

Civil-Military Module Discussion Questions..... 1

Introduction

Richard H. Kohn, “Six Myths about Civil-Military Relations in the United States” 2

Civil-Military Relations and Civilian Control

Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), Pgs. 1-14, 199-207, 225-233, 239-248 3

The Gap between the Military and Society

Phil Klay, “The Warrior at the Mall,” *New York Times*, April 14, 2018, p. SR1 4

Participating in Politics and National Debate in Retirement

Gen Martin E. Dempsey, “Letter to the Editor: Military leaders do not belong at political conventions,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 2016 and “Keep Your Politics Private, My Fellow Generals and Admirals” *Defense One*, August 1, 2016; James Joyner, “Generals and Political Interventions in American History,” August 4, 2016; Eric T. Olson, “Don’t Box Retired Generals Out of Politics,” *Defense One*, August 11, 2016; Michael A. Robinson, “Danger Close: Military Politicization and Elite Credibility,” *War on the Rocks*, August 21, 2018, [https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/danger-close-military-politicization-and-elite-credibility/...](https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/danger-close-military-politicization-and-elite-credibility/) 5

Resignation

Peter Feaver, “Should Senior Military Officers Resign in Protest if Obama Disregards Their Advice,” *FP [Foreign Policy]*, October 7, 2014; Lt. Gen. James M. Dubik (Ret.), “On principled resignation: A response,” *Ibid.*, October 14, 2014; Peter Feaver, “Military Resignation in Protest Is Still a Bad Idea,” *Ibid.*, October 24, 2014..... 6

Civil-Military Relations with a Retired General as Secretary of Defense

Jim Golby, “In the Wake of Chaos: Civil-Military Relations Under Secretary Jim Mattis,” *War on the Rocks*, February 4, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/02/in-the-wake-of-chaos-civil-military-relations-under-secretary-jim-mattis/>; Peter Feaver, “Elephants in the Room: Mattis was the Best Secretary of Defense Trump Could Have Had,” *Foreign Policy*, February 12, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/12/mattis-was-the-best-secretary-of-defense-trump-could-have-had/>..... 7

Military Cooperation and Trust

Richard H. Kohn, “Civil-Military Behaviors that Build Trust” 8

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Civil-Military Module Discussion Questions

1. Your oath of loyalty and fealty is to the Constitution, and does not, like the oath of enlisted members, include language about obeying orders. Yet the Constitution clearly establishes the President as Commander-in-Chief and with that goes the presumption of obedience by everyone junior in the chain of command. The system has clear guidance on how to respond to illegal orders. What about “unwise” orders? In dealing with civilian leaders, can your oath to support the Constitution override requests, hints, directions, directives, or even orders that you deem unwise? Under what circumstances and with what processes can senior military people deal with orders they find problematic?
2. Leaving the question of legality, what do you do as a senior leader about orders that you find immoral or unethical? Do you have any recourse, e.g., resign? Quietly or in protest? Can you ask to be relieved or retired in these, or any other, circumstances? What other circumstances?
3. Is it possible to be caught between the executive, legislative, and/or judicial branches of government in a situation or situations in which legal and constitutional authorities over the military are in conflict? Think of some situations; what would you do?
4. Thinking about the so-called civil-military gap, how can we celebrate the distinctiveness of military culture without appearing to disparage civilian culture? Are there aspects of military culture today that need to be adjusted to better track with civilian society? What are they? Are there aspects of military culture today that need to be protected from pressures to conform to civilian society? What are they?
5. How do we go about lessening the suspicion, distrust, tension, and even outright conflict between senior military leaders and the top political leaders, elected and appointed--and still fulfill our responsibilities under various laws pertaining to positions we might hold, to provide advice and execute orders? What avenues are appropriate/inappropriate in circumstances when senior military leaders believe that the civilian leadership is preventing them from providing their professional advice candidly and privately?
6. What responsibilities do senior leaders have to mentor officers under their command on civil-military relations? What venues could be used for that? How could senior leaders go about it?
7. A bedrock of civil-military relations is an a-political, or non-partisan, military. How does that square with retired flag officers endorsing political candidates? Are such endorsements proper for some ranks and not for others? Is there a distinction between endorsing in local elections, and getting involved in local community service--like school boards--that some might consider "political" if not partisan? How about running themselves for office or speaking out/sharing expertise and perspectives on national defense and security? Would that be permissible? Why or why not?

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Originally a lecture for a two-day seminar for senior flag officers on civil-military relations held at UNC-Chapel Hill and sponsored by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, this essay will be published in slightly different form as the introduction to *Civil-Military Relations in the United States* (London: Routledge, 2019). *Not to be circulated, cited, or quoted without permission of the author.*

Six Myths about Civil-Military Relations in the United States

Richard H. Kohn
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Very few people today think about civil-military relations until something out-of-the-ordinary occurs. A top general clashes in public or in congressional testimony with the President. Or the President fires a prominent four-star commander or chief for malfeasance of some kind. Even fewer Americans have heard of civil-military relations or know what it means. While one of the least studied subjects, it can be the most important aspect of war and military affairs, and thus national security.

A chief reason is that the substance of civil-military relations is extremely broad. It encompasses the entire set connections between a military and its host society, from the interactions of military bases with surrounding communities to consultations between civilian political leaders and their most senior military officers. All of that affects national defense in peace and in war, in ways great and small. For example, civil-military relations are deeply involved in cyberwar, where the government has only begun to address the problems of agency responsibilities, command and control, and legal authorities for defense and attack in cyberspace against civilian businesses and public infrastructures. Civil-military relations pervade the campaign against terrorism, in the controversies over government surveillance or drone killings of American citizens. Cyber and terrorism revisit age-old debates about the balance between liberty and security, which for countries with political systems like that of the United States, have always been central to civil-military relations.

