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Mission creep: militarizing America

The nomination of General Brian McCaffrey as drug czar symbolizes the nation's dramatic retreat from the principle of separation of military and civilian power. It further demonstrates the degree to which the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 -- which outlaws military involvement in civilian law enforcement -- is being ignored and undermined by both the drug warriors and the Clinton administration.

Disturbing as the McCaffrey appointment may be, however, it is only an unusually visible sign of something that has been going on quietly for a long time -- the military's steady intrusion upon, and interference with, civilian America.

In order to avoid violation of the law, General McCaffrey has retired from the military, but he will not retire from his military contacts, philosophy, loyalty and access. He is, after all, a man some thought in line to become the next chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

General McCaffrey headed the US Southern Command, which provides military backup for American policy in Latin America -- a policy long linked with support of dictatorships, suppression of dissidents, human rights abuses, death squads as well as chronically ineffective and corrupt management of drug smuggling. The price of this policy has been heavy: for example, over 100,000 people have been killed since 1960 in Guatemala, many of them by armed forces and police trained and supported by the US.

One former US ambassador to a Central American country says of Southcom, "I wouldn't even let them in the country" because Southcom would "inexorably militarize political problems." Today, he added, "very few countries outside of Central America welcome visits" from the commander of Southcom.

A Pentagon official describes Southcom's role as "military to military diplomacy." Rather than functioning like an old-fashioned colonial army -- "they're not like the Bengal Lancers" -- they go in and work quietly with the local military to make sure the right elements are in charge and show them how to put down dissidents and how to interrogate.

The embassy military attachés are the point men in these operations. McCaffrey came into conflict with the State Department in his attempts to gain authority over the attaches and run his own foreign policy. Further, the *Dallas Morning News* reports that a year ago McCaffrey circulated a classified plan under which the military would assume direct control of the Latin American drug fight. The idea "drew the wrath of civilian agencies from the Drug Enforcement Administration to the CIA. It was a brash plan to fuse power now spread among dozens of agencies while raising the military from a limited support role. The proposal quietly died."

The Dallas paper noted that "colleagues widely describe [McCaffrey] as outspoken and strongwilled, a man whose self-esteem shone brightly even amid the white light of four-star egos."

One drug enforcement official told *US News & World Report* that under McCaffrey, Southcom's "idea of coordination was to brief you after their plan was *fait accompli*."

In its announcement of McCaffrey's drug czar appointment, the White House said:

He has spent his military career engaged in coordinated campaigns that are directed toward solutions and winning. He will not tolerate bureaucratic turf wars or grandstanding on this critical issue.

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While his career may have been directed towards solutions, it was a goal McCaffrey never reached at Southcom. Southcom has gone through anti-smuggling strategies likes a Hollywood hooker through designer drugs. As recently as two years ago, for example, the military dumped its touted reliance on AWAC planes. Meanwhile the military virtually gave up on interdiction efforts in the Pacific. One source told the *International Defense Review* that "the Pacific is just too big to monitor properly."

The *IDR* also reported a shift towards attempting to stop drugs before they leave the source Latin American country: "The shift is due to a variety of factors, including the relatively low volume of drugs seized in transit; US budgetary restraints and a variety of organizational and force structure changes. . ."

In other words, it didn't work and it cost too much money. But there is no evidence that the source country approach is any better. One study found that such strategies were, in fact, seven times as costly as controlling demand through education and medication.

Furthermore, they do substantial damage to the stability and democracy of the targeted country. Thirty religious, health, and human rights activists wrote Secretary of State Warren Christopher complaining about American trained and encouraged anti-narcotics operations in Bolivia. The letter describes well the sort of drug policy fostered by Southcom and other US agencies:

Since mid-January, the Bolivian anti-narcotics police have undertaken massive sweeps in the Chapre, arbitrarily detaining over three hundred people. Those detained are typically held several days and released without charges; indeed, without even being presented to a judge . . . Neither Bolivian law nor international human rights standards permit these warrantless arrests of individuals against whom there is no evidence of participation in criminal conduct. The government is clearly using police powers to stifle lawful political opposition . . .

The Bolivian anti-narcotics efforts also continue to rely on special judicial procedures that violate fundamental due process considerations. Under Bolivia's Law 10008, those who are formally charged with drug offenses -- no matter how minor -- are imprisoned without the possibility of pretrial release and must, even if acquitted, remain in prison until the trial court's decision is reviewed by the Supreme Court, a process that takes years. The US government provided funding for the salaries and expenses of special prosecutors for the anti-narcotics courts.

