



by Michael Herb

The basic function of an army is to fight and win a nation's wars; thus, war is the endeavor of a nation. Winning in large-scale combat operations matters and has returned as the priority for the United States military with leaders across the United States Army continuously reinforcing the shift away from substantially sized limited contingency operations in the Middle East.

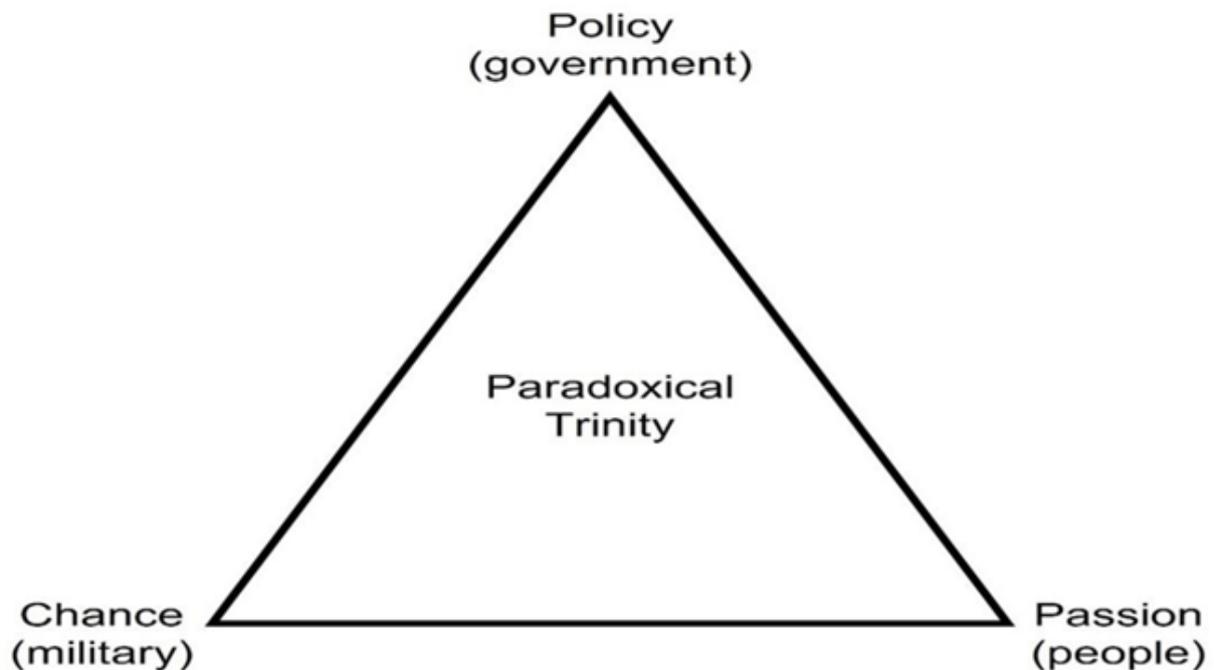
Army leaders understand how to operationalize large-scale ground combat operations warfare, but will that be enough to win in large-scale ground combat operations? What is the Army's role in preparing the nation for war in a large-scale ground combat operation environment?

This article will examine the need to prepare not only the military but the nation for large-scale ground combat operations (LSCO). If the nation does not understand employing the military in a war containing large-scale ground combat operations, an army's preparations would be irrelevant. Preparing the Army for large-scale ground combat operations is a serious responsibility; however, the Army must also ask a difficult question—is the nation ready to send a trained Army into a large-scale ground combat operations war? This article will examine theories by Clausewitz and Huntington to see the Army's role in this question.

An Army and a Nation

According to [Carl von Clausewitz](#), war is a contest of wills between nations; therefore, the Army conducts warfare at the will of the American people, through elected representatives. The Army is preparing for warfare in a large-scale ground combat operations war, but society is part of the process to wage war.

Understanding the environment and realities of large-scale ground combat operations should not be a shock to society. Clausewitz discusses this as a balance of three factors in war; [Passion \(the People\)](#), [Chance \(the Military\)](#), and [Policy \(the Government\)](#). Western militaries have discussed the Paradoxical Trinity for almost two centuries. Maintaining an acceptable balance within this trinity is considered important in war and applicable to large-scale ground combat operations. The Army owns part of the chance element but is connected to the other two elements; however, there is no independent element of the trinity. This requires a relationship across the Paradoxical Trinity.



Increasingly, the military has less representation across the population. As a nation, America has been very fortunate. With passive interest, yet gratitude for those serving, the public observed the Global War on Terror for two decades. Less than [8 percent](#) of our population is currently or has previously served in the military. The limited influence the military has on most Americans' lives is both a blessing of the prosperity America enjoys and

a detriment to civil-military relations. This creates a gap in the relationship between the military and society. This disconnection has been written about in great volume by military professionals and academics for decades now; yet, little effort to address the issue by the military is evident.

