than Infantry Fighting Vehicles to improve dismounted infantry capability.¹¹⁰ Although the Army wanted these new

systems, there were recognized technological problems, and many were not ready for production before fiscal year 1981. As the GAO emphasized, fielding unreliable systems would only add to readiness woes.

Some members of Congress worried about the potential inflationary impact of the planned increase in defense spending, particularly the fiscal year 1981 increase. The CBO urged a steady buildup in procurements to minimize "bottlenecks," promote capacity expansion, and enlarge the number of potential bidders so as to lessen inflationary pressures. In other words, a dramatic increase in procurement would exacerbate the already high inflation rate. The largest fiscal year 1981 procurement program was for tracked combat vehicles, especially the Infantry Fighting Vehicle, which was being procured gradually in fiscal year 1981, consistent with the manufacturer's production capacity. Additional tooling investment would be required to expand capacity as early as fiscal year 1983. The CBO also emphasized that in fiscal years 1980 and 1981, production of the XM-1 tank was "expected to proceed at rates consistent with Chrysler's capacity."¹¹¹

In short, procurement of systems at higher rates of production was not feasible. As of May 1979, many of the new systems were not mature enough to enter low-rate production. The earliest some would enter production was fiscal year 1979 and the latest was fiscal year 1984, when development funding for the 15 new systems declined rapidly. To accelerate the production over that same period would have required "about a fivefold increase in their procurement funding."¹¹²

Contextualizing the "Hollow Army."

Army General Frederick Kroesen, who served as Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe during Meyer's tenure as Chief of Staff, wrote an article in 1999 asking the question, "What is hollow?" As Kroesen notes, the definition appears uncomplicated: hollow refers to "the discrepancy between 'spaces' and 'faces' in the Army structure." However, this is too simple an answer. Kroesen states that such an assessment requires detailed analysis of priorities, operational requirements, and the use of military personnel for duties other than their assigned mission.¹¹³ This is the issue raised at the May 1980 hearing. Yet, it was dealt with in a perfunctory manner. Members of the subcommittee never asked for details or evidence, and never asked General Meyer a crucial question about the level of strategic risk the United States was willing to assume to meet its commitments. In essence, the hearing met its political intent of embarrassing the Carter administration, but shed no light on the issue.

Carter's relationship with Congress and members of his own party in both chambers was often acrimonious and sometime venomous from the earliest days of the administration. As Julian Zelizer points out, in the post-Vietnam and post-Watergate era, "the situation on Capitol Hill would have been difficult for any president regarding how well, or badly, they interacted with legislators." Legislative reforms enacted to curb presidential power were anathema to the executive branch.¹¹⁴ Moreover, not only had congressional reforms upset the power within the institution, but among the Democrats in Congress. Carter's close advisor Hamilton Jordan stated that there was

“no unifying Democratic consensus, no program, no set of principles on which a majority of Democrats agreed.”¹¹⁵ Speaker of the House and Massachusetts Democrat Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill and other congressional leaders distrusted Carter because they believed the Georgian, a political outsider they did not know well, failed to support their political interests.¹¹⁶ Carter made this situation worse. His first step after inauguration prompted disharmonious relations when he eliminated more than 300 water projects from the last Ford administration budget. He considered these to be congressional “pork” but members of both houses deemed them critical to maintaining favor with their constituents.¹¹⁷ Relations between Carter and congressional Democrats worsened a year later because the President’s fiscal conservatism angered old-line congressional Democrats, who believed that the most important duty of the government, especially during an economic downturn, was to ease social and economic burdens, even if that meant producing budget deficits.¹¹⁸

