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The Report

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Is the U.S. Ready for War?

It always comes down to men killing their enemies in the mud, says Sen. Tom Cotton.

By Andy Kessler
Nov 19 2023, WSJ

Ukraine's troops are using both old-fashioned heavy artillery and commercial products such as drones with grenades attached to them, directed via Starlink's satellite internet service. Hamas terrorists used motorcycles and paragliders. Israeli soldiers use sophisticated Iron Dome antimissile systems and, to close off tunnels, "sponge bombs" that work like spray foam sealant from Home Depot.

Is the U.S. ready for that kind of war? To find out, I met with Arkansas **Sen. Tom Cotton**—a former platoon leader with the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq who now sits on the Armed Services Committee. “I still don’t think the Defense Department is doing enough to adapt quickly,” he said. Current wars have exposed the Pentagon’s “brittleness and lack of resiliency, and that’s in part going back to the drawdown during the Clinton era.”

“Different wars require different kinds of weapons,” he said. “You just look at three conflicts or potential conflicts. In Ukraine, you have heavy mechanized land warfare, and Hamas, you have intense urban combat. And in Taiwan, if it came to that, you would have a largely maritime conflict.

Hamas doesn’t have tanks. So Israel doesn’t need Javelins.”

“Necessity is the mother of invention. And Ukrainians are very resourceful,” he continued. “The problem with the Soviet Union was not only that it was communist, but also that it was Russian. Ukraine exposes the fanciful thinking of many political leaders here and in Europe who believed that threats from Russia ended with the Cold War.”

But are we buying the right stuff? F-35 Lightning II fighter jets do amazing things, but don’t we need more adaptable weapons? “Machine guns can do a pretty effective job against paragliders,” Mr. Cotton says. “In Congress, when people think about technology as it applies to security, they think too much about whiz-bang keystroke warriors, that somehow you’re going to win wars just with cyber attacks or with hashtags.”

He shakes his head. “It always gets down to men under arms in the mud on the ground killing their enemies until their enemies submit to their will.”

“The department needs to do a better job of that kind of thing. There’s still going to be a significant need for traditional battlefield technology for tanks and armored personnel carriers and munitions, for fighter squadrons, for new stealth bombers. The technology that matters most is technology that enables the soldiers who are out in front of the spear and makes it safer for them.” Mr. Cotton reminded me of the military adage invoking D-Day: “When the ramp drops, the bullshit stops.”

Then I sensed frustration. “It’s like pulling teeth to get the DOD to focus on what’s needed to fight and win the wars. Ukraine is a reminder that that kind of warfare has not vanished from the earth. There’s still going to be battlefields. There’s still going to be the infantry in the army that have to close with and destroy the enemy, to fire and maneuver as opposed to

big brains sitting back in Washington, D.C., clacking away on keyboards and all of a sudden, you compel a nation to submit to your will."

I nodded and said I agreed. Mr. Cotton quickly jumped in: "There was a lot of people who don't agree with you and me, just to be clear, like mostly Democrats."

But what about using commercial technology for warfare? "In 30 years of consolidation of the defense industry, there have only been three companies that have broken through at the department with a big splash. Elon Musk with SpaceX, and by extension Starlink.

Palantir with Peter Thiel. And Anduril with Palmer Luckey. It should not take an iconoclastic billionaire willing to break china at the Pentagon. The department should be a lot more open to commercial off-the-shelf solutions."

I reminded him that many engineers threatened to quit Google if they worked on artificial intelligence to help drones identify targets.

"Unfortunately, the rot you see that has infested campuses over the last month with pro-Hamas rallies also extends in some cases to their engineering and their computer science departments. There's no question about that."

Has the U.S. lost its will? "We can have the weaponry and ships and aircraft, but if our adversaries don't think we're willing to use them, to defend ourselves and stop them, they don't do much good." In the Middle East, if "Joe Biden is not going to respond, and if he's going to be shooting empty warehouses in eastern Syria, as opposed to blowing up IRGC barracks outside of Tehran—if I'm Xi Jinping sitting in Beijing, and I see that, it makes me think."

Will we be ready for a China-Taiwan conflict? "You don't have to be read into classified programs or have all that much imagination to realize that those drones you see swarming around Super Bowls or opening ceremonies might be pretty effective against Chinese ships or Chinese landing craft, if you could rapidly convert them into military usage."

