Introduction: The American Way of Postwar

*The Liberty Dilemma*

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It wasn't a demobilization, it was a rout.
—George C. Marshall

Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall presided over the largest mobilization in U.S. history, followed by the largest demobilization in U.S. history. His thoughts convey his despair at the speed of the post–World War II drawdown and its effects on military preparedness. Historian Russell F. Weigley’s landmark 1973 work, *The American Way of War*, examined how the United States has prosecuted its wars. He determined that the American way of war used overwhelming force, tactically and logistically, to crush its enemies. That seminal work has spawned countless similar works examining other methods of warfare. This essay, and those that follow, examine the effect of postwar drawdowns on U.S. Army readiness.² The “liberty dilemma” that forms the basis for this volume describes a paradox: the need for a strong military often conflicts with other notions, such as a fear of the military and the desire to reduce government expenses. That dilemma has shifted in form and tone over the nation’s history, forcing ever-changing adaptations. This clash often affects readiness, and the essays that follow explores the U.S. Army’s attempts to maintain that readiness in the context of a “liberty dilemma.” The examination of these adaptations reveals the American Way of Postwar.

As the U.S. military enters a postwar period after the conclusion of major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, military leaders begin to prepare for the inevitable drawdown of forces that traditionally follows each conflict. The military leader traditionally abhors the drawdown, fearing any loss of capability that may be difficult to regenerate. The issue is not just the drawdown of forces but the effects of that reduction on readiness or preparedness. The definition of preparedness has changed over the last three centuries. Linked originally to the size of forces available, readiness has come to be defined more recently as a function of the Army’s capabilities.³ Each of
the military services is affected by these drawdowns in similar ways, differing only in scale and details of execution. The U.S. Army, the largest of the services, is a traditional and highly visible target for reductions. The essays in this volume examine the history of previous military drawdowns from an Army perspective.

This drawdown is driven by a Congress dedicated to reducing expenses and supported by a populace wearied by over a decade of war. Years of war have brought enhanced technological capabilities, development of new and revised doctrines and tactics, and a highly trained, combat-experienced Army. The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in less well-known areas such as the Philippines, have also driven the national budget from an overall surplus of $128.2 billion in January 2001 to a $1.412.7 trillion deficit by January 1, 2009. Though the budget appeared to begin recovery after 2009, the deficit remained at $679.5 billion as of January 1, 2013. These very real financial pressures affect the normal postwar drawdown. The Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) has added additional pressures, with reduced budgets and the danger of sequestration should the government fail to balance the budget. This is no empty threat, as sequestration first occurred under BCA in 2012.

The issue at hand is not just the size of the military but rather its capabilities set against its projected requirements. The earliest notions of “preparedness,” which we may broadly term “readiness” today, implied capabilities to address current and future requirements. The nature of those capabilities, however, has long caused discord between those who saw the need for standing armies and those who feared them.

The belief in “no large standing armies” is enshrined in American tradition dating back to the Founding Fathers, rooted in the Constitution. The full measure of that belief may be seen in the wording of the so-called Army clause, which specifically limited the funding for such forces: “the Congress shall have the power to raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years.” The issue was a matter of some discussion at the time. Contemporary observers such as Adam Smith argued that “men of republican principles have been jealous of a standing Army as dangerous to liberty.” Alexander Hamilton, on the other hand, argued that certain circumstances call for standing armies, citing the deterrent effect these forces have on aggressive neighbors:

The jealousy of military establishment, would postpone them as long as possible. The want of fortifications leaving the frontiers of one State open to another, would facilitate inroads. The popular states would with little difficulty overrun less popular neighbours. Conquests would be as easy to be made, as difficult
to be retained. War therefore would be desultory and predatory. Plunder and devastation ever march in the training of irregulars. The calamities of individuals would make the principal figure in the events, which would characterise our military exploits.7

This, coupled with a concept of “no entangling alliances” from George Washington’s Farewell Address, gave citizens of the Early Republic the illusion of safety and security. Modern notions of these traditions hold these to be basic American ideals, but Kevin McBride, Ashley Bissonette, and Jason Warren argue that these concepts find roots in English traditions. The first two essays in this volume explore colonial conflicts in the seventeenth century and find the earliest indications of a dichotomy between standing professional armies and relatively untrained militias. Each uses a case study to illustrate colonial successes and failures and relate them to contemporary notions of preparedness.

McBride and Bissonette present “The Art of War: Early Anglo-American Translation, 1607–1643,” which examines the English and Dutch colonists’ experiences in the Pequot War (1636–1637). They illustrate the Connecticut colony’s reliance on veteran officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers to form its defense. These officers had received European military training and had served in the Thirty Years’ War, and then immigrated to the colony. McBride estimates that 30 percent of the soldiers serving in this conflict had such training, and he traces their successes directly to that training. The Connecticut colony, unlike other New England colonies, relied on the “train band” concept, which provided trained and ready forces somewhat parallel to a modern National Guard. The train bands consisted of men from the “better” parts of society, and were thus respectable. While the colonists drew comfort from the lack of a standing Army and its implicit threat of oppression, they also drew comfort from the corps of leaders who brought military experience to the colony.

