

## On “Rebalancing US Military Power”

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*This commentary is in response to the article, “Rebalancing US Military Power,” by Dr. Anna Simons published in the Winter 2013 issue of *Parameters* (vol. 43, no. 4).*

It is always a pleasure to read diplo-military articles, as I have long been an advocate of a full spectrum approach to conflict that includes diplomacy at one end and military force at the other. Dr. Simons presents compelling arguments for the use of “partnering” as both a strategically and tactically superior option to the current US post-Cold War role as a world leader in an increasingly asymmetric and destabilized world. However, I feel that some of her arguments could be more fully developed and that her lack of focus on military advisors’ leadership requirements along with chronological details limits the applicability of her recommendations. I would like to develop her thesis further and respectfully include actionable recommendations that would more effectively turn the concept of “partnering” into policies that could be implemented.

Dr. Simons’s economic arguments are particularly valid, as the “development of a global land power network” and “limit[ing] boots on the ground” are admirable goals. However, looking to the Marshall Plan’s post-WWII successes, one should add significant time commitments in addition to troop levels (or lack thereof). Her partnering argument becomes much more compelling when policymakers realize these endeavors take decades to cement, in contrast to Dr. Simons’s assertion in the article. Therefore, the economic and resource requirements of a partnership versus a counter-“everything under the sun” approach becomes more attractive provided academics and diplomats without field experience do not overlook the leadership requirements. As any combatant commander will attest, leadership is paramount to success in partnering.

Rather than accept Dr. Simon’s thesis outright, I argue the actual shift to partnering is a two-step process that should not be shortchanged in pursuit of expediency. True partnership and professionalization requires direct leadership instead of mere advising. Only leadership’s trust building function leads to true partnering as a longer-term sustainment strategy. Many successes in WWII were predicated on American military leadership in a direct role during combat operations. Merrill’s Marauders and General Stillwell’s Chinese forces are both examples of successful diplo-warfare precisely because these generals led their forces from the front. Distrust of advisors grows exponentially when the partner nation’s military leadership feels the advisors view themselves as superior. The element of leading from the front is overlooked in this article.

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While Dr. Simon's familial relationship analogy is accurate in many respects, it does not take into account what I coin the "father-son" element. Similar to the parent-child relationship in later stages, the early stages of a leadership-based partnership require leadership by example. Just as a young son learns to "be a man" by watching his father's example, young militaries learn professional behaviors by seeing them in action. No amount of formal training can replace the "follow me and do what I do" style of a direct leader. Additionally, just as a son emulates his father's example in order to win approval, host nation militaries try to earn praise by following the example of leaders they trust and respect. Tactically, this is the first step to professionalizing the host nation's military. Subsequently, the relationship should morph into a "marriage" type espoused by Dr. Simons. Failure to lead and earn trust means the recommendations in this article are doomed to fail.

Civic action as the ultimate litmus test of military readiness to partner is a fantastic recommendation and should leverage the existing Civil Affairs organization within the military. I also agree flag officers should retain the authority to curtail these operations when the host nation's military proves unable or unwilling to provide basic civil services for their citizens. I argue the partnership envisioned by Dr. Simons should be tactically implemented as a two-stage process; first, in a direct leadership role of the host nation's military, and then in an advisory role once trust is earned between both parties. I also think that coercive diplomacy and prioritization of American interests are viable diplomatic options for gaining rapid tactical advantages in spite of the indictment they are given in the article. Unfortunately, there is simply not room in this commentary to expound fully, though many will agree that creating an asymmetry of motivation to comply with US desires is sometimes necessary (*vis-à-vis* Pakistan's air space after 9/11).

While the professional soldier has a long and illustrious history associated with the storied ideal of the "warrior poet," Dr. Simons is advocating for a new twist on an old ideal—the Warrior Diplomat. Conceptually, this is a sound and timely ideal that limits American expenditure of manpower and treasure. This goal becomes more important in endeavors that increasingly require long time commitments to avoid the fate we see in Iraq today. With the addition of leadership skills to Dr. Simons's list of required traits, her ideals can certainly be implemented "on the cheap" compared to the large scale COIN strategy recently promoted by General Petraeus. In an era of shrinking budgets and growing crises around the globe, Dr. Simons's recommendations are much more realistic.

## The Author Replies

Anna Simons

**M**any thanks to SFC Tomlin for the seriousness with which he took my arguments. I agree with him: partnering should last decades, if not longer. However, I also want to be clear:

determining whether we have a worthwhile partner should not take decades. Indeed, it should not even take a decade.

We Americans should be very cautious and not fall for laws of “averages” when it comes to partnering, advising, stability operations, nation-building, counterinsurgency, or anything else involving other countries’ militaries. Yes, according to current conventional wisdom, a successful counterinsurgency takes at least a decade to wage. But this is precisely why I concentrated on the Huk Rebellion. What Ramon Magsaysay and Edward Lansdale accomplished not only represents a short, decisive success, but should suggest that every case is sufficiently unique; none should be treated as an average anything. Otherwise, it becomes too easy to want to reach for manuals rather than do what Lansdale did: read the situation in the Philippines for itself, and not for something else.

I also turned to Lansdale because the success he assisted with required minimal time, minimal money, and a minimal footprint—but a great deal of nondoctrinaire thinking and a willing partner. Magsaysay’s willingness, along with his and Lansdale’s wife, were key. Willingness to turn the Filipino Army around preceded legitimacy. And, again, willingness should never be too hard for advisors to accurately gauge.

As for the issue of “direct leadership,” I agree with SFC Tomlin. Taking charge was surely the easiest way for American and British leaders to attain results during World War II. However, sensibilities and sensitivities have shifted considerably since then. It is hard if not impossible to imagine where an American would be allowed to ‘lead’ another military’s forces today. Guerrilla forces, maybe. But a unit in a sovereign country’s military? We did not even attempt that in Afghanistan or Iraq. Nor is it clear whether it would be locals or the American electorate who would resist such a notion more vigorously.

At the same time, SFC Tomlin alludes to the attributes advisors should possess. I again agree. They do need to lead by example – which means their comportment needs to be beyond reproach. They must embody the best our military has to offer in terms of maturity and expertise. Of course, this means that what American advisors communicate nonverbally is as important as anything they say. In fact, I’d submit that the 21st century challenge for “warrior-diplomats” or for any Americans sent abroad to advise foreign forces is to be able to lead without taking charge.