

## ***LESSONS NOT LEARNED***

### ***The United States Army and Institutional Resistance to Organizational Transformation After Vietnam***

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The experience of the United States Army in the wake of the Vietnam conflict offers a useful case study for the reaction of military institutions to environmental pressures for transformation. Institutional factors were instrumental in defining the Army's reaction to its experiences in Vietnam. Defeat in Vietnam caused new problems and exacerbated old ones, creating a threatening environment for the Army. While military organizations seldom face outright disbanding, environmental stress can lead to transformation. Transformation could include both marginalization of a particular service through external (civilian) redefinition of national military policy, or widespread changes in internal structures and practices; numerous examples of such effects can be seen among Western nations in the post-1945 era. The conditions for transformation existed in the United States Army in the early 1970s, but no transformation ultimately took place; institutional factors within the Army were a significant limiting factor on potential for transformation. A combination of organizational inertia and skillful maneuvering by Army leadership headed off both the external and internal threat, leaving the Army largely intact and unchanged.

As the Vietnam War drew to a close, the United States Army faced a series of internal and external challenges. Internally, the service was wracked by drug abuse, racial conflict, assaults on officers, and a growing crisis of professional ideals and identity among the officer corps. Externally, civilian America's traditional distaste for the military was creeping back thanks to the bitter and evidently fruitless struggle in Vietnam. In the postwar era, the

military would face considerably smaller defense budgets; the Army, as the service most involved in Vietnam and thus most discredited by American failure, stood to lose most.

The Vietnam crisis constituted a real and potent threat to the Army's organizational legitimacy, creating conditions where far-reaching changes in the service's established forms and practices were a distinct possibility. Numerous officers, reaching to the highest levels of leadership, recognized deep-seated problems and called for change. Other armies that had confronted crisis conditions had indeed been transformed. Yet the United States Army emerged from the crisis years of 1968-1974 largely unchanged.

Examining the Army's post-Vietnam recovery from an organizational perspective helps to explain the lack of change. Several factors interacted to preserve established forms and routines. The Army's very size proved to be a significant element: the vast amounts of equipment and training optimized for established methods of conducting war were a significant disincentive to radical change in structure and doctrine. Leaders' self-interest was another important element, as motions to reform met resistance from officers with personal expertise or status invested in the existing system. A final and vital element contributing to stability in the post-Vietnam Army was the exploitation and further cultivation of socially embedded relationships between the service and members of Congress.

A word of explanation for the narrow focus of this paper may be in order. I chose to examine the usefulness of organizational analyses in understanding the behavior of a single military organization; as a historian, the Army is both the subject of my expertise and the organization which I am most interested in understanding. While the decision to focus on a single organization was thus somewhat arbitrary, I believe there are legitimate

reasons for doing so. The nature of the subject constrains the analysis somewhat: while some generalizations can be made among military organizations of different nations, this paper primarily seeks to illustrate the power of institutional and inertial forces in forestalling change in the American army. The focus of study on a single organization is potentially deceptive in some respects, but the reality is that the American context is different in important ways from other organizations to which the post-Vietnam Army might be compared. Studying the U.S. Army may not offer much insight into the broader issues of organizational analysis, but the techniques of organizational analysis can be very useful in understanding the sources of past military policy decisions and the possible direction of military organizations in the future.

**The Crisis:**

*The United States Army is undergoing the most trying period of its long history.... the situation constitutes a manifold crisis.*

--Lt. Col. William Hauser<sup>1</sup>

The depth of the Army's difficulties in Vietnam was such that many observers came to believe that retreat from Vietnam was the only thing that saved the service from complete collapse; while the reality of the situation may have been somewhat less drastic, the fact remains that the state of the Army had reached a distressingly low level by 1971.<sup>2</sup> From 1968 onward, the Army experienced increasing incidence of indiscipline, a trend that culminated in 1971 in a service wracked by widespread drug use, racial violence, desertion, AWOL, and outright refusal to follow orders, punctuated in some cases by troops

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Hauser, *America's Army in Crisis: A Study in Civil-Military Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Seymour M. Hersh, "The Decline and Near Fall of the U.S. Army," *Saturday Review* 55 no.47 (18 November 1972): 58-65 for a well-developed example of this school of thought.

