Diversity is Our Army's Strength

By Sgt. Maj. Alexander Aguilastratt
U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

The U.S. Army is focused on preparing for large-scale combat operations. Its training, equipment, experience in combat, and the quality of its Soldiers make it effective and lethal. The diversity within the U.S. military’s forces must grow and adapt to the diversity of the United States. The cultural and ethnic differences of its Soldiers are the unique assets that our adversaries lack. Diversity in the U.S. Army is its strength and combat multiplier.

"The diversity of America’s Army is a source of power and influence, especially in the political aspects of war and competition" (Birmingham, 2017, p. 1).

America embodies the message that different cultures can and will unite for a common purpose. In the case of the U.S. Army, the objective is to fight and win our nation’s wars, and "...support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic…” (Department of the Army, n.d., para.1).

To convey how powerful diversity is, a study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group in 2018 found that businesses who focused on and expanded their diversity had higher revenue due to increased innovation. According to Anna Powers at Forbes, "...diversity means diversity of minds, ideas, and approaches – which allows teams to find a solution that takes into account multiple angles the problem, thus making the solution stronger, well rounded and optimized" (2018, para. 2). This article will focus on the history of diversity within the U.S. military, current international and domestic threats to diversity, and programs and solutions put in place to protect and safeguard its diversity.

The Foundation
Diversity is present in every aspect of the U.S. Army, from recruitment and retention to combat operations. According to the PEW Research Center, "As the country has become more racially and ethnically diverse, so has the U.S. military. Racial and ethnic minority groups made up 40% of Defense Department active-duty military in 2015, up from 25% in 1990" (Parker et al., 2017).

The U.S. Army has a history of diversity with mi-
minority groups and women serving in every major conflict from the American Revolutionary War to the present ("The Army and Diversity," n.d.). Even when not allowed to serve in an official capacity, the men and women of this country, from varied backgrounds, contributed to the greater good.

From the Tuskegee Airmen (African-American aviators and support crew serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps during WWII) to Medal of Honor recipients Dr. Mary E. Walker (an Army surgeon serving in the Civil War) and Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez (a Vietnam veteran of Native American and Hispanic descent); their actions proved members of any race, gender, and background are capable of the highest levels of bravery and honor, paving the way for the full integration of today’s Army.

**International Threats**

Concerning the current super power threats to the U.S., according to Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Russia is the most significant threat just because they pose the only existential threat to the country right now" (Macias, 2018, para. 2). If the U.S. and Russia were to engage in a conflict, neither could use their arsenal of nuclear weapons without triggering a nuclear apocalypse (Magni, 2020). But what truly makes Russia dangerous to the U.S. is not their assortment of nuclear weapons, or even their conventional capabilities, it’s their ability to engage in indirect action strategies and asymmetric responses across multiple domains (Boston & Massicot, 2017).

Russia’s most recent asymmetric tactic has been to train young German militant right-wing extremists (neo-Nazis) in close quarters combat, weapons handling, and explosives ("German far-right youth receive combat training," 2020). Furthermore, Germany has recently decided to disband and overhaul its special forces unit, the KSK, because it was discovered to be heavily infiltrated by neo-Nazis (Bennhold, 2020). While these two incidents may not be related, they can’t be dismissed because both are connected to the same far-right group. This might suggest Russia is covertly responsible, or at least played a role in the infiltration of Germany’s special forces, rendering them combat ineffective.

What is troubling is that the KSK is a unit that has worked side-by-side with U.S. units throughout the world, providing them multiple opportunities to influence and recruit the U.S.’s military personnel. And if Germany’s elite special forces unit can be infiltrated and radicalized, units globally are at risk—even U.S. Army’s Green Berets.

*The New York Times* reported a former Green Beret captain was arrested for espionage. "He turned over sensitive military information and the names of fellow service members so Russia could try to recruit them" (Goldman, 2020, para. 2). Another example of U.S. radicalization is the Soldier that conspired with a neo-Nazi group to kill members of his own unit until his plan was discovered (Becket, 2020). These events prove unconventional attacks on the U.S. from any nation or terrorist group are possible, especially with the ease of contact through social media platforms.

**Domestic Threats**

The U.S. must remain vigilant about protecting its diversity, not just from international threats, but also from domestic racial hate groups, religious extremists, and gangs (Johnson, 2011; Myers, 2020). From Timothy McVeigh to Nidal Hasan, radicalized veterans with weapons and combat training pose a danger to society. Violent and racist groups such as the "Boogaloo" and "09A" continue to thrive, and are known to be supported by several radicalized military service members (Myers, 2020).
The Way Ahead

The U.S. Army has put programs in place to ensure all Soldiers, Civilians, and Family members, regardless of race, gender, or background are protected against bigotry and prejudice. The Army currently has the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program to prevent discrimination and provide proactive training and education, and the Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention (SHARP) program to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assaults. Both of these programs work to ensure a healthy, fair, and cooperative work environment so the U.S. Army can continue to fulfill its mission of protecting the Nation at full readiness.

Furthermore, in order to promote fairness and remove any conscious or unconscious bias from promotion board panel members, the U.S. Army has redacted all information regarding race, ethnicity, and gender from both officer and enlisted record briefs. As suggested by Sgts. Maj. Jason Payne and Francine Chapman, “These steps toward a blind centralized evaluation system (BCES) will curb personal preferences based on Soldiers’ physical characteristics, promote diversity amongst the Army’s enlisted and officer population, and better identify the most talented individuals for advancement based on merit” (Payne & Chapman, 2020, para. 1).

Finally, to protect military personnel against radicalization from hate groups, religious extremists, and gangs, Congress is proposing a program in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act bill that would track extremist behavior and gang affiliations (Myers, 2020). This program would create a database that tracks investigations and criminal actions conducted by each radical organization to better monitor what’s happening in the U.S. military.

Conclusion

As the U.S. gears up for a return of the great power competition, the margin for error against near-peer adversaries grows smaller. According to author Jason Lyall, who studied 850 armies over the span of 250 years, “...victory on the battlefield over the past 200 years has usually gone to the most inclusive armies, not the largest or best-equipped ones. Inclusion, in other words, is good for military effectiveness” (Lyall, 2020, para. 2).

Diversity, like any other tool or system, must be maintained and exercised frequently. It should be celebrated and practiced from the most junior-ranking private, to the highest-ranking officer, and protected from those who do not share the Army Values. By investing in its people, the Army will continue to overcome all challenges and accomplish any mission.

References

Bennhold, K. (2020). Germany disbands special forces group tainted by far-right extremists. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/world/europe/german-special-forces-far-right.html?fbclid=IwAR3eSgCAGAD4HJ0paMfc-bgPcqUPLoUxS1g9nvWMq0IPQ9YzjRh2hamRY

From left: Tuskegee airmen Marcellus G. Smith and Rosco C. Brown conduct maintenance on a Class 44-C P-SC#11 aircraft at Ramitelli, Italy, March 1945. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)


---

**Sgt. Maj. Alexander Aguilastratt** is the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) liaison to Headquarters, Department of the Army and the TRADOC Project Inclusion sergeant major. Aguilastratt previously served as the Charlie Squadron, Asymmetric Warfare Group’s command sergeant major as well as Joint Task Force-Bravo command sergeant major.

---

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.