What follows, as an introduction to the subject, began as a lecture in 2012 to a workshop for senior American generals and admirals. In many iterations since for civilian and military audiences, the text has undergone revisions as I've gathered more evidence and refined the central message, which is that much of our understanding of civil-military relations is myth. Long experience convinces me that what most people (including the military) know or think they know about the subject is simplistic or actually untrue. Mark Twain supposedly remarked that "It's not what you don't know that hurts you. It's what you know that just ain't so." And in national defense, what we know that just ain't so, can be extremely dangerous.

* * * * *

The *first myth* is that *everything is fine in the relationship* between the top military and political officials in the government. This is demonstrably false. There have been problems throughout American history, but particularly since World War II. The relationship has been messy, filled with mutual misunderstanding and suspicion. Historians frequently mention Abraham Lincoln's disagreements with his generals but rarely mention bad blood between cabinet secretaries and their most senior unformed subordinates. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's distant and dysfunctional relationship with the generals and admirals had many precedents well over a century old; two commanding generals moved their headquarters out of Washington to escape their cabinet bosses, and the first Chief of Naval Operations rose over the heads of all the serving admirals at the time, so terrible was the Navy secretary's working relationship with them. Presidents from John Adams to Barack Obama have distrusted their generals, occasionally clashed with them and occasionally relieved them of their posts. Mr. Obama fired two American commanders in Afghanistan and declined to put his most prominent general, David Petraeus, in the top military job. The problems, while episodic, have been consistent.¹

A flag officer once questioned whether this tension, even the conflict, was relevant, since our system "works:" the U.S. has been most frequently successful in war and in defending itself, civilians can fire generals, and we can go on about our business. That's certainly true enough. We have plenty of generals and admirals. We fire them rarely, and there are always others available to take their place. The problem, however, is that the distrust and discontinuity in the relationship have impeded communication, produced poor decisions, warped policies, and on occasion harmed the nation's effectiveness in wartime. Perhaps the most blatant example was Douglas MacArthur's attempt to widen the Korean War and undermine the Truman Administration's decisions, including not to send American troops to the Yalu River, which MacArthur, of course, did, leading to a disastrous defeat. Some forty years later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff publicly resisted the 1992 effort to repeal the ban on open homosexual service. This was as open and egregious (if less dangerous) a rebellion as MacArthur's, and rebellion is the right word. Blocking President Bill Clinton so weakened him politically as to unhinge his administration at its inception. So everything is not fine in the relationship.²

* * * * *

A *second myth* follows closely upon the first: that civilian control of the military is safe, sound, and inviolate, or, in other words, *No Coup, No Problem*. We seem to believe that the Constitution assures civilian control when in fact it does not. The Constitution *intends* civilian control of the military, but doesn't *assure* it. In his memoirs, Harry Truman

¹For a survey of conflict during American wars, see Mathew Moten, *Presidents and Their Generals: An American History of Command in War* (New York, 2014).

²See Richard H. Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today," *Naval War College Review* 55 (2002): 9-59.

commented about firing Douglas MacArthur for publicly opposing the limiting of the war in Korea to that peninsula: “If there is one basic element in our Constitution, it is civilian control of the military,” Truman wrote. “If I allowed him to defy the civil authorities in this manner, I myself would be violating my oath to uphold and defend the Constitution.”³

Certainly civilian control has been embraced by all Americans from the beginning of the Republic to the present; it is the foundation for the relationship between the military and the government. The framers of the Constitution structured the national government explicitly for civilian control. They believed, however, that nothing could physically restrain an army. A standing army in peacetime might seize power or act as the instrument for someone else to do so. Or so history suggested. Yet in spite of inserting all sorts of devices in the document to restrain the military, all involving essentially shared and overlapping civilian powers, in the end the framers divided authority over the military so that one branch of the government could not use the military against the others. The military couldn’t even exist without explicit agreement by civilians, much less act on its own, unless it ignored or overthrew the Constitution.

Now divided and shared powers, as we know from recent history, can be a recipe for paralysis or conflict between the branches, or for irrational policies and decisions. Budget “sequestration”—the 2011 law that capped the budgets of all agencies of the federal government at an arbitrary figure for ten years and required percentage cuts across the board—is the most blatant recent example. But it is not the first instance of the use and abuse of the military (which accounted for half the cuts under sequestration) for struggles between the President and Congress. “The Constitution is an invitation to struggle,” wrote one scholar.⁴

Divided and shared power also permits the Pentagon to play the executive and legislative branches off against each other, something frequent since World War II, or to limit the control either branch exercises over the military. The President is commander in chief, but time and again has had to negotiate with his military leadership in order to get his way, as President George W. Bush felt he had to do to get his chiefs to agree to the surge in Iraq in 2006 lest they oppose it or undermine it in some way and Congress withhold

³*Memoirs by Harry S. Truman, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope* (New York, 1956), 503.

⁴John T. Rourke and Russell Farnen, “War, Presidents, and the Constitution,” 18 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18(1998):513; Christopher J. Deering, Congress, the President, and Military Policy, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1988):136–47.

funding.⁵ Presidents negotiated with the military during the Cold War in order to get support for arms-control agreements with the Soviets so the Senate would ratify the treaties. Mr. Obama negotiated the Afghan surge with his military. He negotiated the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. It took him almost two years into his administration, and it succeeded only in the legislative equivalent of the "dead of the night," a special session of the lame-duck Congress in late 2010.⁶ Similarly difficult has been the opening of combat duty to women. In truth, the pictures of the chain of command that grace the walls of all military headquarters ought to include the Capitol building on an even level with that of the President of the United States.