The atmosphere with respect to defense issues was often poisonous, especially by 1980. The May 1980 subcommittee hearing is emblematic of the House Armed Services Committee’s tendency to increase defense budget requests and willingly modify administrative programs, which in turn affected executive priorities. One analyst claimed that by the time of the 96th Congress (January 3, 1979 to January 3, 1981), even the Senate Armed Services Committee was “behaving like a hostile guerrilla force [ambushing] key White House initiatives.”¹¹⁹ Although the Democrats held a majority on the committee, Republican Senator John Tower with assistance from some hard-line anti-Communist Democrats such as Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson

continuously chipped away at the power of committee chairman Senator John Stennis. Although he retained sufficient influence to support the President's goals on most occasions, he did not enjoy a substantial level of control because Jackson and two other Democrats often sided with the Republicans. One staff member declared that Carter's aims were "out of step with that of the committee and the Congress." The majority of the committee became increasingly determined to increase defense spending.¹²⁰ Senator Ernest Hollings, a Democrat from South Carolina, weighed in as a strong supporter of increased defense spending when he assumed the chairmanship of the Senate Budget Committee in May 1980. He had fought with Stennis in the past over increased defense spending and was now in a position to set the defense budget levels.¹²¹

The "rise of the New Right," that is, the increasing political power of conservatives also had an influence on the public perception of Carter's positions on defense. In the 1976 contest for the Democratic nomination for the presidency, conservatives in the Democratic party supported Senator Henry Jackson, but tended to give Carter the benefit of the doubt when he was elected. However, the personal relations between Jackson and Carter were strained due to wounds sustained in the primary battle between the two. Further, the Carter administration rejected the names of several centrist Democrats for appointment to positions within the government, with the liberal wing capturing the key appointments in the national security apparatus.¹²² Thus whatever success Carter enjoyed would owe very little to Jackson and the conservative wing of the party.

The right wing group, the bipartisan Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), had the most influence

in portraying Carter as weak on defense. Paul Nitze, one of the organization's founders, had expected a position in the Carter administration, but did not receive it. Certainly, Nitze's bruised feelings may account for some of the CPD's animus toward Carter, but Carter also rejected the Soviet-U.S. arms control prescriptions that Nitze and his CPD co-founder, Eugene Rostow, had advanced. Although that issue would be the major friction point between Carter and the conservatives, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 underscored the CPD's argument that Carter had naively underestimated the Soviet Union's aggressive objectives and the unparalleled Soviet military buildup.¹²³ By the spring of 1980, 26 CPD members were among Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's 68 official foreign and defense policy advisors; nearly one-third were members of the Democratic Party.¹²⁴ The CPD also proved to be a potent interest group, swaying public and elite opinion against Carter's foreign policy, which it perceived as a "self-imposed retreat from American global power and leadership." It fostered extensive contacts with the news media, conducted speaking tours throughout the United States, prepared issue statements, pamphlets, and reports, and spent \$750,000 to derail the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II), as well as supplying a huge pool of witnesses to testify before Senate committees in 1980.¹²⁵ The CPD also worked in consonance with the American Security Council, an organization with ties to military contractors, which established a grassroots organizational offshoot to lobby for "a strategy of peace through strength."¹²⁶

During 1980, a number of "horror stories" about military readiness appeared in newspapers through-

out the country, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and smaller dailies.¹²⁷ Mark Rozell shows that the press's assessment of the Carter administration became increasingly negative and "unflattering" over the course of his term of office, resulting from the journalists' disenchantment with Carter's leadership and performance. Rozell also contends that most of the press coverage in 1980 was transparently hostile toward the Carter administration, and Carter was perceived as a "weakened" president. "This negative press assessment contributed importantly to an image of the administration in the public and in Washington as incapable of effective leadership."¹²⁸ Carter was also accused of using a "smear campaign" against Republican opponent Reagan, with the Carter campaign portraying Reagan's foreign policy stance as bellicose.¹²⁹ The Reagan campaign took advantage of the negative press assessments of the Carter administration, particularly with respect to defense issues. During the 1980 campaign, Reagan continuously charged that the Carter administration had allowed U.S. military capability to become so perilously weak that it invited Soviet aggression. He used the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran hostage crisis to argue that increased defense spending was necessary to overcome this decline in preparedness.¹³⁰

Neutral Competency and the "Hollow Army."

