

This Is No Longer Your Grandfathers' Army.
Posted On:January 01, 1970

If we are talking softly but carrying a big stick, as President Teddy Roosevelt advised, we need a big stick. Americans divide themselves into hawks who believe freedom requires defense and doves who believe that if we are nice, others will be too.

The hawks are certainly right that a nation without a good military is vulnerable to the world's bullies. The majority of Western European countries are doves, a position they are permitted because since the end of World War II, the United States has been their protector. But the doves need to learn that niceness does not work with violence-prone immigrants, many of whom are not only not nice to their women or each other, but also bite the hand of their benefactors. Internal terror attacks have made that clear. This is no time to cut our military budgets either.

The American armed forces are, without question, the best that the world has ever seen. They are as competent as the ancient Roman armies, but far less violent. The American forces that defeated the Nazis and Japanese empires and occupied both were undoubtedly more decent than other occupying armies have been. Compare them to the Nazis, Japanese, Soviets, or the horrible ISIS in Iraq, for example.

Warfare among pre-Columbus Native American tribes reaped a death toll of 25 percent. Today, even in the Iraq and Afghan wars it is miniscule when compared with the global population. Evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker notes that today the world is relatively more peaceful than at any time in history, largely because of Western science, technology, and a standard of global order provided and protected by American power. This includes the role of our military.

Armies are not only about violence. Armies play a major role in creating nations. During World Wars I and II, the American armed forces brought together young men (and women) from all parts of what was a very regionally distinctive country. Texans and New Yorkers bunked, trained, and fought together, an experience that forged a nation with a common culture when the wars were over. We sometimes forget how mobile our society now is; we can live comfortably anywhere in this country. The Army deserves credit for this.

Israel created a unified country out of immigrants as diverse as professional European Jews and holocaust survivors, Jews from the Muslim world, and villagers from Yemen and Ethiopia. The army, essential for defense in a hostile neighborhood, was also the teacher of a common culture in a generation young enough to learn new things. That both young men and women must serve in the army for a period after high school has helped create a modern, vibrant country.

American foreign policy has long included military training in countries that never had really professional armies. This training includes discipline and self-discipline, identity with the nation rather than the tribe or religious sect, and officer training that teaches critical thinking and modern human rights law. When we have enough time to do this, we create armies as good as those of Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and much of Latin America.

Places where this training has not worked include Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which have far too many recruits who are illiterate and far too many officers who are there by virtue of tribe, ethnicity, or family connections. Our military trainers tried, but really needed several more generations of modernization. But ISIS has no chance of creating a modern army either. They don't even have a common language.

Civil law and order does not take place in a vacuum. Even a less-than-stellar military force is better than anarchy. Imagine trying to create a country with the likes of Boko Haram or ISIL! The combination of force and ignorance is no formula for a stable, modern state.

Today's voluntary military forces are much smaller than our conscript armies of the past, yet they keep us safe and are one of the best hopes for the rest of the world. This is certainly not your grandfather's army, but it is our big stick.

679 words

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