The earliest colonists arriving in the New World had fled oppressive tyrannies that maintained conformity by force. At best, standing armies symbolized the power of the government to coerce, and at worst, they became the tool of that oppression. Jason Warren examines this defense system in “Liberty Paradox: The Failure of the Military System in Mid-Seventeenth-Century New England.” Even that seemingly most republican of actions, the overthrow of the English monarchy and establishment of a commonwealth, did nothing to allay the colonists’ fears of oppressive government. Indeed, revolutionary leader Oliver Cromwell was a well-respected British Army officer. Though King Charles I was tried and sentenced to death in the House of Commons
in 1649, it was Cromwell and his army that carried out the task, as Parliament was then subject to the Army Committee. Ironically, the formation of the New Model Army during Cromwell’s reign signaled the move toward standing professional armies. When the commonwealth was established, however, the fear was that oppression would come from a republican military rather than a royal monarchy. This republican tradition of army submission to Parliament rather than to Crown made it also subject to the financial whims of that body. Though some early colonists rejected the notion of royal rule from across the ocean, a concept that gained support in the eighteenth century and eventually led to revolution, the idea of a standing Army still seemed dangerous. This “liberty dilemma” that forms the basis for this volume describes the paradox: a populace that fears the very military construct that forms the population’s defense.

Warren argues that the Great Narragansett War of 1675–1676 turned out much differently for the colonists than had the Pequot War some forty years before. In this case, Connecticut used a very different system than did the other colonies, and emerged from that conflict relatively unscathed compared to them. Connecticut relied upon a small corps of “regulars,” aided by militia and experienced Native American allies. Far removed from the conflict in Europe, seventeenth-century colonists in North America often found themselves at war with each other as a result of ongoing wars between their parent nations, such as the series of Anglo-Dutch wars. The colonists of all nations faced a greater threat, however, in the form of the Native American tribes that contested the presence of the colonists. The distance from their parent governments, the relative isolation of the New World, and the short duration of both intercolonial and Indian conflicts bred ambivalence toward defense requirements.

Colonists built forts to give some measure of comfort, and often only the illusion of security, while the militia functioned as the instrument of defense. Modern observers have lamented the “boom and bust” approach to defense spending and the short-sightedness of twentieth-century politicians, but Warren contends that this, too, is a long-standing tradition rooted in early colonial attitudes. The relief that colonists felt at the end of each early conflict often manifested itself as hubris: the conflict just completed would not be replicated because the victory (however defined) ended the danger to the colony. Both McBride and Warren determine that the Indians thus showed a greater adaptability than did the colonists. With the hubris of their European forebears, the colonists often saw the Native Americans as an existentialist threat but often badly underestimated them. The liberty dilemma would continue until the next such threat appeared.
The French and Indian War (1754–1763), the North American theater of the Seven Years’ War between Great Britain and France, provided a training ground for future military leaders. Many of the colonists who fought in the British Army in North America against France would also serve some twenty years later as Continental Army (and later U.S. Army) officers during the American Revolution. Most notable among these was George Washington, who after stunning defeats on the Braddock Expedition and at Fort Necessity during that conflict would become the senior American commander in the Revolution. This corps of experienced officers and men provided the backbone for the Continental Army, but it proved to be a thin reed on which to lean.

The idea that the colony or nation need concern itself only with maintaining a corps of experienced officers carried over into the post-Revolutionary period. Samuel Watson explores the U.S. Army’s experiences with expansions and contractions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in “Surprisingly Professional: Trajectories in Army Officer Corps Drawdowns, 1783–1848.” He determines that political leaders concerned themselves primarily with the officer corps rather than the enlisted men. The officer drawdowns of the Early Republic often reflected the differing political views of the nation’s leaders. The difficulties that Jason Warren identified in the early colonial period thus carried over to the years of the Early Republic. With an overweening faith in militias, regular officers came to be viewed as near-mercenaries. This perpetuated the liberty dilemma and gave it a facet that was to grow familiar: the reliance on reserve forces instead of active forces. The fears of an “officer class” and the potential for authoritarian rule on the part of the Jeffersonian republicans militated against Federalist notions of public service. In addition, most citizens (but especially republicans) rejected the idea of taxes to support a standing army—a notion that continues to resonate and affect military appropriations.

Watson argues, however, that closer inspection of officer commissions, reductions, and retentions shows that they were not always as politically motivated as they may seem to have been at first glance. Despite some partisan politics, however, Watson also sees the nascence of a merit-based officer evaluation and promotion system. Watson’s critical examination of the system exposes its flaws, but it also shows the Army’s careful, and sometimes blundering, steps toward professionalization. These evaluations became important during drawdowns, and in fact the U.S. Army keyed its officer reductions to that critical appraisal. The evaluations focused on the officer’s character, valor in combat, and, increasingly, education. The somewhat subjective criteria for character and valor were balanced by a growing objective evaluation of edu-
cation. Despite its critics, West Point grew to become the standard educational criterion for U.S. Army officers. Fiscal considerations are not new, and Watson identifies some of the same pitfalls in later years that Warren had seen during the colonial period. An unwieldy bureau system, lack of adequate controls over contracting, and the scattered nature of the U.S. Army during the period made logistics costly and inefficient during its early days. The constant clarion call to reduce the size of the U.S. Army, meaning in reality to reduce the number of trained and qualified officers, made the system difficult to sustain over time. During this period we see the first glimpses of the notion of the “cadre” units designed to form the backbone of an expandable army. This concept would be used to a greater extent during the twentieth century, but with results not nearly as good as anticipated.