In 1994, the CBO determined that the term "hollow army" had been distorted beyond General Meyer's meaning to the point that it now applied "not only [to] shortages in experienced personnel but also shortages of training, weapons, and equipment that undermined military readiness during the mid- and late-1970s."

The CBO concluded, "Today, much of what is known about the hollow force of that period is based on anecdotal evidence" and a press that "sensationalized the impact of readiness problems on U.S. military capabilities." Further, readiness woes were made public, "perhaps intentionally," on the part of some military officers.¹³¹

The CBO's final point is particularly pertinent. There is a tendency by a majority of defense analysts to adopt the "normative assumption that defense policymaking should be above politics." Consistent with this belief is the notion that there is a proper balance between substantive expertise which should be politically neutral, and accountability to and control by elected officials. In the defense analysts' view, defense policymaking and planning should be a rational process free from political contamination. The very essence of the principal-agent relationship, however, negates this insulation from political contamination in the defense realm, as there are multiple principals with multiple goals.¹³² Playing politics with national security is a serious charge, but it is a realistic element of the budgetary process, especially as to the services' concerns about their relative share of the defense budget.¹³³ However, given the inauspicious connotations associated with this behavior, and the myth of neutral competence (traditionally viewed as nonpartisan and objective¹³⁴) regarding the U.S. military, such efforts are felt to require dissimulation with a more disinterested pretext offered.

Samuel Huntington provided such a disinterested explanation. As he observed, Congress, one of the principals, can play an independent role only if it has access to the same professional military advice available to the President. Further, with respect to the

defense budget, members of Congress contend that their constitutional responsibilities demand that they be able to examine the President's budget request in the light of "the purely 'military' recommendations of the Joint Chiefs." Congress made it legally permissible (under the 1949 amendment to the National Security Act of 1947) for the first time for the Joint Chiefs to present their views directly to Congress and thereby exempted them from the restrictions of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921.¹³⁵ In short, this exemption then gave the military an opportunity to offer budget recommendations that were not in line with the President's request.

While Huntington argues that this legal milestone places "a tremendous burden" on the Joint Chiefs "as to whether to speak up or to remain silent," he glosses over a more important issue of the service chief's other role as the representative of a particular military service with its own organizational cultures, routines and bureaucratic constituencies.¹³⁶ As David Jablonsky indicates, it is fallacious to believe that a service chief is:

... free to ignore the conditions of his office. In actual fact, he [the service chief] remained in effective control of his service only so long as he retained its confidence, which could be quickly lost if he was perceived to have abandoned his role as service spokesman in the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff].¹³⁷

This spokesman role includes being its advocate, when necessary, for larger levels of funding and policies that support larger budgets to procure additional capabilities, especially new equipment and force structure.¹³⁸ Further, organizations themselves struggle to attain the capabilities they believe are essential to their "es-

sence as an organization," including the "funds necessary for capabilities and missions."¹³⁹

Meyer was fully cognizant of this role, being no political innocent or stranger to the responsibilities of the Army's chief. It is clear from statements he later made in a 1988 interview that he was concerned about the portion of the defense budget allocated to the Army. As Chief of Staff, he tried to persuade the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Stennis, to establish a land power subcommittee to ensure that the Army got its "fair chance at the resources" as opposed to the Air Force and Navy Departments, which each had specific subcommittees dedicated to their concerns.¹⁴⁰

Thus, defense policy is an arena of public policy, as Daniel Wirls points out. The "military constitutes a historically embedded professional bureaucratic class unlike that in any other area of policy" and is part of the "governing apparatus." As such, the military has a say in the formulation of policy because of the connection between policy and military power, which seeks to maintain the United States as the preeminent world power. Military superiority is both an abstraction and a reality that "has had distortional effects as politicians and policymakers resort to tropes, clichés, and tradition instead of analysis, rarely feeling compelled to justify what is taken for granted." The "hollow army" is just such a trope, for it signals that any decrease in spending or a reluctance to increase funding is interpretable as a threat to security.¹⁴¹ Moreover, military power is understood relative to that of other nation-states and the perception of threats and the necessary response. There are no clear measuring devices to determine reliably and accurately the relative strengths and weaknesses of an opponent.