What has made civilian control work has been, in my judgment, at least four factors in American history: first, reverence for the Constitution and the primacy of law that undergirds society; second, geographic separation from Europe, which allowed the country to avoid a substantial standing military until the Cold War with its nuclear weapons and their delivery by air, which diminished the safety of ocean boundaries; third, reliance in war on a policy of mobilization using citizen soldiers in the form of state militias, reservists, and volunteers, and later conscription; and fourth, the professionalism of the military itself—its willing subordination as a core value of the profession of arms in the United States. But all four of these factors have weakened to a greater or lesser extent in the last seventy-five years.

While the lampooning of lawyers in American culture goes all the way back to Shakespeare's day, the reverence for law, including the Constitution and judges, has declined in the United States. Respect for the Supreme Court, as revealed most recently in polling, has also lessened because some recent decisions have seemed starkly partisan. Law, lawyers, judges, and the legal system have eroded in credibility and respect, certainly since the Warren Court's epochal decisions and the opposition they provoked.

⁵Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008* (New York, 2008), 286–89; George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York, 2010), 375-378; Peter D. Feaver, "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35 (2011):89–124. According to Stephen Hadley, Bush's National Security Adviser, "If the president had just decided, without . . . bringing the military on board, " it would have produced "a split between the president and his military in wartime. Not good. That's a constitutional crisis. But more to the point, Congress--who did not like the surge and was appalled that the president would do this--would have brought forward all those military officers who'd had any reservation about the surge in order to defeat it. And the president would have announced his surge, but he'd have never gotten it funded." Quoted in Peter Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and al-Qaeda* (New York, 2011), 282-283.

⁶The best description of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell to date is Chuck Todd, *The Stranger: Barack Obama in the White House* (New York, 2014), 184-203.

The second weakened pillar of support for civilian control of the military has been a permanent military of real size since the beginning of the Cold War, ironically the result of nuclear weapons and air power, two innovations the U.S. itself pioneered, and the transformation of the United States into the guarantor of security and stability in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.

Third of all, citizen soldiers. How many people in our society are conscious of the obligation to serve if the nation calls? All of the military, including the National Guard and the Reserves, while they call themselves citizen soldiers, are resolutely proud of their professionalism, and when surveyed about their values, attitudes, opinions, and perspectives in 1998-99 by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, they expressed views hardly different from those of the regular military.⁷ We have no active planning for mobilization beyond the callup of the Reserves and the National Guard. The possibility of drafting American youth to create a traditionally citizen military has all but died.

Last, the willing subordination of the military itself to civilian control has also weakened. The entire military subscribes to civilian control, believes in civilian control, but like the rest of society, many in the military sometimes have a dim understanding of the behaviors and attitudes necessary to foster and support it. People in the military, and sometimes the armed services as institutions, have engaged in behaviors that—all through American history, but particularly in the last two generations—dilute civilian control.⁸

Of course any attempt to overthrow the government is unthinkable. Indeed, only a couple of plausible scenarios have ever been advanced that imagined the possibility, and they're farfetched.⁹ In the United States, power and authority are too separated, divided, shared, and distributed amongst national, state, and local governments, for anybody to *control* anything (not to mention the power of the private sector to act independently and to influence government at all levels). This causes constant tension, competition, suspicion, misunderstanding, and outright conflict in many areas of national life, civil-military relations among them.

Yet, the absence of a revolt has not prevented occasional defiance or regular instances of passive resistance, evasion, or manipulation by the military establishment and, of course,

⁷Ole R. Holsti, "Of Chasms and Convergences: Attitudes and Beliefs of Civilians and Military Elites at the Start of a New Millennium," *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, ed. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 28, 33, 3538-39, 48-49, 52-54, 55, 58, 60, 61, 64, 65, 67, 68-69, 71, 72-73, 76-77, 78-79, 81, 83, 86-87, 88, 89, 91.

⁸Kohn, "Erosion of Civilian Control," 23-33; Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

⁹Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II, *Seven Days in May* (New York, 1962); Charles J. Dunlap, Jr, "Origins of the American Coup of 2012," *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly* 22 (1992):2-20.

by the politicians of the military. From the beginning, beneath subordination, there has often been the kind of distrust that prevents civil–military relations from working in a healthy fashion. Congress and state governors distrusted George Washington and the Continental Army throughout the War for Independence. On at least one occasion, the officer corps teetered on the brink of outright mutiny. Andrew Jackson, appointed a regular army general after the War of 1812, defied the Secretary of War and wiped out an Indian tribe in Florida, precipitating a crisis that led to the purchase of what was then foreign territory. During the Mexican War, James K. Polk so distrusted his chief general, Winfield Scott, that Polk acted as his own Secretary of War and watched Scott closely. For his part, Scott ran for the presidency twice in the 1840s, then in 1852 actually wrested the Whig party nomination from his commander and chief, all the while on active duty as a general, and during two elections, the Commanding General of the entire Army.