The U.S. Army has always been long on short-sightedness, and John A. Bonin’s “Challenged Competency: U.S. Cavalry before, during, and after the U.S. Civil War” provides a case study. Army mythology allows us to believe that the cavalry gave up its horses unwillingly and against the wishes of the cavalry community, but Bonin reveals more of the story. Rather than being viewed as an arm of decision in the pre–Civil War days, the cavalry was an expensive organization and logistically difficult to maintain. Bonin argues that U.S. Army leaders believed the technological advancements of the mid-nineteenth century had supplanted the cavalry, and therefore the Army need not invest time, energy, and funds into fully developing it—this, despite the recommendations of the Delafield Commission, based on its observations during the Crimean War. The makeup of that commission perhaps indicates the Army’s attitude toward cavalry at the time. Headed by Major Richard Delafield, the commission included Major Alfred Mordecai and Captain George B. McClellan. Despite being an engineer and never having served in the cavalry, McClellan served as the commission’s cavalry expert. The Army also adopted the cavalry manual that McClellan wrote and the saddle he designed, both based on his observations with the commission.8

The Army’s use, or rather misuse, of the cavalry was cause for greater concern. Even after prewar belief in a “short war” proved unfounded, Army leaders chose not to invest in this greater capability. Commanders saw utility for cavalry units in the West, covering the vast territories and matching the speed of mounted Indian tribes. In fact, in the U.S. Army at the beginning of the Civil War, the cavalry was seen as being useful only in the West, with regular units in the eastern armies being relegated to picket duty. The militia cavalry was almost uniformly poorly equipped, undertrained, and provided with old, broken-down horses inappropriate for the cavalry. The regular units had better mounts but lacked adequate troop training in horsemanship, caus-
ing cavalry units to lose many of the horses they did have. Cavalry horses were considered specialized equipment and were less plentiful than horses for wagons or caissons.

Senior U.S. Army commanders tended to use the cavalry in ways that failed to develop or take full advantage of its potential capabilities. Despite McClellan's supposed prewar expertise, he proved to be deficient in his own use of cavalry in the Army of the Potomac. The Confederate Army, however, did take full advantage of the cavalry's potential, and therefore completely out-fought the federal cavalry for the first two years of the war. Bonin argues that the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia's early advantage in infantry as well stemmed from the better training of Virginia militia compared to dragoon duty on the western frontier or picket duty in the East. He concludes that U.S. Army short-sightedness prevented the cavalry from becoming the decisive arm it could be. The “liberty dilemma” had evolved somewhat from its seventeenth-century predecessor, and formed a pattern more familiar to the modern observer. In this case, the dilemma concerned whether or not to develop and maintain expensive technologies for use in what was sure to be only a brief encounter.

In “The Elusive Lesson: U.S. Army Unpreparedness from 1898 to 1938,” Edward A. Gutiérrez and Michael S. Neiberg explore the U.S. Army’s experiences beginning in the Spanish-American War, a watershed event in American diplomatic and military history. The United States entered the world stage for the first time as a major power, a position it has never relinquished. The conflict also serves as a model of military unpreparedness, a pattern that the Army has maintained throughout much of the twentieth century. The unpreparedness began with a lack of strategic direction from a government not ready to perform, and not fully cognizant of, the tasks on which it was about to embark. The U.S. Army, reduced to a constabulary force with garrisons scattered across the country, primarily in the West, was then suddenly required to become an expeditionary force. The Army as a whole was completely ill equipped and untrained for the tasks required. Despite the hard lessons learned in Cuba and the Philippines, and the burgeoning unconventional war against insurrectos in the Philippines, the U.S. Army remained small. Successive government administrations, Congress, and a majority of the American people failed to understand the growing American role in world affairs, and they failed to see and acknowledge the increasing international dangers. The best defense at the time seemed to be the two oceans, whose size and positions implied safety. Those oceans did provide a certain amount of security, but the development of the airplane, and further naval innovations such as the submarine, reduced the effectiveness of those barriers. Nevertheless,
the nation’s powerful isolationist lobby argued to keep the United States out of international involvement, citing Washington’s Farewell Address and the warning against “no entangling alliances.” The oceans also strengthened the U.S. Navy’s hand in budget negotiations, as the growing international threats required a naval component for deterrence.

The Army at this time, however, found what appeared to be a legitimate continental threat in Mexico. The Punitive Expedition, mounted in 1916 in response to a cross-border raid by Mexican insurrectionists, allayed the fears of many who were alarmed by just such a foreign invasion. While this relatively small mission proved the Army’s inadequate logistical capabilities for expeditionary operations, the crucible of the Great War showed the American Army just how ill prepared it was for twentieth-century warfare on the European scale. Despite the War Department’s small movements toward professionalization, with the creation of a General Staff and War College, the U.S. Army remained woefully undermanned, poorly resourced, and inefficiently organized.

World War I also proved to be an unfortunate precedent for Army preparedness. The nation raised and fielded the largest Army in its history in a very short time, then deployed it to fight overseas in a short and, relative to the other nations, bloodless campaign. Shifting to World War I, Gutiérrez and Neiberg outline the American Army’s attitude toward the enemy as “inept brutes who would be easy to defeat.” Most believed the mere “élan” of the American soldier would be enough to defeat this unworthy enemy. This élan would compensate for the fact that in some units soldiers did not even have weapons, or have the opportunity to fire them prior to deployment. For instance, terrible winter weather and multiple moves during mobilization prevented the 39th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division from doing any marksmanship training until they arrived in France. Four years of war had wearied the German enemy the Americans encountered, but it remained a formidable force. American casualties could not equal all the horrendous numbers of the other combatants’, but they were significant nonetheless.