There are several theories about civil-military relations and the functions within each aspect of the relationship. Samuel Huntington's [*The Soldier and the State*](#) is a widely known and circulated book on civil-military relations. Huntington argues that military institutions must balance social and functional imperatives in the construct of the American governmental system. Civil-military relations has been a principal in America since its founding.

[Huntington](#) discusses the military professional ethics in regards to "(1) basic values and perspectives, (2) national military policy, (3) the relation of the military to the state." The third point is just as critical as the other two, yet often neglected. The Army needs to recognize the balance between being reduced to a tool of politicians and a warrior culture far removed from politics and society. The ability to offer military advice to politicians does not prevent maintaining a relationship with the population that elects the politician nor eliminate the requirement.

A balance is twofold, and the military cannot ignore the civilian population, especially composing only a fraction of the population. The Army must provide the civilian population with more engagements than recruiting events, retiree speeches on organizational development, or press conferences to maintain a balanced relationship. Initiating large-scale ground combat operations without providing the population with the opportunity to understand what the military is preparing to undertake may cause an imbalance in the Paradoxical Trinity.

Maintaining a balance in civil-military relations is not solely a civil or political leadership responsibility. As a profession, the military should maintain a balance in civil-military relations. The Army must be present in society and not just in a recruiting role, or retirees giving speeches about organizational change. The Army must be engaged with the public while providing the political bodies with the best military advice. This is not a partisan issue; it is a civil-military issue.

[Huntington](#) underscores the severity of an imbalance—"the disruption of the civil-military balance reflected more basic constitutional disorders...undermine the nation's security: distorting the perspective and judgment of soldiers and statesmen." The growing lack of interaction and context of cultures between the civilian population and the military is not likely to reverse. Therefore, the Army has a duty to the nation to help bridge that divide.

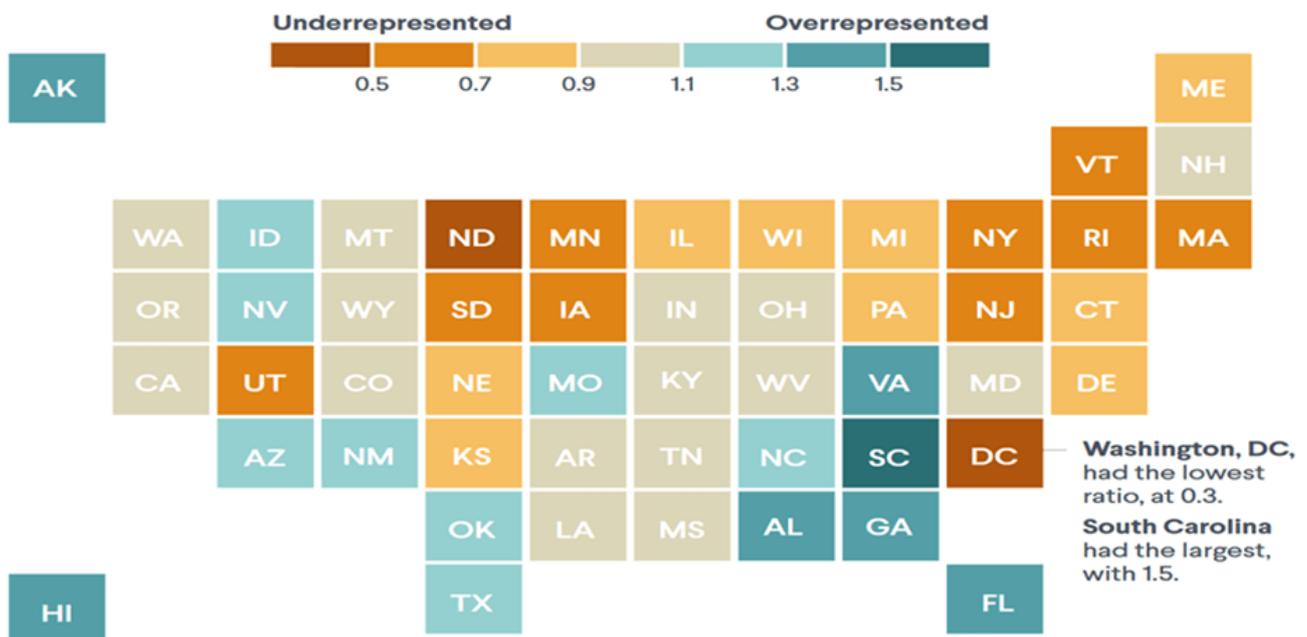
Military Outreach

[Clausewitz](#) said, “No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.” The Army knows how to conduct warfare, but if the Paradoxical Trinity is correct, that is only part of the equation Clausewitz describes. This leads to a question—how should the Army approach this discussion?

