

SWORDS, PLOUGHSHARES AND PR



Can the military help resolve our domestic problems?

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On Sept. 26, 1968—the date is important—Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford declared that he was mobilizing the resources of the defense establishment in a determined attack on some of the nation's basic domestic problems. "The national security," he explained, "depends not only on the quality of weapons and soldiers but also on the strength and unity of the American people." Nor did he stop there. The Defense Department, the Secretary stated, "has a deep obligation to contribute far more than it has ever contributed before to the social needs of our country." He directed the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force to produce specific proposals by Nov. 30, 1968.

Actually, it is quite evident that the DOD has no intention and, as we shall see, has a trained incapacity to deal with U.S. domestic problems. Anybody genuinely interested in initiating new major programs, especially a serious domestic commitment of the Defense Department, could not but await the view of the new President on the matter—and the Secretary of Defense he will appoint. Moreover on several recent occasions the DOD has indicated that after the war in Vietnam is over it would object to releasing the billions saved (the costs of the war are estimated between 24.5 to 32 billion a year) to domestic programs. First, military stocks which have been depleted during the war will have to be replenished, and next, deferred military needs will have to be attended to. Richard Nixon's staff indicated that he expects defense spending over the next four years to be \$72 to \$77 billion a year. The present defense budget is almost \$77 billion.

A good measure of the seriousness of a commitment to a specific program is the percentage of resources—money and manpower—an agency apportions to it.

The DOD, it turns out, intends to spend a smaller fraction of its budget on domestic efforts than most corporations spend on institutional advertising. For instance, one of the three major areas to be tackled, according to the Secretary, is housing—to the tune of \$6 million dollars (not per year, but once).

One may defend this "public relations" format on the grounds that such a super-duper over-sell accompanies most of our efforts. Instead of saying we shall try to help

the poor to help themselves we declare "a total war for the unconditional eradication of poverty." We do not simply try to narrow the gap between the races but promise "Freedom Now." But, as I see it, this is part of our deeper problem. In the short-run the public-relations over-sell may help to get across a bill or even a candidate, but in the longer run, it backfires against programs which cannot possibly deliver The Promised Land, and against the politics of public relations.

When the necessary means to carry out a program are not available, many agencies like to think that they will initiate the desired reform by providing the "seed" money or a "demonstration" project which will somehow lead others to follow in their wake. In the case at hand, "prototype" is the key word. The Air Force plans to build, at its base in Victorville, California, a "prototype low-cost" housing project, at a cost of \$6 million, as DOD's contribution to domestic housing. The implication is that builders from all over will flock to copy this inexpensive model.

I'll eat my typewriter if this happens. Could one provide a viable prototype for \$6 million, the officials of HUD and every federal and city housing project launched over the last 30 years should be in court—for criminal negligence. Why did they not spend \$6 million so productively?

The fact is that to develop a viable prototype usually requires much research, the trying out of a variety of scaled-down and full-scale models. Second, rarely if ever does the prototype carry its message on its own wings. Dissemination systems must be set up. In a society in which everybody is promoting something, it will cost a fortune just to rise above the "noise" level and get builders to know about the project and come and see. Also, prototypes useful in one area—e.g., sunny California—are not likely to suit many other parts of the country. Finally, and most important, few poor persons, localities, or States have the funds to build the necessary houses, even if they are inexpensive.

We do need prototypes; to build one may be a worthwhile contribution to a long implementation process. But unless the problems involved in implementation are understood, and efforts are directed accordingly, this prototype will, like many others, remain without followers—and thus without value, that is, other than for the Air Force base.

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Actually, there is good reason to hold that it would be just as well if the DOD did not become a *major* domestic factor. In countries where the military has become (with U.S. help) the center for the handling of domestic problems, to the extent that they are handled, the following effects have been observed: (1) further weakening of the civilian sector, as the military attracted experts and ambitious youth; (2), a deepening identification with the military as a source of organization and competence, while the civilian sector is viewed as run by ineffectual, corrupt politicians, and, (3) an expansion of the military sector, chiefly by *adding* to its resources those needed for civilian purposes rather than the turning of military personnel and resources over to domestic missions. This is more or less the picture as I saw it in Bolivia and Guatemala and the way I understand it to be, in varying degrees, in Turkey, Korea, and Taiwan.

The danger is not only that democracy would be weakened and fascist tendencies encouraged, but that the military is notoriously inefficient. Unlike business firms, it has no inherent commitment to efficiency as there is no profit motive; and national security—its main product—is very difficult to measure. When the military builds a house, a school or a hospital it is likely to cost more than if it were built by the civilian sector. If the military has idle resources they should be turned over to civilians, either by releasing or lending them, and not used to justify the creation of new, non-military missions for the armed forces. The military is too powerful as it is, and would grow more so should it become our domestic savior.

Having said all this, a few exceptions must be noted. If and where the military has special capacities (e.g., jungle transportation) and if its resources will be converted from military to peaceful uses, such efforts can be quite welcome. Another exception was the desegregation of the military. This set an important precedent and showed that desegregation could be achieved rapidly, by an order—in a speed unmatched by a civilian agency.

Still another exception is provided by Clifford's recent statement. He suggests that the military be allowed to provide extra inducements to those of its civilian contractors which will carry out their work in slums and/or hire hard-to-employ people. As the military spends half of the federal budget, a really significant impact could be made here. And the military would not need to acquire new missions or divert major resources to its end. The work commissioned would be required anyhow and supervising it would fall within the military area of competence.

Thus, some civilian good on the domestic front can result from the military apparatus. It is just that we do not expect the DOD quite yet to turn more than a few of its swords into plowshares and, if a mass conversion is to take place, we would much rather let civilian blacksmiths do the job.