During the Cold War, the services actively fought each other over unification and contested Truman’s budget limits. The admirals revolted against the administration’s cancellation of the super carrier *United States* in 1949, a clash that resulted in several sackings. Eisenhower, certainly the most knowledgeable modern president about the military in America, replaced a number of his chiefs. The Army leadership under him attempted everything short of open revolt to undermine the policy of emphasizing air, naval, and nuclear weapons. In his last year in office, Eisenhower considered firing his Air Force chief. At one point, he called the behavior of some of his senior military leaders “damn near treason.”¹⁰ Eisenhower first labeled Richard Nixon's secretary of defense, Melvin Laird, "too devious," but after a meeting with him, Ike told Nixon "Of course Laird is devious, but for anyone who has to run the Pentagon, and get along with Congress, that is a valuable asset."¹¹ Kennedy, too, had to fire some of his military leaders. They had opposed Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's reforms of military policy, strategy, and budget procedures. The bad blood between McNamara and the military antedated the Vietnam War but escalated dramatically during that conflict, spreading into the Nixon years with a President who so distrusted his own secretary of defense, and he the President (and the military distrusting both), that, according to the official history, "The secretary, the White House, and the JCS would deliberately keep each other in the dark about their actions or intentions."¹²

From the military’s revolt over open homosexual service in the early 1990s through Donald Rumsfeld’s sour relationship with the services and beyond, conflict has flared regularly, to include the struggle over strategy in the Afghanistan War from its beginning

¹⁰Robert J. Watson, *Into the Missile Age, 1956–1960* [*History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense*, v. 4] (Washington, DC, 1997), 775.

¹¹Richard Nixon, *RN: the Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1978), 289.

¹²Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969-1973* [*Secretary of Defense Historical Series Volume VII*] (Washington, 2015), 28-29. See also 59, 549-50.

in 2001 to the drawdown that began in 2011. The most consistent conflict and mutual manipulation has been over budgets. One officer told me in the 1990s that his job in legislative liaison was to go up on Capitol Hill and restore two billion dollars to his service's budget that the Secretary of Defense had eliminated.

While conflict has diminished in the last ten years, it has become endemic. In 2015, responding to a question about “the tension between civilian decision makers and their military advisors in making wartime decisions,” the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Martin Dempsey, reflected after some four years in the job that “the system is actually designed to create that friction in decision making.”¹³ Furthermore, the tension is more visible, partly because Congress and the press are always trying to lure the military into expressing disagreement with executive branch bosses, forcing generals and admirals to choose their words carefully in testimony. When military witnesses do practice such caution, they're sometimes accused of lying or holding back their real views; and if they do disagree, then they are criticized for undermining their civilian superiors (and on occasion enraging them). So the senior military in our system is damned either way. Dempsey was accused of being a Democrat general when supporting the White House and in September 2014 was widely bashed for contradicting presidential statements (which he did not do) on using ground troops to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. During the prior administration, the liberal organization MoveOn.org smeared General David Petraeus, testifying before the House and Senate after he took over in the Iraq “surge,” of being General “Betray Us.” The Democrats were on his case consistently probing for disagreement between him and the Bush Administration. Suspicions were so aroused that the General did not clear his testimony with the White House because that itself would have undermined his credibility.¹⁴ Imagine a general in charge of a war who cannot clear his testimony with his boss. It was an amazing scene, but one repeated in minor ways for many years.

Military leaders have returned this distrust. Douglas MacArthur, the army chief of staff at the depth of the Great Depression, recounted in his memoirs that he became so frustrated, in a meeting at the White House with the President and the Secretary of War (before the President had a Secretary of Defense), that he, MacArthur, “[s]poke recklessly and said something to the general effect that when we lost the next war and a American boy lying in the mud with an enemy bayonet through his belly and an enemy foot on his dying throat spat out his last curse, I wanted the name not to be MacArthur but Roosevelt.” Roosevelt, “[g]rew livid,” MacArthur remembered. ““You must not talk that way to the President,’ [Roosevelt] roared.”¹⁵ MacArthur recognized immediately the truth of that,

¹³From the Chairman: An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, 78 (3d Quarter 2015):5.

¹⁴Woodward, *War Within*, 385–88; Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008*, (New York, 2009), 243-251.

¹⁵Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York, 1964), 101.

said he was sorry, apologized, and offered his resignation. Roosevelt in his cavalier way brushed off the offer; MacArthur left with the Secretary of War and vomited on the White House steps. The General recalled that Roosevelt never again consulted him on anything of substance even though MacArthur remained Chief of Staff of the Army and became one of the four major theater commanders of World War II.¹³

Tension and distrust continue down to today. In the last two decades, a surprising number of four-star officials have been relieved or were forced to retire early three Chiefs of Staff of the Air Force, a Commander of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, a Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (NATO), two commanders of Central Command, a Pacific Air Force commander, and two commanders in Afghanistan. There was in 2013 the clumsy retirement a few months early of the legendary Marine General James Mattis. In 1995, the chief of naval operations committed suicide while on active duty in the office. In the George W. Bush Administration, a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was not renewed for a second two-year term.

In 2007 I asked a colleague who wrote a book on the Secretaries of Defense, an office created in late 1940s, whether any secretary had ever embarked on the office trusting the military. He said no.¹⁶ Leon Panetta, Mr. Obama's first CIA director and second Secretary of Defense, told people in the White House in 2009, "No Democratic President can go against the military advice, especially if he asked for it." Panetta's attitude was, "So just do it. Do what they say."¹⁷

Even so, over time, there's been enough divisiveness to make cooperation and collaboration quite difficult, sometimes to the detriment of sound policy and effective decision-making. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recalls in his memoir that at one point, General Petraeus said "with half a chuckle, 'You know I could make your life miserable.'"¹⁸ Gates was struck by the cheekiness of the remark, but any observer of civil-military relations could agree that what Petraeus said was true. The very fact that he would say it was an implicit threat. Earlier, President Obama had told Gates, in the midst of the review of Afghanistan strategy, "I'm tired of negotiating with the military."¹⁹ Former congressman Jim Marshall, the son and grandson of army generals and himself a decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam War, summed it up in this way: "Those of us

¹⁶This exchange with Charles A. Stevenson, author of *Warriors and Politicians: US Civil-Military Relations Under Stress* (Washington, DC, 2006) and *SECDEF: The Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC, 2006) took place at West Point at the annual Social Sciences Department Senior Conference in June 2007.