Political leaders worked to limit American involvement in the postwar occupation, and the U.S. Army came home and quickly demobilized. This pattern of activities set unrealistic expectations for future military operations, apparently confirming the utility of small permanent forces. Large forces could be quickly formed around a small nucleus and be just as quickly trained, equipped, and deployed into battle, where the soldiers’ élan would guarantee a rapid and decisive victory. Americans had no interest in, nor stomach for, long postwar involvement, so the force could then be demobilized with alacrity. Such assumptions not only bred lack of preparedness for the immediate
future but also generated other systematic decision-making processes that relied upon a short-sighted approach.

Gutiérrez and Neiberg point to the nation’s desire for a postwar “Return to Normalcy” as the culprit for such myopia. Taken from President Warren G. Harding’s successful slogan in the 1920 election, the phrase lent comfort to a people suddenly terrified by war beyond the scope of their imaginations, only a generation or so removed from the Civil War. Return to normalcy meant *status quo ante bellum*: peace, isolation, and a small military. Gutiérrez and Neiberg argue that the return to normalcy has been a constant postwar refrain, with the populace never accepting the idea of *status quo post bellum*. This focus on a prewar environment fails to acknowledge the realities engendered by the conflict itself and the terms of the peace or war termination, and therefore fuels a drive to reduce forces quickly, regardless of the damage this causes. Gutiérrez and Neiberg cite the World War I example and the national desire to return to 1914 rather than acknowledge the changes in the world of 1919. Ironically, the return to antebellum normalcy prevented the military from becoming involved in any large way in any more overseas adventures. This allowed the opportunity for thought and intellectual development.

The lack of overseas engagement and reduced U.S. Army missions launched the first internecine squabble between the Army and the Navy with respect to funding. The U.S. Navy successfully argued for large recapitalization budgets to support its strategic mission, contending specifically that the Army was not a “strategic” force. This competition for funds, and associated roles and missions, has continued to the present. The liberty dilemma thus became a battle for relevancy, as political leaders saw less value in a large land force that required huge resources to muster, train, deploy, and sustain, and that seemed only useful in wartime. The Navy seemed to be a better value, as a relatively self-sustaining, self-mobile instrument of both diplomacy and war.

The bright spot in the post–World War I lean years is the Army’s internal focus on preserving intellectual capital and development of officers. Michael Matheny argues in “When the Smoke Clears: The Interwar Years as an Unlikely Success Story” that the focus on scholarly investment saved the Army. The years between World War I and World War II were some of the leanest in the Army’s history. The post–World War I drawdown, followed by the deepest and largest financial depression in the nation’s history, reduced the Army’s fighting strength to almost nothing. Those who remained in the Army endured years of reduced budgets, pay reductions, and almost comical unit manning.

In a military emasculated by financial misfortune, the saving grace of the U.S. Army’s future was the development and maintenance of the intellectual
environment of the 1920s and 1930s. With any real, meaningful training rendered impossible by budget cuts, the Army chose to address preparedness problems with education. General John J. Pershing had identified the glaring need for properly trained staff officers during World War I, going so far as to create a school in France to mirror Fort Leavenworth to fill that need. After the war, reestablishing the Command and General Staff School and the Army War College became top priority. These schools filled the requirements for education but also created the intellectual milieu that allowed specialized discourse to flower through professional journals.¹⁰

This effort was not happenstance but rather a deliberate attempt to identify and discuss the lessons learned from the Great War, and inculcate those lessons in training and doctrine for the future. The professional journals of the period were replete with articles on new technology, tactics, planning, and other insights from the war. Notably, Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, future Army chief of staff, published “Profiting by War Experience,” which examined how to learn the lessons of the Great War.¹¹ Many of the future senior officers of World War II also penned articles, including such luminaries as George S. Patton.¹² The topics ranged from tactics to technology, with special attention on the newest weapons. For instance, the machine gun had proven to be a devastating weapon during the war, and the Infantry Journal featured articles on the weapon nearly every other month beginning in 1920, with at least a couple published annually after that.¹³

The Army War College had originally been created as a think tank for the War Department General Staff, and this became especially true during the years between the World Wars. Students from the mid-1930s on worked on projects under the direction of the War Department General Staff or one of the senior branch chiefs, such as the chief of infantry. The studies examined issues of critical interest to an Army that foresaw requirements to expand to create a much larger expeditionary force.¹⁴ This professional discourse was only part of the story, however. The U.S. Army accepted its role as an expeditionary force and began planning in its service schools, especially the Army War College, for numerous possible contingencies. The War Department developed a series of war plans addressing potential conflicts with a variety of countries and coalitions. Planners assigned each of the plans a color and worked closely with War College students to develop and refine them. These planning efforts gave the Army’s future senior leaders valuable experience in planning, and the planners themselves identified challenges the Army would face in the next war.¹⁵