As the military zig and zags in its Latin American anti-drug tactics, these operations retain one common attribute: failure. Between 1994 and 1995, for example, coca leaf production rose seven percent in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. The drug trade continues so merrily along that the radio stations on the Mexican border are even mocking counter-drug efforts with ballads celebrating famed traffickers.

The model of a modern major general

Rather than pointing out such facts, press reaction to the McCaffrey appointment has been overwhelmingly favorable. This is perhaps not surprising. The media is increasingly composed of journalists who have had no military experience and who see war as just another movie script, even if the battle is on our borders or in our own cities.

These new journalistic romanticists are easy prey for Pentagon flacks and the drug warriors. Their understanding of such matters comes not from experience and history, but from Stalone and Schwarzenegger. So badly was the Iraqi War covered, for example, that Americans still don't know how many of the enemy were killed. Or that the UN Food & Agriculture Organization found that over a half million Iraqi children may have died as a consequence of the economic sanctions we imposed after the conflict.

Meanwhile, in dangerous counterpoint, the American officer corps is increasingly composed of those who have had no democratic experience. With the end of the draft and the professionalization of the services, the leavening effect of reserve and national guard troops has greatly diminished. Further, officers like Colin Powell and Brian McCaffrey earned their spurs and their medals almost entirely in the defense of non-democratic regimes -- from troglodytic sheiks in the Gulf to corrupt generals in Vietnam to drug-pushers in Latin America.

The untold truth is that the post-WW2 American military hasn't that much to be proud of. It fought to a draw in Korea, was humiliated in Vietnam, removed a drug dealer from Panama but left all his peers and all the drugs, slunk off from Somalia and was careful not to hang around too long in Haiti. As for the Gulf -- well, Bush and Thatcher were ousted from office in its wake, but not, unfortunately, the intended target.

The one place where the modern American military has been successful is right here in the US, where it has long occupied much of the budget and captured many of the politicians. The sanctity of defense spending is so taken for granted that cutting it was hardly mentioned in the recent budget debates.

Like any good army, the troops have secured their own base first, moving quietly into key civilian posts at the Pentagon. Says one official, "They want to fill the DOD jobs with industry people but the pay isn't high enough, so they get military. The military is willing to whore for industry." The latter, in turn, gladly hires them upon retirement.

Many of these officers are part of an over-staffed brass brigade that developed in the wake of the Cold War and which helped to gobble up the "peace dividend." With their seepage into civilian billets, an important protection against a military takeover -- direct civilian control of the military -- is quietly and steadily being eroded.

It takes a whole readership to raise an editor

Owing to a new book project by the editor, *The Review* may display erratic behavior over the next few months. Since, however, this book will bring the politics advocated by *The Review* to a larger audience, and since the editor can not afford to have someone write the book for him, he hopes you will continue to display the patience and tolerance characteristic of *Review* readers. The book will be a practical guide to creating a society in which the politics aren't broken and the politicians aren't fixed. Your subscription runs by issue number rather than according to the lunar calendar, so you will receive the same quantity of vitriol but at a more leisurely pace.

Perhaps all this isn't so surprising when one examines the real *métier* of a modern major general. It is not, after all, fighting wars -- for there doesn't exist an enemy capable of challenging us. The US defense budget is 120 times the combined strength of the nine next biggest military spenders, and 1,600 times that of six adversarial favorites: Cuba, Syria, Iran, Iraq, North Korea and Libya. In truth, the modern major general's trade consists of occupying, managing and manipulating weak and disorganized small countries, not infrequently primarily for domestic political reasons.

This is the trade for which Powell and McCaffrey were trained and helps explain why each feels comfortable in domestic politics. Where easier to practice the civil and psychological operations they mastered than right here at home? After all, what is the war on drugs but "low intensity" or "non-conventional" warfare? If a Pentagon memo can label Israel a "non-traditional adversary," then why not our own inner cities as well? We're all Northern Ireland now.

The quiet creep

The McCaffrey nomination also follows a dramatic increase in the use of the military and its resources, especially the National Guard, in domestic law enforcement -- from Waco to Ruby Ridge to the inner city. It also follows greater intrusion of the military into high schools, the use of troops on the Mexican border for the first time in modern history and sporadic proposals to

involve the Army in everything from inner city works projects to concentration camps for first time drug offenders.