¹⁷Woodward, *War Within*, 247.

¹⁸Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York, 2014), 68.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 382.

who have experienced both sides of the civil-military relationship see a wide gulf of misunderstanding, dislike, and distrust. . . .”²⁰

* * * * *

A *third myth* is that a clear bright line exists between military and civilian responsibilities, in peace and in war. The civilians decide policy and make big decisions on budgets, interventions, strategy, and the like while the military advises and then executes. One knowledgeable journalist of military affairs described it this way: “The military’s view is, tell us where you want to go and leave the driving to us.”²¹ The problem is that this has rarely been American practice historically and it isn’t today. Often, civilians haven’t decided on their goals and objectives. “Elected officials are hardwired to ask for options first and then reverse-engineer objective,” Dempsey observed.²² They want to know as exactly as possible the price in blood and treasure beforehand so that they can calculate the cost–benefit ratio. Or they want assurances of success. If they don’t get one or the other (or both), or if they receive answers from their military advisers that are unduly hedged, politicians may, and often have, changed the policy and the strategy accordingly, and unpredictably. The effect on a military commander responsible for success, with history looking over his shoulder and responsibility for the lives of American children and grandchildren, can be daunting.

In his thoughtful book on his command in Iraq, General George Casey remembered no specific directives from his civilian bosses when he took over in 2004. He had to research his own mission from presidential speeches, from other documents, and from meetings with various officials. He did not recall a four-page list of some ten goals that his superior officer, the US Central Command commander General John Abizaid, had given him, perhaps because Casey and Abizaid were so close; they talked every day and their close friendship and collaboration went back years. So Casey would not necessarily remember such a document. But his uncertainty was not as unusual as one might expect. “Years of experience at the strategic level had taught me that the higher up you go, the less guidance you receive.”²³

²⁰Foreword, *American Civil–Military Relations: The Soldiers and the State in a New Era*, ed. Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, 2009), x. See also biographies at https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/james_marshall/400254 and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Marshall_\(Georgia_politician\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Marshall_(Georgia_politician)).

²¹James Kitfield of the *National Journal* made this remark at the Conference on the Military and Civilian Society, First Division Museum, Cantigny, Wheaton, Ill. (Oct. 27–29, 1999). I attended and was struck by the insight of the analogy.

²²“From the Chairman: An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey,” 5.

²³George W. Casey, Jr, *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom July 2004–February 2007*, (Washington, DC, 2012), 6. I read a draft of the memoir at General Casey’s invitation and discussed the manuscript with him in person.

Going back into the nineteenth century, the best example of this disjunction between the military and its civilian overseer was Lincoln, who began the Civil War without a strategy. He soon adopted army Commanding General Winfield Scott's Anaconda plan. The next year, the President expanded the goals of the war from restoring the Union and defeating Southern armies to crushing the Confederacy and abolishing slavery. Many Union army officers opposed the new objectives. At times, Lincoln haunted the telegraph office, ordering troops around himself and telling his commanders what to do. Even after he appointed Ulysses Grant as chief general in the eastern theater, Lincoln had his own agent—a presidential spy in effect—traveling with Grant and reporting on what Grant was doing and thinking. Grant was one of the smartest generals in American history; he welcomed that person and treated him with candor and transparency.²⁴

A century and a half later, General Stanley McChrystal remembered meeting only once with President Obama before leaving for Afghanistan, and in that meeting *not* discussing strategy. Of course, after General McChrystal's assessment was leaked, President Obama changed the strategy and the timetable of the war.²⁵

The truth of post World War II history is that nuclear weapons and the limited conflicts of the Cold War increased the oversight and intrusion of political leaders into military affairs, into what had been, during World War II and before, the domain of military authority. The 1964 satirical film *Dr. Strangelove*, about the outbreak of a nuclear war provoked by iconic caricatures of deranged generals Jack D. Ripper and Buck Turgidson, dramatized the reasoning. But real life experiences were equally influential in producing increasingly restrictive rules of engagement imposed on military operations. Early in the Korean War, four Air Force jets set out to bomb an airfield in northeastern North Korea. Because of dense cloud cover, the two that didn't abort navigated by dead reckoning. Upon finding a break in the clouds where they expected to find the target (it was the right timing), they dropped down and attacked the airfield. Unfortunately, it was a Soviet installation dozens of miles inside the Soviet border.²⁶ Presidents have imposed strict rules of engagement at the cost of considerable civil–military friction, in an effort to synchronize policy with strategy and strategy with operations, and sometimes even with tactics. When those rules are unclear or civilians do not communicate honestly with

²⁴Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York, 2002), 42-45.

²⁵Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York, 2013), 288–89. For a description of the review of the strategy for Afghanistan in the fall of 2009, see Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York, 2010), 144–352; and Gates, *Duty*, 352–85.

²⁶Entries for Oct. 10–13, 1950, *The Three Wars of Lt. Gen. George E. Stratemeyer: His Korean War Diary*, ed. William T. Y'Blood (Washington, DC, 1999), 226–31; Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950–1953* (Washington, DC, 1961), 142n.

military leaders--as occurred in the bombing of North Vietnam in the latter stages of that war--military commanders can be caught in the middle, as was Seventh Air Force General John Lavelle in 1972. He was fired and retired as a two-star general.²⁷ Civilian control empowers the politicians to make the rules and forces the military to follow them. Senior officers who recognize the changed circumstances since World War II try to help the civilians as much as possible in order to get workable, effective orders.