The U.S. Army officer corps’ small size at the time worked to the Army’s advantage in one important way. This small community facilitated the sharing
of ideas and knowledge, ensuring that “lessons learned” and new tactics, techniques, and procedures were disseminated across the force, allowing some degree of uniformity.\textsuperscript{16} This reduced size, however, did not allow enough opportunities for command, even for the critically small officer corps of the time. Most officers waited for years to command, and some never got this critical professional experience.\textsuperscript{17} The sole advantage, however, was the additional time available for schooling. Virtually all officers attended one or more professional schools, and many remained as instructors. This experience benefited both the officers and the Army, as the instructors remained on the cutting edge of combat developments. These schools also served as incubators for growing future senior leaders. Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, assistant commandant of the Infantry School from 1927 to 1932, identified many officers, such as Omar N. Bradley, Matthew B. Ridgway, Maxwell Taylor, Mark Clark, Lucian Truscott, Jonathan M. Wainwright, and Edward M. Almond, who later became senior commanders in World War II.\textsuperscript{18}

As Sam Watson had discovered about a previous era, Matheny determines that focusing on training, educating, and molding the officer corps enabled the Army to posture itself for the next war. He concedes that the years between World War I and World War II were financially lean but intellectually robust, and the Army used the time and circumstances to great advantage. The lean budgets forced leaders to think institutionally and strategically, rather than tactically. That environment fostered innovative thinking and detailed planning. The pressure of war would demonstrate the value of the work during these prewar years.

When war began in Europe in the fall of 1939, most Americans were eager to avoid involvement. The need to prepare for a potential war already engulfing Europe, in the face of strong isolationist public sentiment, typified the liberty dilemma for War Department officials. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall anticipated possible future requirements, however, and recommended increases for both the Regular Army and the National Guard. The advantages of the prewar intellectual milieu aside, the Army remained frightfully small. Forces in being on June 30, 1939, included nine understrength active divisions, totaling fewer than 50,000 soldiers. These divisions would require another 180,000 soldiers to bring them to wartime strength. The eighteen existing National Guard divisions, not yet mobilized, would require another 360,000 soldiers to bring them to full strength. As daunting as these numbers were, Marshall and other Army planners knew from Great War experience that war on a European scale would require much more.\textsuperscript{19}

The prewar planning period had also fostered the creation of detailed mobilization plans, both military and industrial, building on the lessons of 1917.
When the fall of France in 1940 made Americans feel more vulnerable, FDR began federalizing National Guard units and Congress authorized the nation’s first peacetime draft. The liberty dilemma resurfaced as the war in Europe seemed to slow in the winter of 1940–1941. FDR won an unprecedented third term in office against significant isolationist opposition, largely on the basis of his vow to keep the United States out of the European war. By the fall of 1941, Roosevelt had ordered Marshall to begin again drawing down the Army; only Pearl Harbor prevented that planned reduction.

The War Department’s “Victory Plan,” developed prewar to meet potential global war requirements, called for 213 divisions. As the mobilization progressed, however, this became unworkable. The military competed with civilian industry for manpower. Roosevelt had ordered that men involved in critical war production for Lend Lease should not be drafted, so the pool of available draft-age men dropped from twenty-five million to fifteen million. The semi-autonomous Army Air Corps also pulled away potential draftees from the ground Army. Moreover, this highly technical service, and the growing need for officers, reduced the pool of educated soldiers for the ranks. With these challenges, Marshall decided to limit the mobilization to ninety divisions, to be activated over a three-year period.

In the midst of mobilization, another liberty dilemma presented itself. The growing African American population needed to be included in the calculus for draft-eligible males, but white Army leadership, and a largely white society, were uncomfortable with arming large numbers of black men. This concept harkened back to the Army’s experience in the last years of the Civil War. Segregated American society demanded a segregated Army. The War Department had raised two black divisions during World War I, but afterward reduced them to only four permanent regiments: two infantry, and two cavalry. Many African Americans believed that the black soldiers’ service in World War I conveyed full citizenship; their liberty dilemma existed in the failure of white society to grant that status. As another war drew closer, many African Americans became wary. Their fathers’ service and sacrifice had not been rewarded—black veterans did not enjoy the same respect and dignity as did white veterans. Historian Chad L. Williams studied the plight of these veterans and concluded that they “transferred their war and post war experiences into sustained commitments to fighting for freedom, civil rights, and the broader historical dignity” of African American people. Black soldiers vowed that they would battle to end this liberty dilemma—they would force the nation for which they fought to treat them as equals.

As the mobilization continued, the disadvantages of the small prewar Army became apparent. The very small core of trained, educated officers
quickly dissipated to fill out the cadre of mobilizing divisions. The division activation plan called for one year of training, but training failures, equipment shortages, personnel levies for the Army Air Corps, and loss of soldiers to OCS interrupted preparation. Moreover, each of the divisions activated in 1941 and 1942 provided officers and NCO cadre for a division activating the following year. All of these distractions made the mobilization much more difficult and delayed almost all units. The 89th Infantry Division provides an extreme example: despite activating in July 1942, the division did not deploy overseas until January 1945.26

The Army had used its time and limited resources after World War I to best advantage, creating an intellectual environment that allowed ideas and innovations to flourish. The strategic plans for military and industrial mobilization proved to be invaluable when war did come, and the operational plans for war on multiple continents also became useful. While these plans helped produce order from chaos, they could not overcome the significant personnel and equipment shortages the Army experienced, nor could they reduce the time required for, and the difficulties in, training.