assaulting their officers by "fragging" them with grenades. Interacting with the collapse of discipline was the Army's inability to secure a decisive victory on the battlefield despite years of trying and a massive commitment of men and materiel. Although changes in American society and the difficult circumstances of the war in Vietnam complicated the Army's situation, the disastrous results of the war reflected directly on the service's professional leadership. The Army's established leaders, organizational forms and techniques had failed to accomplish the mission assigned to them; the obvious question was to what extent this failure would undermine the fundamental legitimacy of the Army's established organization.<sup>3</sup>

### The Environment of Military Organizations

Understanding the environment in which military organizations operate is crucial to understanding the pressures for change which they face. Sociologist Fritz Lang has noted that military organizations operate in a unique environment. While they share many features of civilian organizations of equivalent size and complexity, the fact that the fundamental product and purpose of their organization is the "production" and management of violence (or at least the potential for violence).<sup>4</sup> While military organizations generally have an exclusive national franchise in their particular area of warmaking, they do face "interservice" competition with other military

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<sup>3</sup> Haynes Johnson and George C. Wilson wrote a revealing eight-part series entitled "Army in Anguish," [*Washington Post*, September 12-20, 1971] which detailed the Army's problems with racial tension, drugs, crime, poor leadership, and dissent within the ranks; the last three parts of the series focus on the service's prospects for rebuilding. Numerous secondary works which appeared during the Seventies addressed the Army's disciplinary problems in this time period. Most are somewhat polemical, but nonetheless informative. Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), and E.L. King's *The Death of the Army* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972) are among those critical of the Army. Hauser's *America's Army In Crisis* attempted to present the point of view of a would-be constructive critic within the Army.

<sup>4</sup>Fritz Lang, "Military Organizations," in James G. March, *Handbook of Organizations*, Chicago (Rand McNally and Co., 1965), 838.

organizations with different specialties. A military organization must be constantly prepared to demonstrate its usefulness and effectiveness to civilian overseers in order to defend its allotment of a limited national defense budget. While it is unlikely that a major power would completely abandon land, sea, or air forces, civilian judgments regarding the relative importance of each component in overall national defense policy have profound effects on the available resources and morale of individual military organizations. As a result, the leaders of military organizations seek to preserve and expand their service's share of the defense budget by cultivating contacts with key civilian policymakers and by maintaining a positive public image.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. Army in the Vietnam era had had much experience with marginalization, most recently with the decision to emphasize Air Force and Navy atomic-armed air power in the years immediately after the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> The Army managed to preserve a meaningful but precarious role for itself by undergoing a sweeping reorganization in doctrine and structure emphasizing nuclear warfighting in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but the dislocation which ensued from this hasty transformation disturbed many senior Army leaders. When its position in Cold War defense policy was stabilized, the Army discarded most of its changes and reinstated more traditional organizational forms and practices.<sup>7</sup> This previous experience with the dangers of marginalization and transformation contributed to the Army's institutionalized resistance to change. The environment of interservice bureaucratic competition in which the Army operated led the service to

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<sup>5</sup> Janowitz, 359-360, 366-367

<sup>6</sup> See Bruce Geelhoed, "Executive at the Pentagon: Re-examining the Role of Charles E. Wilson in the Eisenhower Administration," *Military Affairs* 44 no.1 (February 1980), 1-7.

<sup>7</sup> See A.J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam*, Washington (National Defense University Press, 1986). Another valuable perspective is provided by David Fautua, "The Origins of the U.S. Cold War Army: NSC 68, the Korean War, and the Challenge to Civilian Control," unpublished dissertation prospectus, UNC Chapel Hill, 1996.

develop a conservative, insular institutional outlook in order to resist being relegated to second-class status once again.

The environment of military organizations is substantially different than for business organizations, but it is no less competitive. Military institutions, like other government agencies, are subject to judgment by governmental authorities. The ultimate test of a military organization is, of course, war: success in war tends to validate existing military doctrine and practices, while defeat leads to rethinking and redefinition. In peacetime, military organizations prepare for war; the government's evaluation of how effective this preparation is in supporting national goals and policy contributes to change or continuity in peacetime military organizations. A military organization operates in two main arenas: an internal sphere consisting of the service itself, and an external environment that includes external security threats and the military organization's relationship with its own civilian government.<sup>8</sup> The United States Army in the late Vietnam era faced significant challenges to its organizational legitimacy in both these spheres.