The most powerful constraint on the civilians, beyond the need for military effectiveness, is political. In the last thirty years, the military has risen to be the most trusted and respected institution in American society. This prestige and legitimacy put considerable restraint on the civilians. They know it; they're jealous of it; and they fear it. During the 1990s, when Mr. Clinton tried to impose open homosexual service on the armed services, he weakened himself enormously. Though he intervened overseas with more force more often than any of his predecessors, it was almost always after negotiation with his military advisors. One heard at the time that a sardonic joke, perhaps apocryphal, circulated in the Pentagon in the middle of the 1990s to the effect, "The answer is 500,000 troops in ten years. Now what's the question?" More than one official has admitted that Clinton feared those in uniform.²⁸

The caution with which presidents deal with their military advisers and commanders brings up a corollary myth to the division between civilian and military responsibilities: that the military should push back in such a fashion, even speaking out publicly, even to the point of either threatening or actually "resigning" if they oppose orders that promise disaster, or are professionally untenable, or are immoral or unethical in a senior officer's view. This idea is articulated regularly among officers and sometimes in print in military journals. The problem is *whose* definition of disaster and *whose* system of morality? The implications for civilian control and civil-military cooperation after a four-star chief or field commander "resigns" over a critical issue, with or without going public about it, are almost certain to damage civil-military relations and erode military professionalism. Few senior officers think about such circumstances, expecting that they'll know and react appropriately were such a situation to arise.

I asked General Curtis LeMay, with whom I had a friendly relationship when I was Chief of Air Force History in the 1980s, if he'd ever considered "resigning." He clashed frequently with his civilian superiors when he was Air Force chief of staff in the 1960s. Given the implications of resignation, officers' obligation to the profession, their duty to

²⁷Mark Clodfelter, *Violating Reality: the Lavelle Affair, Nixon, and Parsing the Truth* (Washington, DC, 2016).

²⁸Kohn, "Erosion of Civilian Control," 18–19, 32–33. A useful review of civil–military relations during the Clinton years is David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York, 2001).

the people under their care and command, LeMay responded with words to the effect, “No. I knew they’d just get some toady in there. I was going to stay and fight.”²⁹

Military officers also have an obligation to their oath and the civilian control implied in that oath. There’s no tradition of resignation in the American armed forces and for good reason. The very threat chills civil–military relations, destroying any trust in a relationship that contains inherent distrust. Resignation pits an officer’s judgment of a policy or decision against that of his or her civilian boss. The role of the military is to advise and then execute a decision provided the orders do not violate law.

Furthermore, “resignation,” even the discussion of it, much less the threat of it, is likely to cause a political problem for the politicians involved, and they know it; thus a flag officer under consideration for appointment to a sensitive position at the highest level is sometimes asked directly or indirectly to discuss under what circumstances he or she might resign, or to reveal their political “affiliation” as a way to investigate the officer’s comfort with the policies of an administration. In other words, politicians have for some years now been vetting senior military people for appointments on the basis of whether they will be loyal or whether they might resign and go public with disagreements they might have with a decision or policy.

Many officers chafe at the subordination of the senior leadership to civilian policies and decisions. On occasion, one hears officers claim that their oath is to the Constitution, not the political leadership (the wording is different than the oath that enlisted people take). The distinction first became prominent in 1951 when Douglas MacArthur used it as an excuse for his public opposition to Truman’s Korean War policies. What he ignored was the clear conflict between swearing or affirming “to support and defend the Constitution” and “bear true, faith and allegiance” to it, while, at the same time, refusing or evading the orders of the top civilians in the chain of command, or the laws passed by Congress and signed by the President. One cannot have it both ways: supporting the Constitution while ignoring or disobeying legal orders, or laws, or the policies set by the President, is simply inconsistent.

Thinking otherwise erodes civilian control, undermines military professionalism, and can lead to enormous dysfunction in the civil–military relationship. Yet the thought endures for some in uniform. So the ugly truth is that the only differentiation between civilian and military responsibility is what the civilians choose to accept or allow the military to control. That authority can be revoked at any time if it’s not written into law. And in any event, the differentiation of responsibility and authority has changed over time, and is inherently situational.

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²⁹During the 1980s, I periodically met with General LeMay at his request when he visited Washington as the member of the governing board of the National Geographic Society.

A *fourth myth* comes in two versions: first, that the military is nonpartisan and apolitical; second, that the military is political and politicized. Both of these are true, and both are false.

Part of the ambiguity turns on the definition of *political*. The military functions as the neutral servant of the state. Yet officers know and on occasion practice politics: in the promotion of their careers, advancing or protecting their branch or community within their service, championing a weapons system, or their armed service itself—to name only a few examples. Beginning in the late 19th century, when the services expanded their roles in national defense, embracing new technologies and doctrines, their need for more money from Congress and thus public support increased.³⁰ The large standing military establishment for the Cold War intensified both the need for larger budgets and competition between the services to capture that funding. As national security rose in importance, it sometimes crowded out other issues as an arena for domestic partisan combat. Americans are not so careful to distinguish bureaucratic or national security politics from partisan politics; the line between them has in recent decades become somewhat murky anyway. When the Triangle Institute for Security Studies surveyed civil and military elites and the general public on the gap between the military and society, one question asked whether the military would seek to avoid carrying out orders it opposed. Two-thirds of the public judged that such would occur at least some of the time, and a sizable minority of the officers themselves said that it would be likely, suggesting that both saw the military to some extent as just another bureaucracy practicing the politics of self-interest.³¹

Over the last three generations, the perception has grown that the officer corps is not only political but has become partisan; survey data indicates less identification as independents and greater affinity for the Republicans. To a degree, this is unsurprising—inherent in the conservatism of the military. When lives and the fate of the nation are involved, a certain cautious skepticism and conservatism is not only natural but

³⁰Allan R. Millett, *The American Political System and Civilian Control of the Military: A Historical Perspective* (Mershon Center Position papers in the Policy Sciences, Number Four, April 1979) (Columbus, OH, 1979), 19, 27-29.

