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Trends. The Psychology of Military Readiness

Editor

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Military readiness can denote the likelihood of successfully meeting security commitments through military employment before such commitments arise to be met. This denotation is usually placed in the context of commitments wherein military employment is more appropriate than other tools of national security or appropriately linked to the employment of other such tools. That military readiness can be a significant indicator of national viability is clear. Less clear is when military readiness or a misrepresentation of the same is achieved.

A case in point is a recent estimate of the United States' (US) military readiness. According to Thom Skanker and Eric Schmitt of the New York Times, senior US officials assert that "the new missions given the military after Sept. 11 to defend the United States at home, wage war in Afghanistan and increase security at bases overseas are seriously taxing combat readiness." From this quote--if correctly reported and, indeed, manifesting the intrapsychic processes of the officials in question--one might well infer that military readiness is but a construct denoting a bottomless pit. This inference can be based on the implicit assumption that successfully meeting security commitments--viz., homeland security and defense, the attenuation of the Taliban and al Qaeda from Afghanistan, and overseas base survivability--through military employment necessarily lowers military readiness, even as one demonstrates military readiness by successfully meeting these commitments.

Thus, one is left with the paradox of (1) not significantly exercising military assets and not being military ready by dint of not having a security commitment to meet through which one can assess readiness and (2) significantly exercising military assets and demonstrating military readiness thereby taxing, lowering, and subverting this readiness. That the empirical validation of military readiness cannot occur without simultaneous employment towards all conceivable and even inconceivable commitments may be good news for government contractors, a win-win rationale for those seeking to increase the defense portion of the Government budget, but bad news for those seeking a coherent balance of the many tools of national security. (See Ferris, G. R., Perre we, P. L.; Anthony, W. P., & Gilmore, D. C. (2000). Political skill at work. *Organizational Dynamics*, 28, 25-37; McRae-Bergeron, C. E., May, L., Foulks, R. W., Sisk, K., Chamings, P., & Clark, P. A. (1999). A medical readiness model of health assessment or well-being in first-increment air combat command medical personnel. *Military Medicine*, 164, 379-388; Shamir, B., Brainin, E., Zakay, E., & Popper, M. (2000). Perceived combat readiness as collective efficacy: Individual- and group-level analysis. *Military Psychology*, 12, 105-119; Shanker, T., & Schmitt, E. (May 24, 2002). Military would be stressed by a new war, study finds. *The New York Times*, p. A8.) (Keywords: Military Readiness, National Security, United States.)