The quotation from General George C. Marshall that opened this essay gives some indication of the challenges the U.S. Army faced at the end of World War II. Scott Bertinetti and John Bonin explore the Army’s mass demobilization after that war in “Searching for the Greatest Generation’s Army in 1950.” The end of the largest war in the nation’s history reintroduced the age-old liberty dilemma: the loss of the existential threat seemed to remove the need for a large military. Bertinetti and Bonin’s essay reveals an added economic component to the dilemma, as the large wartime Army had required tremendous resources. Moreover, the burgeoning postwar economy needed the manpower of returning GIs to help convert war industries back to civilian uses. The occupations of Germany and Japan required many more troops than had the post–World War I occupations, but the Army reduced by over 77 percent in the first year after the war. Bertinetti and Bonin contend that the U.S. monopoly on the atomic bomb seemed to obviate the need for a large standing military. President Harry S. Truman favored Universal Military Training (UMT) to mitigate the problems incurred in mass mobilization, but Congress disagreed.

Bertinetti and Bonin trace the evolution of the liberty dilemma from the end of World War II through the beginning of the Cold War. The United States seemed, yet again, unready for the world leadership role thrust upon it, but the growing menace from its erstwhile Soviet ally forced it to accept that role. The overseas occupation forces, especially those in Germany, became bulwarks against the spread of communism.
President Harry S. Truman extended the liberty dilemma in a speech announcing military support of Greece and Turkey in 1947. In a strategy to be termed the “Truman Doctrine,” Truman averred that it “must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempts at subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. . . . We must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.” This committed the United States to a pattern of international engagement that extends to the present.

Bertinetti and Bonin determine that this engagement became all the more important after the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb. The State Department’s National Security Council Memorandum–68 identified the failure of the U.S. atomic bomb to deter Soviet expansionism. Despite this, the Army suffered in comparison to the other services. The Army appeared less technologically advanced than the Navy and the new Air Force in a world that seemed to require such attributes. Moreover, the Army had lost both end strength and infrastructure to the Air Force under the National Security Act of 1947, which created the Department of Defense and the Air Force. Bertinetti identifies Korea as a flashpoint in the Cold War to contain worldwide communism. The events there in June 1950 demonstrated just how damaging the post–World War II drawdown and concomitant development of the nuclear deterrent had been. The U.S. Army had withdrawn from Korea in 1949, so when the North Korean Army attacked South Korea, only a small group of 485 advisors remained. The Army’s end strength stood at 593,000, some 37,000 short of its authorization. Most of the 87,000 soldiers in Japan belonged to badly understrength divisions, but they were scattered throughout the country on occupation duty.

Moreover, the Far East did not enjoy priority for good soldiers. Far East Command reported to the Pentagon in 1949 that 43 percent of the enlisted men in the command had tested in the two lowest categories on the Army General Classification Test (AGCT), and all had received incomplete training. The U.S. Army began a training plan in 1949 to get the few troops available trained in combat tasks, but the Korean War began before the plan was able to show any progress.

Bertinetti and Bonin conclude that the Korean attack exposed the main flaw in Truman’s nuclear strategy: The supposed deterrent failed to prevent the attack, as it also failed to deter the widening of the war with China. Bertinetti and Bonin note that technology is better suited to capability enhancement than it is to doctrine dictation, yet national strategy moved even more toward nuclear containment.

Ray Millen’s “Post–Korean War Drawdown under the Eisenhower Administration” examines an Army drawdown in the context of a change in national
strategy, and finds it less painful than it first appears. President Dwight D. Eisenhower took quite a different approach from that of General Eisenhower, who had commanded the largest U.S. Army formation ever assembled. In a newly nuclear world, Eisenhower saw nuclear weapons as the ultimate deterrent from nuclear war, and believed the nation’s enemies would see such a conflict as unthinkable. That said, he left a nuclear option clearly on the table.

Eisenhower’s “New Look” strategy envisioned the deterrent effects of massive retaliatory strikes, eliminating the need for large numbers of ground troops to prosecute a long general war. Eisenhower needed to balance a Congress and a populace frightened by an implacable and seemingly invincible Soviet foe with his pledge to balance the budget, which was also a popular notion with the public. The most cost-effective method of deterring the threat while reducing expenditures seemed to be investment in high-tech weapons rather than a large standing army. The focus on nuclear deterrent assumed away the need for ground troops, and Eisenhower avoided committing ground troops to the extent possible. As a military man, he suspected that senior military leaders would look at all problems as requiring military solutions if they had a large force with which to work. He would have understood the modern-day tongue-in-cheek military maxim, “If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

The drawdown of forces, however rationalized at the strategic level, had ill effects at the tactical level. The age-old tension between regular and reserve components surfaced again, as strong Army Reserve and National Guard political lobbies defeated Army leadership attempts to cut reserve component forces. The political arguments related to the reserve constituencies rather than Army readiness. With the Soviet Union now clearly an existential threat with nuclear weapons, the liberty dilemma returned. Large ground forces appeared not only unsuitable but unsurvivable. The key seemed to be building a nuclear capability so large that war was mutually deterred. The active Army also reorganized to meet the presumed threat, and attempted to adapt to a nuclear battlefield, including a mission for tactical nuclear weapons. The new structure, the Pentomic division, ultimately proved unwieldy and was abandoned after a few years. Despite the problems, Millen argues that the drawdown of the Eisenhower era did not degrade the effectiveness of the U.S. Army over the long term, nor did it contribute to the policy failures and organizational malaise of the Vietnam era.