Bill Clinton, who has rarely seen a civil liberty worth standing up for, even submitted legislation last year that would have virtually overturned the Posse Comitatus Act. His bill would have allowed the military to provide "technical assistance" to civilian law enforcement, a term Clinton himself defined as including "conducting searches, taking evidence, and disarming and disabling individuals." So awful was this measure that even Casper Weinberger and Sam Nunn objected. As the director of the Florida ACLU, Robbyn E. Blumner, wrote in the *St Petersburg Times*:

Throughout history and around the world, involvement by the armed forces in civilian law enforcement is one of the trademarks of a repressive regime. Yet the administration's proposals would chip away at the wall that separates the two and, by that action, greatly enhance the power of the presidency. In the wrong hands, the results could be devastating to freedom.

Much of the military's intrusion has been accomplished without public notice. For example, the Pentagon has greatly expanded JROTC programs. Last year, the American Friends Service Committee found retired military personnel teaching approximately 310,000 students, ages 14 and up, in about 2200 high schools (with another 700 on the docket). As the AFSC pointed out:

Public schooling strives to promote respect for other cultures, critical thinking and basic academic skills in a safe environment. In contrast, JROTC introduces guns into the schools, promotes authoritarian values, uses rote learning methods, and consigns much student time to learning drill, military history and protocol, which have little relevance outside the military.

It pays off, though, for the Pentagon. Although the JROTC denies it is engaged in recruiting, 45% of all cadets completing the program sign up, mostly as enlisted personnel. AFSC also found that JROTC programs are more often found in schools with a high proportion of non-white students -- now providing 54% of all cadets -- and in non-affluent schools.

And what are these cadets being taught? Says the report:

A comparison of the JROTC curriculum and two widely used civilian high school civics and history textbooks demonstrates that the JROTC curriculum falls well below accepted pedagogical standards. Units on citizenship and history are strikingly different from standard civil texts on these subjects.

For example, . . . the JROTC text portrays citizenship as being primarily achieved through military service, provides only a short discussion of civil rights; and downplays the importance of civilian control of the military. . . .

In comparison to the civilian history text, historical events in the JROTC curriculum are distorted . . . History is described as a linear series of accomplishments by soldiers,

while the progress engendered by regular citizens is marginalized. America's wars are treated as having been inevitable.

While it claims to provide leadership training with broad relevance, in fact the JROTC curriculum defines leadership as respect for constituted authority and the chain of command, rather than as critical thinking and democratic consensus-building . . . Finally, the text encourages the reader to rely uncritically on the military as a source of self-esteem and guidance.

Further, at a time that schools are trying desperately to discourage violence, the JROTC is teaching students how to kill more effectively. It is also teaching them -- in a text that addresses the "Indian menace" that "Fortunately the government policy of pushing the Indians farther West, then wiping them out, was carried out successfully. "

Colin Powell's army

And just where did the idea come from for the expansion of military indoctrination in our high schools? From none other than that very media model of a major modern general -- Colin Powell .

Following the LA uprising in 1992, writes Steven Stycos in the *Providence Phoenix*, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff "proposed a massive expansion of the program. Powell urged the new units be targeted to inner-city youth as an alternative to drug use and gang membership." In New England the number of students involved nearly tripled.

Was Powell seeking citizen officers to balance the academy-trained military? Absolutely not. The JROTC students are grunt-fodder. Besides, while referring to ROTC as "vital to democracy," Powell closed 62 college-based ROTC units during this same period. The inevitable result was that the proportion of academy-trained officers rose and the role of the citizen-officer diminished.

You may recall that Powell was the man whom the media pushed for president, depicting him as in the mold of Dwight Eisenhower. The media forgot to tell us that while Eisenhower warned of a growing military-industrial complex, Powell has been one of its biggest beneficiaries and boosters. While Eisenhower fought to restore democracy, Powell fought to preserve sheikdoms. While the Eisenhower-era military followed the wartime orders of strong civilian leaders like Churchill and Roosevelt, the Powell-era military won't even follow Bill Clinton's orders in peacetime. While Eisenhower was part of a unique military demobilization after the Second World War, Powell was among those who prevented demobilization after the Cold War. On top of which he wants kids to know that the Indians were a menace.