Thus, while the military can offer expert assessments, it is the civilian leader who has the authority and responsibility to determine whether the risk is acceptable, to determine priorities, and to weigh the effects on the body politic.¹⁴² It is ultimately a matter of judgment, but that judgment is not politically neutral as there are numerous stakeholders interested in the military budget including industry, Congress, politicians throughout the federal system, and the military. Senior military officers, especially service chiefs, are political actors attempting to secure resources for their constituents, despite often being viewed as having only the national interest at heart. In the eyes of the authorization committees, service chiefs have substantial prestige and influence, particularly when the military and the congressional members' interests converge.¹⁴³ As one of Carter's predecessors, Dwight D. Eisenhower, remarked: "Each service . . . has traditionally had at its head people who think that their service is the only service that can ultimately save the United States in time of war. They all want additional manpower and they always will."¹⁴⁴ This was certainly the case with respect to the "hollow army" debate.

Interpreting the "Hollow Army."

The "hollow army" episode is fundamentally an argument over policy, an argument as to whether the U.S. Army had sufficient human, financial, and material resources to execute the Carter administration's defense policy and strategy as specified in Presidential Directive 18. To portray this issue solely in terms of poor civil-military relations, or of the "good" soldier versus the "misguided" or "bad" politician, is not only simplistic, but it privileges one narrative over the

numerous other respectable narratives that existed. To construe the issue exclusively as one of military professionalism versus civilian control of the military is also narrow and inaccurate. The point of contention over the Army budget did not result from fractured relations between General Meyer and the Secretary of Defense. On the contrary, relations between Secretary of Defense Brown and Meyer were genial. When Meyer returned to the Pentagon after uttering the term “hollow army” at the hearing, Meyer claims he was willing to resign over his remark but Brown dismissed the idea, stating that Meyer “had to do what he had to do.”¹⁴⁵ Such a perspective also negates a more expansive, “interest-based” interpretation: a clash between political classes who have disagreed over “the proper course of action.”¹⁴⁶ It reduces the issue to a medieval morality play, a form of allegory in which the personifications of virtue and vice clash. Instead, this drama – conceding that a congressional hearing is a form of political theater or a “political spectacle” – must be understood from within a richer web of meaning.¹⁴⁷

Policies are symbolic, and the policy process is often viewed as a struggle over the symbols the actors summon. Interpretation and argument play primary roles in the policy process. Additionally, policies themselves are increasingly understood as largely symbolic, a method of articulating latent concerns.¹⁴⁸ In this particular situation, the congressional hearing includes protagonists, dialogue, and the use of symbolic language (the metaphor of the “hollow army”) all of which, as Robert Reich observes, “gives voice to these half-articulated fears and hopes, and embodying them in convincing stories about the sources and the choices they represent.”¹⁴⁹ The members of Congress and the witnesses are active coauthors of their

own narratives. The *Washington Post* reporter elucidates the “play,” acting like a drama or literary critic, contextualizing the event for the reader, the audience, and interpreting the phenomena that have been acted out in the hearing room. He also becomes a coauthor in the narrative. Further, the texts, that is, the hearing transcript, newspaper articles, and the spoken words (storytelling), are historically situated and culturally determined. In this real life drama, webs of meaning – beliefs, desires, and attitudes as well as values – are present.¹⁵⁰ Studying the history of this “drama” in its historical context is critical to interpretation. It and everyone and everything associated with it is part of the larger ongoing narrative (hence the importance of recontextualizing or broadening the context within its historical situation beyond the hearing room), as each plays the primary role within its own narrative.¹⁵¹ However, the congressional hearing and the statements made at the hearing are one narrative thread within the context of the metanarrative that is the Carter presidency.