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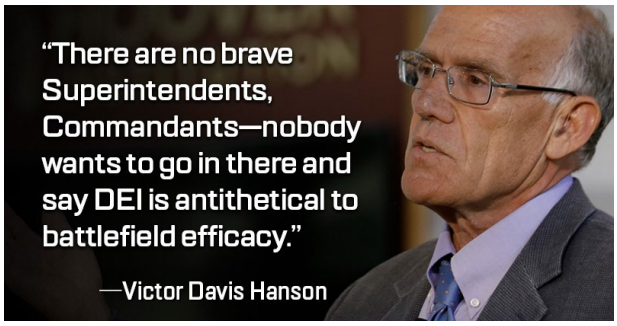
Air Force Academy • Marxism • Naval Academy • West Point • Woke Agenda
Victor Davis Hanson discusses DEI at Military Academies

16 November 2023



On the Victor Davis Hanson Show, he and the cohost discuss the article, **Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion Reign Supreme At The Air Force Academy,** written by STARRS Board of Advisors Scott Sturman (USAFA ’72) and STARRS Vice Chairman MG Joe Arbuckle (USA ret). He also mentions another STARRS article, **Culture Change at USAFA: Why Six Professors Resigned**.

Excerpt:

Victor Davis Hanson:

“. . . . . There is a lot of criticism about the Air Force Academy’s woke agenda. This is very important because one of the way we maintain deterrence is traditionally when American pilots go up in the skies, whether it’s in the Balkans or whether it was during the Reagan era against the Libyans or whether it’s in the skies over the eastern Mediterranean, nobody screws around with them because they’re superior and they’re usually their planes are superior or the pilots are considered the best in the world.

When you start tampering with that and you have sort of like Stanford University word list where you can’t use the word Mom or Dad because some Air Force Academy’s children or children of one parents, or they suggest you say “you all” rather than you, you’re really talking about it’s a sin of commission and omission.

> **You’re not only destroying morale and sending a message to cadets there that your promotion and your career will not entirely be adjudicated by merit, but it will have something to do with your race.**

In other words, when you’re in a class and you look around and you think, ‘if I am nonwhite, I’m going to get an edge, and if I am white, I’m going to not have that edge.’

It has nothing to do with class. They do not ask my Middle Eastern cadet or my black cadet or my Latino cadet, whether they were the children of dentists or doctors or oil money. They don’t care. It’s just superficial appearance.

That’s going to destroy morale. It already has.

That’s why they’re short recruitment and people don’t want to teach there in the same degree they did in the past.

> **There are no brave Superintendents, Commandants—nobody wants to go in there and say this is antithetical to battlefield efficacy.**

It will eventually mean that really good people are not going to go into the Air Force. And the people who were in there were going to get cynical because they feel they’re not going to be promoted on how they fly a plane or or shoot a missile.

I don’t know how we’re going to maintain our preeminence unless you assume–and I don’t assume–that these people think the United States is so far ahead of everybody else, that we’re so powerful that we can afford to have a Commissariat Commissar system that monitors our ideology, sex race, ethnic background.

I don’t think we are. I don’t think we have any margin of error.

China certainly doesn’t do this. Russia doesn’t do this. There’s a reason why they don’t do it. They did it before under Mao in China and they did it under Stalin and Khrushchev and probably Brezhnev as well, where **they had commissars that use ideological criteria to adjudicate performance.**

> **They found they couldn’t compete with us because the West didn’t do that.**
>
> **Now the West is doing it and they don’t. It’s, you know, bizarre.**

. . . . If you study the Cultural Revolution under Mao or what happened to the Soviet army, the Red Army in the first year of the invasion, and by Germany, you can see where that leads to it.

It just means that your whole system breaks down and it breeds just, well go watch *Enemy at the Gates* and see what a commissar is. I know it’s a fictional; it’s based on a real story, supposedly.

You can see how even in a fictional context, **all the criteria that go into making decisions that are not based on battlefield, but on propaganda or public relations or advancement.**

The Soviet Union said we’re going to promote people that show the lot that they are the loudest and the longest demagogues about the Soviet system and Marxist-Leninist dogma.

We can say the same thing with the universities, the English department or Classics department, I can see the damage there, but I don’t think it’s going to directly affect our F-35 program or the pilots in Iraq.

This? this does. **The people who are corrupting these academies come from the humanities or the social sciences.**

It’s a very lucrative thing for a DEI contractor to get these bids. They go in and they say, read this and this and this and you’re racist, this, this, this. You over here are victims, you over there are victimizers. Hey, you back there, is an oppressed, you next to me are an oppressor. That’s just designed to divide people.

> **I don’t know where everybody got this idea that diversity was good. It’s always unity.**

Diversity is a challenge. Diversity of opinion might be good, but right to divide up a society by your superficial appearance? That's divisiveness, not diversity.

Unity is what you want.

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The De-Militarisation of America | Victor Davis Hanson

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