The environmental context of military organizations parallels that of other public bureaucracies in important respects, particularly with regard to the institutionalization of organizational goals and practices. Russell Peabody and Francis Rourke describe the growing phenomenon of "politics of administration" in which public bureaucracies' interactions with their environments "have the effect of augmenting, retaining, or diminishing the basic resources needed to attain agency goals. These resources include jurisdictional authority, public favor, rank within the organizational hierarchy,

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<sup>8</sup>Lang 839

and fiscal support." The basic task of administrators in these circumstances is to preserve and expand the power of the organization.<sup>9</sup>

The actions of military leaders in the Cold War era conform to Peabody and Rourke's institutionally-driven analysis. While the fundamental purpose of a military organization is enhancing the security of the nation which it serves, military organizations became increasingly driven by institutional concerns: the growing technological and resource base demanded by modern warfare and the resultant rising demand for peacetime funding led military leaders to build relationships with figures in the civilian government and business sectors who could aid the military organization in its competition for resources. Military leaders frequently viewed national security needs through the lenses of institutionalized norms of their respective military organizations; While they were not generally so cynical as to intentionally damage national security, leaders of military organizations generally proposed defense policies that maximized the role of their particular service in the overall defense scheme.<sup>10</sup>

### Transformational Pressures: Internal and External

In trying to explain the lack of change in the post-Vietnam Army, this study rests on the assumption that the U.S. Army was under significant pressure to transform itself in the late years and immediate aftermath of Vietnam. Although no transformation ultimately took place, strong evidence suggests that the Army did indeed face major strains in both its external and internal aspects.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert L. Peabody and Francis E. Rourke, "Public Bureaucracies," in James G. March, *Handbook of Organizations*, Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1965, 817.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Millis, *Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History*, New Brunswick, N.J.(Rutgers University Press, 1956), 305-314; Janowitz, 351-352

From an external perspective, the Army's greatest problem was the negative civilian reaction to the service's inability to gain a military victory in Vietnam. While officers protested that civilian political leadership had not given the military enough freedom of action to successfully prosecute the war, the fact remained that the military had accepted civilians' strategic directive and failed to achieve the desired goals. The Army had fought the war, expending large quantities of resources and at the cost of thousands of lives, without ultimate success.

Perhaps more importantly in the long run, in the absence of victory or even significant progress, the strain which the war placed on the nation led to increasing hostility toward the military, particularly toward the Army, which had both the largest demand for personnel as well as the largest and most active role in Vietnam. The positive reception of the military by civilian society during the Cold War was largely unprecedented in American history, and it was to the traditional antimilitary attitude that the nation appeared to turning as the war dragged to a close. The difficulty of obtaining victory had eroded support for the war, which as it continued led to a deep decline in the popularity and prestige of the military among American civilians. Increasingly, civilians questioned military leaders' judgment and motives--the military's poor performance in Vietnam damaged its credibility with civilians; at the same time, heightened civilian criticism evoked increasingly defensive reactions from military leaders.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to pressures stemming from declining public support for the Army, the failure in Vietnam undermined the Army's established doctrine. The

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<sup>11</sup> Willard Latham, "The Modern Volunteer Army Program: The Benning Experiment, 1970-1972," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974), pp.8-10; Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army*, New York (Hill and Wang, 1978), p.41; Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), 9-10,17-19.

U.S. Army relied on large, heavily-equipped combat units with massive firepower, designed to engage the similarly equipped and organized Soviet army in heavy conventional combat. In Vietnam, the lightly equipped and armed Vietnamese communist forces were generally able to avoid engaging large American units in open combat, however, countering the American advantage in firepower with mobility and subterfuge. While the American forces won nearly all the "stand-up fights," the communists were able to preserve their military potential until mounting strain induced the United States to pull out. Ultimately, the American forces' inability to force the Communists to fight on American terms led to a Communist victory. While Army leaders could protest that they had not been defeated in battle, the fact remained that the Communists had achieved their objectives and the U.S. had not; this set of circumstances called into question the validity of the basic Army's strategic and tactical assumptions, as well as the organizational forms designed around them.

The failure to successfully complete the mission it had been assigned threatened the Army internally. The Army's experiences in Vietnam were equally damaging to the legitimacy of its established leaders, forms and practices. The failure of the service's established methods led to a loss of confidence within the organization. The professionalism of the Army officer corps eroded to an alarming extent as the war went on. Officers of all ranks perceived a deep decline in both professional ethics and technical competency among their fellow officers. The combined pressures of a highly competitive career system and the political and military demands created by Vietnam led to widespread bickering, mistrust, and dishonesty among officers, as individual

officers felt the system forced them to place their own careers ahead of the interests of the service itself.<sup>12</sup>

The effect of both internal and external pressures on the Army was to undermine the legitimacy of the Army's established organizational forms and practices. The Army stood at a crossroads in 1970-1971; many officers had lost confidence in the system, and civilian support for the Army had declined precipitously. The threats to the Army's legitimacy created substantial pressures for organizational transformation.