³¹Paul Gronke and Peter D. Feaver, “Uncertain Confidence: Civilian and Military Attitudes about Civil-Military Relations,” in *Soldiers and Civilians*, ed. Feaver and Kohn, 154-57. In the Princeton Survey Research Associates telephone survey of the public (1,001 individuals over age 18) in the fall of 1998 commissioned by the Triangle Institute, 9 percent answered “all of the time,” 21.1 percent “most of the time,” and 38.2 percent “some of the time.” See Triangle Institute for Security Studies, 2003, “Survey on the Military in the Post Cold War Era, 1999”, <http://hdl.handle.net/1902.29/D-31625> Odum Institute; Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina [Distributor] V1 [Version] at http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?globalId=hdl:1902.29/D-31625&studyListingIndex=1_4c184fe10a520f873284ebe31cda

functional. However Vietnam accelerated the trend: bitter conflict with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations over how to prosecute the conflict, and in its aftermath, the abandonment of the military by the Democrats, the embrace of military spending by the Republicans, and their outreach to the military as a core constituency.

Contributing to the politicization of the military has been the growing salience of national security in American life beginning in World War II. A huge step occurred when Truman fired MacArthur and the military leadership publicly endorsed the Administration's policy of limiting the Korean War. Most memorably, Omar Bradley, the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, called expanding the conflict to attack China would "in the opinion of the Joint Chiefs . . . involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."³² The hearings were a politicizing event, and many chairmen since have found that avoiding the appearance of politicization quite challenging.

The most dramatic break with past tradition burst onto the scene in the election of 1992 when the most recently retired chairman, the respected and popular Admiral William Crowe, along some two dozen other retired flag officers, endorsed Bill Clinton for the presidency. Here was a direct intervention in politics, both a symptom of politicization, and a spur to more of it. In one act, Crowe took Clinton's fitness to be commander-in-chief off the table. In the next twenty years, more and more retired four stars began endorsing presidential candidates. The number has grown beyond the top rank to hundreds of retired generals and admirals. It's now typical for both parties to trot out senior retired flags in order to burnish the candidate's national-security credentials. One retired Chief of Staff of the Air Force traveled the country introducing a presidential candidate named Barack Obama. In the 1990s there were frequent reports of officers, sometimes on active duty, taking positions on the political issues of the day in private amongst their peers or in public spaces. While there is a long history of writing memoirs or articles, or speaking out, after retirement, it has rarely been explicitly partisan. Yet in much of the public's minds and politicians' thinking, the military has become an interest group that is not always scrupulously nonpartisan. In truth, many professional officers have lost sight of the necessity to be, and to appear to be, steadfastly apolitical. And politics can infect the ranks; the day after the election of 2008, a group of soldiers, officers and enlisted, apparently posted a picture of Mr. Obama at the rifle range for a target, and then destroyed the big-screen TV on which they watched the election returns.³³

Over the last half-century, military people have come to vote in higher percentages than the rest of the public. In the 1950s, during a time when Americans were drafted into the military, the Eisenhower Administration created what became the federal voter-assistance

³²*Military Situation in the Far East: Hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services and Foreign Relations*, 82d Cong. 732 (1951) (testimony of General of the Army Omar N. Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff).

³³ Email from an historian colleague, Sept. 2, 2015.

program to help military people vote because they're so often away from home. What began as an effort to make voting available grew to one making it easier, then encouraging it, and then hectoring service people to vote; every unit designates an officer to provide assistance. They can't very well tell people to vote, praising the act as a citizen's duty, and then abstain from voting themselves; officers are citizens, too, and proud of it. They take citizenship and voting seriously, knowing the direction of the country affects them personally. They devote a meaningful period of their lives, perhaps a whole career, to serving the nation.

Officer voting was not typical before World War II. Army chief of staff General George C. Marshall did not vote. Soldiers in his generation thought it was politicizing; many believed it would undermine their ability to do their duty (and besides, absentee voting was not as extensive or as convenient then). When I mention this to military audiences, an officer almost always pops up and says, "You're telling us we don't have the right to vote," or "You're telling us not to vote." I always reply, "No, you have the right. If you want to vote, go ahead. You just shouldn't discuss it in front of subordinates, peers, or superiors. Every time you go into the voting booth, recognize that you are disagreeing with George C. Marshall. Ask yourselves, since he's one of the most revered generals in American history, why you disagree with George C. Marshall, and why you're right and he's wrong."

Whatever the sources or the perceptions, politicization threatens healthy civil-military relations. If the armed services lose their reputation for being nonsectarian, nonpartisan, and non-ideological, they will lose esteem and could cease being viewed as the military of all the American people. Indeed trust and confidence in the military already divides to some extent along partisan lines, suggesting that Republicans have more confidence because they think the military is conservative and Republican.³⁴ No amount of testimony by officers that they do their duty regardless of party or personal views can diminish the impression of political bias. A partisan military will be even less trusted by presidents and congresses, further harming the candor and privacy so indispensable to civil-military consultation and collaboration in the Executive Branch, and trust in military testimony and advice in Congress. Presidents and secretaries of defense will begin to "vet" officers for their political views or loyalty to administration policies and decisions, fearing leaks or warped advice or poor implementation of decisions or even endorsement of a political opponent once the officer retires. Thoughtful officers know this. The vast majority of retired four-stars reject endorsing presidential candidates, not wanting to encourage partisanship in the ranks or misleading the public into thinking that the military is partisan. General Petraeus announced that he stopped voting when he became a two-star general. General Petraeus has a PhD in Politics (the label for political science at Princeton). He certainly understands civil-military relations, as he wrote about it his PhD

³⁴James T. Golby, "Self-Interest Misunderstood? Political Activity by Military Officers and Public Trust," Inter-University Seminar on the Armed Forces and Society Biennial Conference, Oct. 2013, Chicago IL.

dissertation in the 1980s. But I have wondered why that particular rank represented some dividing line for him to stop voting.