To understand the action of others, we must understand this concept of narratives and their historically embedded character.¹⁵² History is not solely objective fact but is also “interpretation and memory.”¹⁵³ This is why the narrative associated with the “hollow army” has been interpreted at the time and since to reflect the values of the participants who share General Meyer’s interpretation. The members of the committee had no interest in delving into Meyer’s metaphor, for they understood and agreed with it: “Telling people what they want to hear in a context that makes the message credible.”¹⁵⁴ To interpret it further would be to diminish its political effect; it would be an attempt to separate the poetic from the political, to paraphrase

James Clifford.¹⁵⁵ The poetic has potency; the metaphor is a means of making sense of the world. Meyer's pithy term fit the subconscious understanding of the subcommittee members; his terminology provided a "vocabulary in which a puzzling object [or situation] could be related to other, more familiar objects, so as to become intelligible."¹⁵⁶

Thus, the meanings (values, beliefs, and feelings) that policies embody for their multiple stakeholders and the ways those meanings are communicated are central to understanding the "hollow army" episode. Meyer created those meanings with his metaphor. Murray Edelman writes that:

The critical element in political maneuver is the creation of meaning: the construction of beliefs about the significance of events, of problems, of crises, of policy changes, and of leaders. The strategic need is to immobilize the opposition and mobilize support.¹⁵⁷

The essential tactic, he continues, "must always be the evocation of meanings that legitimize favored courses of action and threaten or reassure people so as to encourage them to be supportive or to remain quiescent. Allocations of benefits must themselves be infused with meanings."¹⁵⁸ The conflict over meaning is central to the "hollow army" interlude. However, that meaning must remain ambiguous because the geostrategic environment in which the argument occurs is uncertain and unknowable. Thus, it becomes the locus of "disputed claims and competing symbols" with conflicting assumptions about the consequences of action or inaction.¹⁵⁹ It is not possible to establish the validity or the certainty of the positions that parties take on an issue. The language invokes beliefs, and part of this evocation is to frame the debate, even to identify

a particular group as harmful,¹⁶⁰ as the statements at the congressional hearing suggest. This is part of the performance. The spectacle that widely publicized political language constructs is highly dynamic, and the content is socially structured and assembled through an “evocation of unobservables in the present and potentialities in the future.”¹⁶¹

Language itself has a performance function, which is made more potent “when it is masked, presenting itself as a tool for objective description.”¹⁶² Performance language catalyzes thought and action. Its metaphors are “figures of thought based on cognition and, therefore, with implications for action”¹⁶³ because they are connected to a literal concept or to a level of meaning that is readily understandable by reference.¹⁶⁴ In this case, “hollow” was tied to the concept of a U.S. military unable to execute U.S. policy commitments, thus associating hollow—a physical attribute—to a policy objective. The metaphor, however, cannot be made explicit because it will lose its potency, its value as an incentive for action. The metaphor would be blatantly ridiculous if taken literally.

Thus, over the course of 3 decades, the “hollow army” story became the dominant account because of a potent metaphor structured to articulate the ambiguities surrounding this important policy issue and to express through imagery the risks associated with inaction. The metaphor became a most effective means of communicating information, of illustrating a point.¹⁶⁵ The value of the metaphor for those who are committed to its underlying message is that it can be perpetuated across time for political purposes. Metaphor serves as an “artifact” that carries meaning for a specific interpretive community.¹⁶⁶ However, since it is historically situated within a particular context and culture, it is also vulnerable to decay in political dis-

course. Perspective can be gained only through distance and time from the event. After 30 years, it is time to unmask the metaphor.

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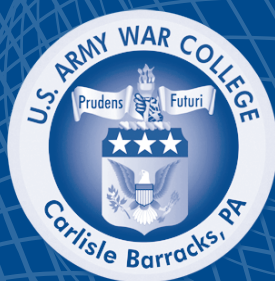
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