While failure in Vietnam and the chaos within the Army was bad enough by itself, Army leaders realized that these factors created the potential for a thoroughgoing transformation in the Army's makeup and mission. The Army's chaos threatened to produce sweeping organizational changes. The Army's legitimacy was under siege both from without and from within. The service had been unable to defeat the Vietnamese Communists despite the vast array of men and technology it had at its disposal, a realization that might be taken into account in future defense budgeting. Army leaders feared that the civilian government might conclude that heavy ground forces were simply not worth the cost in manpower and equipment; since the U.S. Army had focused heavily on "heavy" armored and mechanized forces ever since the Second World War, the possible transition appeared very threatening from an institutional perspective.

In fact, the Nixon Administration was in the process of what it felt to be a substantial redefinition of defense policy during the early 1970s. Dubbed "The

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<sup>12</sup> The Army War College produced a landmark study of the problem in 1970 in the wake of My Lai Massacre, in which Army officers covered up an incident in which American troops under the supervision of their officers murdered several hundred Vietnamese civilians. This document, entitled *Study on Military Professionalism*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. (U.S. Army War College, 30 June 1970), constitutes the best source of information on the crisis of professionalism within the Army. A broader discussion of the problem and its subsequent resolution can be found in Erik Coleman, *Reflection and Reform: Professionalism and Ethics in the U.S. Army Officer Corps, 1968-1975* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, UNC Chapel Hill, 1997).

Nixon Doctrine," the new plan called for deemphasizing ground forces in favor of air and naval power, in addition to calling for greater international cooperation in order to limit the chances of major future wars. The Nixon Doctrine provided a challenge to the Army, as the service had to reestablish its legitimacy or face significant changes: wrenching organizational transformation at best, marginalization at worst.

### Transformational possibilities: A comparative perspective

A comparison with other Western armies in unsettled postwar circumstances underscores the range of possibilities for transformation that confronted the U.S. Army after Vietnam. After the Second World War, the German, French, and British armies had all undergone transformation.

The German Army is perhaps the most dramatic example of transformation; it also suggests the possibility of preserving important military elites and valuable routines in a transformational setting. As the product of an international renegade state that had suffered decisive defeat and surrendered unconditionally, this is not surprising. During the Allied occupation of Germany after the war, the German Army was formally disbanded; Germany was demilitarized. When the United States decided to remilitarize its new West German ally in response to the perceived Soviet threat in Europe during the 1950s, the awful legacy of the Wehrmacht loomed large and stimulated many NATO nations to oppose the move. The U.S. pushed the program through, however, and the West Germany Army was created. This army was led to a significant extent by former Wehrmacht officers who had had limited ties to the Nazi regime, a fact that was profoundly disturbing to many observers but which suggests that expertise is a valuable commodity that is preserved in a transformation. Perhaps more importantly, the Bundeswehr

successfully sought to preserve the organizational forms and institutional values which had helped make the Wehrmacht so successful. As Martin Van Creveld noted in his 1982 book *Fighting Power*, the German army had produced a combat record far superior to its better-equipped and more numerous opponents throughout the Second World War; this superiority stemmed to a significant extent from the German army's fluid, open organizational structure which put large amounts of responsibility in the hands of individual commanders rather than centralizing authority. This quality of initiative and responsibility was preserved in the West German Army, giving it a substantial advantage; this suggests that valuable organizational characteristics can be preserved even in major transformations.<sup>13</sup>

The French Army provides a cautionary example. The French Army, once regarded as one of the best in the world, was dramatically defeated in short order by the Germans in the early stages of the Second World War; in the aftermath of WWII, the French Army was defeated again in Indochina. Following these reverses, the army spent years fighting an emotional and bloody struggle to preserve French control over Algeria, only to have the civilian government choose to grant the North African colony its independence. In the wake of defeat and what many officers perceived to be a betrayal, the army in Algeria rebelled against civilian control. French officers in Algeria led their troops against the civilian government. They participated in civilian-led uprisings in 1958 and 1960, then staged an outright military coup against the French government in 1961. In the wake of these actions, the French government moved swiftly to impose deep-seated changes on the army. The army was reduced in size by nearly a third, elite units that had rebelled were

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<sup>13</sup> Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945*, Westport, Connecticut 1982; Maj. Henry Gole, "Leadership from Within," *Military Review* 93, no.2 (February 1973), 83-91.