Martin Clemis picks up Millen’s argument and further explores the buildup of the Kennedy-Johnson years, which saw a complete repudiation of New Look, as well as the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. “Once Again with the High and Mighty: ‘New Look’ Austerity, ‘Flexible Response’ Buildup, and the U.S.
Army in Vietnam, 1954–1970” reminds us that several scholars have pointed out that the U.S. Army that went to Vietnam was the best trained, equipped, and led army the United States had ever fielded up to that time. Reflecting on the nation’s history of unpreparedness, this statement says less about the Vietnam-era U.S. Army than it does about those that preceded it, but it is nonetheless true, especially for the first years of the war. The Army declined steeply in quality and leadership as the U.S. involvement in the war grew, and the Army of 1973 was a mere shadow of the force that began taking the field in 1965. The problems the Army experienced were not linked to either budgets or end strength, most of which grew over the period.

Conrad Crane’s examination in “Post-Vietnam Drawdown: The Myth of the Abrams Doctrine” debunks one of the Army’s great legends, but more importantly provides a cautionary tale for military planners charged with executing the drawdowns. Budgets and end strengths may be externally imposed by congressional mandate, but the mission of deciding what stays, what goes, and why falls to Army leaders. Crane’s essay describes General Creighton W. Abrams’s creative attempts to address the Army’s future combat requirements and projected modernization needs, given the limitations imposed by Congress and the mandate to end the draft. Crane argues that, while these efforts largely succeeded for the combat divisions in the active component, the results were far-reaching and not always positive.

The nature of the small-scale contingencies that have provided most of the Army’s deployment experiences in the last forty years has required large numbers of these combat-support and combat-service-support units. Repetitive deployment of these units, especially, has strained relations between the active and reserve components. They also strain relations between the reserve soldiers themselves and their employers. Despite the patriotic fervor in the nation since 9/11, civilian employers have difficulty supporting continual deployments. As the Army now looks to ensure that critical capabilities are maintained either in the active or in the reserve components, the reserve component units normally take the brunt of such redesignation.

Headquarters were always seemingly an easy target. Frank J. Siltman, in a study at the U.S. Army War College, determined that the Army habitually cuts headquarters elements to gain efficiency but does not staff or equip them appropriately. Siltman agrees with Martin Van Creveld that the complexity of modern war requires large staffs to be effective. Cutting these quickly merely passes the requirement to subordinate units, which are then levied to fill the staff requirements.

As the Army worked to remake itself after the Vietnam War, it also looked to other armies and other conflicts to learn lessons. Antulio Echevarria points
out in “The ‘Good’ Drawdown: The Post-Vietnam Alignment of Resources” that this external focus influenced the development of the deterrence doctrine. Echevarria argues that the long period spent in Europe during the Cold War generated an ongoing professional debate over “maneuverist” versus “attritionist” schools.

The drawdown after Vietnam and subsequent “rebalancing” back to Europe strengthened the deterrent force there, but the United States still executed the containment strategy with much smaller forces than its Soviet adversaries had. In order to “Fight Outnumbered and Win,” the military adage of the day, the Army again turned to improved training for soldiers and more technologically advanced weapons systems to improve its chances. The idea of “doing more with less” has long been a military aphorism, and the Army of the 1980s realigned doctrines to take advantage of technological advances in order to do just that.

The end of the draft in 1973 and the creation of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) was a watershed event for the Army. For the first time, the Army intended to create a professional, highly trained, and well-educated fighting force to execute all of its requirements. As it had after World War II, the Army used the post-Vietnam years for theoretical development, and the changes in the world drove a refocusing of Army efforts.

The U.S. Army did receive some significant help in the post-Vietnam era. President Ronald Reagan ushered in the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history in 1980, and the increased budgets allowed the full fielding of the “Big 5” weapons systems that had been under development since the 1970s. This period of the 1980s was a counterweight to previous drawdowns, but the success of this buildup lay not just in the additional dollars but in the solid theoretical framework the Army had laid in the leaner years. The many previous drawdowns had shown the Army the need for maintaining its intellectual capital. Part of the change to the fully professional AVF involved the development of new doctrine, and included the inculcation of the lessons-learned process. One of the major benefits of the buildup was the development of the combat training centers (CTC), an idea still rooted in the lean years. The CTCs provided a training opportunity for units to get near-combat experience before deployment. Echevarria argues that the buildup of these conventional forces had a negative effect, however. The exclusive focus on the deterrent provided by large, heavy formations, and a firm commitment to armored warfare on the north German plain, reduced the Army’s overall flexibility. The very real deterrent that these forces provided did prevent the large war, but not the many small conflicts in Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans in which the Army found itself in the 1980s.
and 1990s. In most cases, the Army found itself wholly unprepared to deal
with such contingencies, and needed to retrain and reorient itself. The small
number of “light” forces available proved adequate for extended missions, and
required support beyond their capabilities.

