

The US Armed Services' Repertory Company

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"All the world's a stage. And all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts...."
(As You Like It, Act II, Scene 7, Line 139)

"All the world's a stage. And the US military merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one Armed Service in its time plays many parts."
(An analogy of today's worldwide Joint or Multinational Operations, 1994)

A repertory company is a useful analogue for our nation's military services. In the typical repertory theater, a permanent company of players performs several plays or other presentations during a season, usually alternating them in limited runs. Their repertoire is the stock of plays, operas, roles, or songs that the company, actors, or singers are familiar with and ready to perform throughout the season. Performances which earn the highest critical acclaim draw upon the special skills, devices, and techniques of a particular person or particular field of endeavor. Notice that this also aptly describes the varying roles of soldiers, sailors, airmen, or marines.

For most of us, the repertory company we know best is the travelling one which, after performing in our local theater, will tour a dozen other cities. Their upcoming season always appears exciting and challenging. In Seattle, they'll perform Othello; in Denver, it'll be Six Rms Riv Vu; and in Atlanta, it'll be Our Town. As the company travels, the actors, stage hands, and others behind the scenes will remain a part of the company, but they'll be in different performance combinations and in more or less prominent roles compared to the last. That's the versatility and range of a repertory company. They can do a lot, and their success relies on careful orchestration of many factors.

As the surviving superpower of the post-Cold War world, the United States is using its armed services in various traditional and non-traditional missions to pursue national strategic goals. Our various regional commitments are like "roles" assigned to members of a repertory company travelling around the world. In some "theaters" the military services perform one function or role; in another theater, they perform others. Often the "plays" vary in dramatic intensity and duration. The scenery and equipment change to reflect the environment. Some roles involve lethal employment of military might, others call for subtle persuasion, surreptitious surveillance, or humanitarian assistance. Examine, for instance, the range and depth of the dashing "airman" called upon to deliver precise munitions from small, agile fighter bombers; to airlift relief supplies to faraway places with unimproved runways; to develop, launch, and operate satellites; and to sustain forces in hostile environments.

A subtle strength of any repertory company is its teamwork and cohesion, evident as actors and stage hands change roles, functions, and assignments during the season. While one older, more famous actor may view his headliner status as beyond question, he'll occasionally find himself in

a supporting role when the part doesn't call for his special talents. In Othello, no doubt his Shakespearian training and dramatic expression make him the consummate choice to play the lead. But, in Six Rms Riv Vu, the Neil Simon character requires someone different who is more convincing as the congenial, young romantic lead.

The military services' repertory company demonstrates this same flexibility. In accordance with one theater commander's campaign plan, the land component commander is uniquely suited to accomplish key objectives, so the air and sea component commanders are in direct support of him. In a different theater, and occasionally at different times during the same campaign, the air component commander will be the supported commander who confidently relies upon land and sea components for support. The nation is well served by this versatility and self-assurance of its military services.

Additionally, you will rarely see an actor play the only role in a performance, Hamlet's soliloquy and Lily Tomlin's one-woman show notwithstanding. However, the precedent exists even for the military services. For some extended portions of the theater campaign, one military service may be the most visible and most involved, as was the case during early air operations of Desert Storm. In different environs, one military service may actually be the only one deployed. Clearly, like a director, a theater commander must consider the objectives and intentions, the nature of the environment, the duration of the effort, the complexity of the mission, and the combatants' individual and collective capabilities. Then he can "cast" his performance. And, in so doing, the commander acknowledges and, indeed, is counting on certain core competencies resident in each of his "players."

Particular talents are often critical to success. A commander will never assign a critical role or function for which the individual or military service lacks core competencies. Nor will that individual or military service be expected to develop core competencies in every discipline of military operations. For the commander to expect otherwise is to invite mission failure and unnecessary loss of life.

Beyond the analogy, hard emphasis is needed. One, commanders should examine several key factors--objectives, environment, duration of the effort, mission complexity, and capabilities of assigned and enemy forces--to determine the composition of the appropriate "repertory company" for the tasks at hand. Two, sometimes commanders can and should structure a powerful force without including every available military service. Three, commanders should never assign roles, functions, or missions to military services which lack the essential core competencies and mission readiness. Four, commanders should not expect each military service to possess or develop the same core competencies as every other service. And, most important of all, if a commander fails to follow these guidelines, he invites combat ineffectiveness, mission failure, and unnecessary loss of life.

As the nation faces the many challenges attendant to its responsibilities as the world's sole surviving superpower, it will, at times, find it necessary to consider employment of the military instrument of power. While repertory companies' reputations rise and fall based upon favorable reviews, in the case of military services, a nation's survival often rests in the balance. The

commander who would discount core competencies developed through organizing, training, equipping, exercising, and operational seasoning is unlikely to survive the first "performance".