inactivated, and joint-operations commands were instituted. While observers differed as to whether the French example was a generally applicable lesson in the power of the civilian government to enforce its will upon the military or the product of uniquely French conditions, the fact remained that the French Army had undergone a thoroughgoing transformation, first from within in response to defeat and perceived betrayal, and subsequently one imposed from without that effectively quelled its rebellious tendencies.<sup>14</sup>

A final paradigm for military transformation is provided by the British army in its retreat from empire. The British army had been based, literally and spiritually, in the nation's imperial possessions for centuries. In the aftermath of the Second World War, however, Britain's time as an imperial power was clearly at an end. Without the colonies, the British economy could no longer support the military establishment it once had; at the same time, the loss of the colonies reduced the demand for troops. Accordingly, the civilian government moved to reduce the size of the army from 690,000 in 1957 to a final level of 175,000 in 1970. The old colonial army would henceforth function as a subsidiary element in NATO's defense of Western Europe, a substantial reduction in its formerly broad role in national defense policy. Despite this drastic reduction in resources and mission, the army met the civilian initiative with compromise and cautious acceptance.<sup>15</sup>

While the European examples each have their own unique characteristics, they are united in the fact that each represents a transformation of a military organization in response to external forces. The United States Army in the wake of Vietnam also faced substantial pressures that might well have produced a transformation, yet no transformation took place.

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<sup>14</sup> Hauser, 22-32

<sup>15</sup> Hauser, 36-42, 47-48

## The U.S. Army's Response

Given that transformation was a distinct possibility for the U.S. Army after Vietnam, the service effectively had two major alternatives: the Army could seek to preserve its existing structure and practices, choosing stability and continuity over change; or it could embrace transformation. The transformational pressures were more circumscribed than in the German or French cases, but there were several substantial possibilities for change. At worst, transformation could entail a marginalization of ground combat forces in national defense policy. Army leaders feared this possibility, particularly in the wake of the elimination of conscription, which the Army had relied on to fill its manpower needs since the late 1940s. Another possibility was that the Army would be reduced in size and relegated to "peacekeeping" sorts of missions; this would entail significant restructuring and substantial changes in organizational values, since the Army had always focused on defeating the enemy in combat as its major activity and goal.<sup>16</sup> A third alternative was a renewed emphasis on "counterinsurgency" (COIN). Counterinsurgency had been the buzzword in the Army and the Department of Defense during the Kennedy Administration, as an aggressive civilian leadership sought a means of meeting the communist threat in limited war. Counterinsurgency was conceived as a means of meeting Soviet-backed guerrilla forces in the Third World and beating them at their own game; it encompassed political motivation and socioeconomic assistance to "win the hearts and minds" of indigenous populations in addition to military measures. Counterinsurgency demanded a reorganization of the Army to emphasize light, mobile forces and increased attention to the political side of warfighting.

## Outcomes and analysis

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<sup>16</sup> See Janowitz, 1960 for a discussion of the problems and prospects of such a transformation

Clearly, alternatives existed for the U.S. Army; moreover, comparison with recent experiences of European armies suggests that military organizations can and do undergo transformation. Yet despite the pressures it faced and the alternatives available, the U.S. Army ultimately returned to an overwhelming focus on conventional war in the European theater. The Army's manpower shrank in the aftermath of Vietnam and the elimination of the draft, but it retained its heavy-combat capability. The Army retained much of its share of the defense budget and eventually even convinced Congress to facilitate an expansion from 13 to 16 combat divisions in the mid-Seventies. Doctrinal reforms were substantial, but returned to focusing overwhelmingly on solving the problems of mobile warfare against the Soviets. While the U.S. Army was deeply affected by its experiences in Vietnam, it was not transformed. In fact, the Vietnam experience came to be viewed as an aberration, an example of what could happen if Army leaders let civilians push them into the "wrong" kind of war, that is to say anything that was disadvantageous to the service's firepower-heavy mechanized forces.