Three centuries after the colonial forts provided a deterrent to Indian raid-
ers, the U.S. military’s forward-deployed forces provided “forts” that repre-
sented U.S. power and served as the basis for reinforcement by larger forces.
This, too, led to another liberty dilemma in an increasingly complex world,
one its seventeenth-century ancestors would recognize. The bases in Europe
designed to support the potential large conventional war did nothing to sup-
port the small-scale contingencies elsewhere, and the lack of those bases re-
moved any possible deterrent effect.

Richard Lacquement reminds us that the military must be prepared for
success in “Preaching after the Devil’s Death: U.S. Post–Cold War Draw-
down.” The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 has become an enduring
symbol of the end of the Cold War, and the United States and its allies rightly
claimed victory. But the fruits of that military victory carried with them the
seeds of discord, as the formerly bipolar world took on a much more anarchic
environment as nonstate actors replaced monolithic enemies. That victory
resulted from the deterrent effect of America’s long-held policy of contain-
ment of communism, and the large standing military forces that provided
the bulwarks of that policy. Lacquement’s title suggests the liberty dilemma
for military leaders: U.S. policy changed significantly for the first time since
the end of World War II, and large military forces appeared not to be needed.
Indeed, planning for force reduction began even before the Berlin Wall fell,
as improving relations with the Soviet Union indicated that the Cold War was
nearing its end. The difficulty the military faced was convincing its political
leadership that the end of the Cold War did not end the need for a strong
military.

The sheer length of the Cold War presented difficulties for postwar plan-
ning. None of the military or civilian leadership at the time had ever known
anything but the Cold War. To some, the end of the Cold War may have re-
called V-E Day and V-J Day at the end of World War II—a final victory after
a long struggle—and the images of ecstatic joy at the Berlin Wall underscored
that notion. Just as the end of that war had brought the clarion call to “bring
the boys home,” so too did the end of the Cold War. Lacquement argues that
General Colin Powell as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, built on the notion
of the “peace dividend” by proposing a 25 percent reduction, but preserved
strength by tying that cut to a “base force” considered necessary to execute
the new national military strategy of responding to two major regional con-
tingencies. The administration of President George H. W. Bush was able to use the base force concept to forestall other larger and more damaging cuts. Even as the United States began to respond to its first post–Cold War major regional contingencies (MRCs), Operation Desert Shield and Storm, plans were in motion to begin force reductions. At the end of that short conflict, the reductions accelerated as units began deactivating upon redeployment.

As the military reduced its forces, and concurrently began closing bases in the United States and abroad in pursuit of the so-called peace dividend, the “New World Order” envisioned by President George H. W. Bush never materialized, and the world became increasingly disordered. The military that had worked its way to seeming obsolescence at the end of the Cold War became busier than ever, responding to numerous crises that eventually required more time and resources than ever imagined. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 presented the United States with a paradox: a poorly defined enemy, terrorism, that took many different forms and involved both state and nonstate actors.

Lacquement’s essay leads to the conclusion that the real peace dividend is not a more peaceful world requiring less military but a more dangerous and fragmented one. That dangerous environment demands even more resources to keep and maintain the peace, and those resources are generally military.

Conclusion

This collection of essays provides a clear-eyed view of previous drawdowns, set in the context of their eras, but with the perspective of time that allows more complete evaluation. The drawdown experience of the past three centuries shows that the U.S. Army has been here before, in some form. In each case, the Army has proven to be resilient and resourceful, and emerged from the drawdown prepared to rebuild itself to meet the next challenge. The service successfully negotiated drawdowns by focusing time, energy, and resources into the critical areas of education, doctrine development, and technological advancement.

There is an optimistic tone to these essays, as the authors describe the ways in which the Army has sought to mitigate the damage drawdown causes. Education, training, doctrine development, and technological advancement have saved the Army’s readiness many times when drawdown forces threatened to destroy it. Yet even that optimism cannot hide the irony inherent in the Army’s development. The Army has worked to continually reduce forces and restructure remaining units to meet a continued need; developed or leveraged new technology; and enhanced doctrinal development and training opportunities, all in the name of doing more with less. These successful de-
Developments have enabled the Army to “do more with less,” but they have also made the soldier seem less relevant. The military’s successful use of “smart weapons” over the past several years has caused some leaders to question the necessity of a large standing army. The multiple successful deployments of reserve component units has stimulated discussion about why a large active component is necessary, with a capable reserve component available.

These views ignore some important truths, however. First, while technological advances have enabled the Army to do more with less, the scale and complexity of warfare has also changed. The base force that General Colin Powell envisioned to be able to fight two MRCs must now be reviewed as the Army conducts combat, peacekeeping, humanitarian, and engagement missions around the world. Second, any drawdown calculus that includes rapid mobilization and deployment of reserve components is flawed from the outset. This volume also serves as a warning, however, for policymakers who see military drawdowns solely in terms of potential budget savings. The nature of war in the twenty-first century and evolving national military strategy and foreign policy drive requirements for troops up, rather than down. Political leaders must also consider the force’s human capabilities. The U.S. Army that deployed in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was the most technologically advanced one the United States has ever fielded. Training those soldiers to that standard takes time, however, and that training cannot be done quickly.

Finally, the U.S. Army has encountered numerous “liberty dilemmas” throughout its history, and those problems have shaped both the nation’s response to crises and the Army’s role in them. They have taken many forms, as each era, circumstance, and population reveals a different dilemma. The American Way of Postwar describes how the nation and its Army faces those continually evolving dilemmas.

Notes