Most Army outreach programs are through Recruiting Command or the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs. While recruiting is a vital outreach, the Army should not limit outreach to recruiting. The Army knows the regions of the country with stronger ties to the military. This chart displays the representation for all services based on the population within the state of 18- to 24-year-olds.

Representation of States Among Enlisted Recruits, 2018

Ratio of enlisted recruits to civilian 18–24 year olds



There are clear portions of the United States with more community links to the military, yet the uneven distribution of military representation suggests a greater disparity in interactions and understanding of the military among other parts of the population. No one in Recruiting Command would be surprised by this chart; however, the Army should be concerned about what this chart means, not for recruiting, but for how the public is connected to the military.

Providing the opportunity for the public to be informed about the military and the realities of military operations has been done in the past but currently has room for improvement. From [2011 to 2014](#), “the biggest sports leagues in the United States have received more than \$10 million from the Department of Defense for patriotic displays.” While this money was spent with a recruiting focus, paying sports franchises to have military personnel at a game provides little insight into the military. Recruiting at events can provide an opportunity to connect with interested individuals; however, a recruiting agenda may also prevent connection with individuals not interested in uniformed service. Those not eligible or interested in military service are still important to the military, especially in the context of large-scale ground combat operations.

The Los Angeles Office of the Chief of Public Affairs oversees the [Department of Defense’s relationship with Hollywood](#) for the purpose “to accurately depict military stories and make sure sensitive information isn’t disclosed.” This is important work and allows the military to work with movie producers to build public relations. Movies are also great for recruiting; the [United States Navy](#) “stated that after the release of Top Gun, the number of young men enlisting with a desire to be Naval aviators went up by 500 percent.” Again, a recruiting focus. Hollywood and major league sporting events may help to recruit, but provide limited interaction with the civilian culture and do not provide much understanding between the civilian and military cultures.

There are great examples of outreaches to gain a mutual understanding of civilian and military cultures. The United States Army War College’s [Eisenhower Series](#) is an example of a small-scale effort to have discourse with society. Another example is General Petrus J.M. “Peter” van Uhm, retired four-star general and Chief of the Netherlands Defense Staff in the Royal Netherlands Army. He gave a TED Talk (Technology, Entertainment, Design) that sought to bring some understanding and connection between the civil-military population. [General Uhm](#) discussed a need for the military in the Netherlands and why he “chose the gun to create a better world.” General Uhm’s presentation is an example of outreach to explain an instrument of national power in terms of utility, necessity, and perspective of the world. A final example is the efforts with [Hollywood during World War II](#) that kept the civilian population informed and engaged—despite a time when most Americans knew someone in the military. These three examples demonstrate that the military can work on the civil-military relationship and interact with the civilian population.

Conversations about large-scale ground combat operations should not be doomsday scenarios or paint any country as the evil enemy. Honest conversations about what the military does and the specific predicted operating environment can be accomplished through speeches and presentations, town hall style forms, or other discussions. The goal

should be to explain the capabilities and employment of the military, not a story of terror or what the military wants in capabilities. Promoting films or a visible presence at sporting events is the easy, but insufficient answer. The goal should be a mutual understanding between the military and the civilian population, not just the military-industrial complex.

Conclusion

Ground warfare is the Army's business. Large-scale ground combat operations warfare has always been brutal throughout history and will continue to be brutal. The Army has doctrine, training, and knowledge on the conduct of large-scale ground combat operations. Equally, it has set the conditions to be trained and ready to dominate the conduct of such operations. However, even if the Army is prepared for the violent reality of large-scale ground combat operations but the nation is not, then the Army's readiness may be irrelevant.

Civil-military relations are vital in war and peace. While national preparations for war is not solely an Army responsibility, the Army cannot ignore the realities of large-scale ground combat operations in regards to the population. If the Army allows the realities of large-scale ground combat operations to surprise the American people, it will ultimately lose their support. The civil-military relationship within America is shrinking as exposure to daily life continues to dwindle. Preparing for large-scale ground combat operations warfare is incomplete if the nation is not ready for a large-scale ground combat operations war.

The population of the nation is an important part of employing the military instrument of national power. Ensuring a civil-military relationship of understanding across cultures and the cost and responsibility of employing the military is an important balance in this relationship. The Army must reach out and explain the role of military power and understand the current civilian perspective. Flawless ideals will continue to meet human failures and create the need for military action, but that action is based on the will of the American people. The balance of the Paradoxical Trinity requires all elements to be involved in the conduct of war. As Clausewitz said, "war is never an isolated act."

Major Michael Herb, U.S. Army, is an Infantry Officer currently transitioning to be the Operations Officer for 1-509th Infantry (Airborne) Regiment. He is a graduate of The Citadel and holds two Masters degrees. MAJ Herb has served operationally in the 1st Armored Division, 10th Mountain Division, and 2nd Security Forces Assistance Brigade with three combat deployments.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)