The preservation of the Army's established forms and practices can be attributed in part to its internal inertia. As Howard Aldrich and Ellen Auster pointed out, large and old organizations tend to lack flexibility; they tend to become set in their ways and thus develop inertia which inhibits transformation. Among the factors which contribute to inertia are pressures to internal consistency as a basis for coordination and control, increases in vested interests, and homogeneity of members' perceptions.<sup>17</sup> The post-Vietnam Army exhibited all these traits. The very size and complexity of the Army demanded substantial internal consistency, which was further enhanced by the hierarchic nature of military organization. Vested interest in the existing

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<sup>17</sup> Howard Aldrich and Ellen Auster, "Even Dwarfs Started Small: Liabilities of Age and Size and Their Strategic Implications,"

system was great--general officers had been trained in and excelled in the existing system, so they hesitated to tear it down in favor of something new and untested. What is more, the vast investment in equipment and training devoted to the established system discouraged major changes in organization and doctrine. Finally, increasing public hostility to the Army led officers to close ranks in response to civilian criticism, enhancing the substantial homogeneity resulting from the demographic and occupational realities of the officer corps; the perceived need to present a united front to civilians limited debate on possible changes.

Another element in the explanation may be found in the embedded social relationships formed between Army leaders and political figures who could have pressed transformation. Embeddedness is the concept that the social relationships of key figures in an organization may have important effects on the performance and opportunities of the organization.<sup>18</sup> Army leaders had embedded relationships with members of Congress who held power over military budgets. Preserving the Army was important to Congressmen whose constituents benefited from Army procurement contracts or Army bases. Moreover, after the appointment of General Creighton Abrams as Army Chief of Staff in late 1972, the Army's chief spokesperson was a highly charismatic individual who formed close personal ties with both the Secretary of Defense and numerous Congressional overseers.

Another important brake on transformation was Army leaders' awareness of the dangers inherent in large scale change. As Michael Hannan and John Freeman noted, transformation can threaten legitimacy, increasing the risk of negative outcomes. Thus, organizations which have high internal

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology*, Number 3 (November 1985): 481-510

resistance to change are more likely to survive in the long run. With the Army's legitimacy already imperiled, Army leaders were reluctant to risk compounding their Vietnam-related problems by experimenting with new organizational structures and roles, lest failure lead to still deeper damage to internal morale and public perceptions of Army competency. Senior Army leaders sought to limit the scope of postwar reform to cautious adjustments in established policy in order to avoid further damage to their battered service.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of attempting to enact risky new strategies, Army leaders sought to reemphasize the missions which the Army designed for, reestablishing the service's legitimacy. The Army moved to strengthen its heavy combat capabilities during the 1970s, focusing on a potential war on the plains of northern Europe rather than on "low-intensity" conflicts in the Third World. Army leaders were ultimately successful in this task. They exploited their relationships with civilian policymakers in an effort to avoid getting involved in another irregular revolutionary war. The end result was that the Army was able to restore its legitimacy and preserve its established competencies, but only at the cost of failure to learn from its frustration in Vietnam. Instead of learning how to fight a guerrilla war, the lesson the Army learned was to avoid such conflicts. While the Army's actions produced a desirable outcome from an institutional perspective, the service's reluctance to adopt new methods and adapt to new circumstances was hardly an optimal outcome from the perspective of national security.

While the Army failed to learn important lessons from its Vietnam experience, an awareness of the organizational factors which contributed to its inertia may help avoid repeating the same mistakes. The actions of the U.S.

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Hannan and John Freeman, "Structural Inertia and Organizational Change," *American Sociological Review* 49 (April 1984) 149-164; see Coleman, *Reflection and Reform* for a discussion of the halting progress of Army reforms during this period.

Army after Vietnam suggests that the cliché about military organizations always preparing to fight the last war is accurate only to a point: rather than preparing to refight Vietnam, the Army returned to the model of the Second World War. Military organizations seem to conform quite well to the model of organizational behavior posited by Hannan and Freeman. Like other large, complex organizations, military organizations are characterized by substantial inertia, preferring to remain inert in order to ride out periods of environmental strain rather than adapting rapidly. The American example suggests that modern military organizations can successfully meet their institutional goals of self-preservation without transformation.

While it seems inevitable that an organization as large as the U.S. Army will experience some difficulty in transmitting new ideas throughout its substantial hierarchy, further organizational analysis might provide a better understanding of the problem as well as possible solutions. An interesting case study might be the West German army, which managed to effectively overcome its Nazi past while maintaining important organizational practices which had been traditional strengths of the German army. Further research could also further explore the nature and extent of social relationships between military and civilian leaders; this could help explain the extent to which military elites influence civilian elites and vice versa, an issue with important implications for the direction of military policy and of civil military relations.

At present, however, the problem of preserving military organizations' valuable legitimacy and stability while increasing their adaptability persists. This juxtaposition poses a dilemma for military organizations, as the strong institutional forces which unite armies also limited their ability to adapt to new conditions.

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