* * * * *

A *fifth myth* is that Americans love their military. On the surface, this seems no myth. Ours is a patriotic nation that flies the flag and honors it in all sorts of ways. The national anthem and pledge of allegiance are so central to public culture as to constitute civic religion. In annual surveys for three decades, Americans express more trust and confidence in the military than in any other American institution. Thousands of programs in government, business, and the nonprofit world offer help and benefits to veterans and their families. Federal pensions for wartime service or for families of those killed in battle go back nearly two centuries. There are special jobs program and “veteran preference” in federal hiring, even reserved parking spots for vets in local supermarkets. In 2000, one congressman, an expert on the military and later chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, told a colleague and me that virtually anything helpful to veterans flies through Congress almost automatically. Since 9/11, public honoring of soldiers and veterans have become far more vocal and virtually obligatory, even to the point of the personal salutation “thank you for your service” frequently voiced to uniformed personnel and recent veterans. The Obama administration seems to shower more praise and gratitude, more often and in more venues, than any administration in memory. As the journalist James Fallows explained, Americans, who have a “reverent but disengaged attitude toward the military,” expect the rhetoric of “Overblown, limitless praise” from politicians and the media to be routine.³⁵

³⁵James Fallows, “The Tragedy of the American Military,” *The Atlantic* (January/February 2015), <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/12/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/283516/>. See also Matt Richtel, “Please Don’t Thank Me for My Service,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2015, p. SR6. For polling, see Jeff Manza, Jennifer A. Heerwig, and Brian J. McCagbe, “Public Opinion in the ‘Age of Reagan’: Political Trends 1972-2006,” Tom W. Smith, “Trends in Confidence in Institutions, 1973-2006,” in *Social Trends in American Life: Findings from the General Social Survey since 1972*, ed. Peter V. Marsden (Princeton, 2012), 130, 138, 178-207; David C. King and Zachary Karabell, *The Generation of Trust: Public Confidence in the U.S. Military since Vietnam* (Washington, 2003); Hunter Walker, “Harvard Poll Shows Millennials Have ‘Historic Low’ Levels Of Trust In Government,” *Business Insider*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/poll-millennials-have-historically-low-levels-of-trust-in-government-2014-4>; Stephen J. Hadley and William J. Perry, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America’s National Security Needs in the 21st Century* (Washington, n.d. [2010]), 43. In a January 2015 interview with Vox, President Obama used his typically laudatory language when mentioning “the incredible valor of our troops—and I’m in awe of them every single day when I work with them.” <http://www.vox.com/a/barack-obama-interview-vox-conversation/obama-foreign-policy-transcript>.

Yet beneath the surface, the evidence is much more ambiguous. To begin with, Americans have celebrated and assisted their citizen soldiers—the people who fight our wars and then return to civilian life—far more than the professionals, who have historically suffered varying degrees of distrust and disparagement. Since the end of the draft in 1973, the citizen soldier and professional soldier have become conflated in the public mind and even amongst some in the military, as when a Marine major insisted to me in the late 1990s, after a panel discussion at his staff college, that he was a “citizen soldier.” Everyone in the military considers themselves “professional” (even the enlisted and the reserves) while wearing their citizenship proudly.

The “trust” and “confidence” indices have been high for the armed forces only beginning in the late 1980s, and only in comparison to other institutions; the overall trend since the Vietnam War has been declining trust in government and institutions generally. While analysis of the polling data indicates that millennials have greater confidence in the military than their elders, the numbers among the young have dropped off rather significantly recently and their propensity to serve has also been declining. Analysts of the numbers attribute the rise in respect since Vietnam to military success, to the perception of high professionalism in the armed forces, and to the favorable portrait in military advertising and in popular culture. Support for increased military spending has generally been low except for short-term spikes in the late 1970s, when military capability seemed in decline, and then after the 9/11 attack. Confidence in the military is highest among the least educated in American society, and noticeably higher among Republicans than Democrats, among whom the more education, the less confidence.³⁶ Even the yellow ribbons that sprouted during the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War, and graced so many vehicles for years, seemed more an expression of public guilt for the way soldiers returning from Vietnam suffered blame and disrespect. Differentiating “support for the troops” and support for a war may be a way to assuage such guilt and muffle a potential civil-military conflict. Americans seem to have a more mixed reaction to the military than commonly appreciated. “The Brass” as a term almost immediately elicits suspicion and jealousy, if not outright contempt, perhaps in part because of a general dislike of elites and authority (one thinks of the sardonic comic strip *Beetle Bailey*, with the bumbling General Halftrack, begun in 1950 and still running—and other caricatures in popular culture). It even turns out that the salutes to the troops by the National Football

³⁶Jeff Manza, Jennifer A. Heerwig, and Brian J. McCagbe, “Public Opinion in the ‘Age of Reagan’: Political Trends 1972-2006,” Tom W. Smith, “Trends in Confidence in Institutions, 1973-2006,” in *Social Trends in American Life: Findings from the General Social Survey since 1972*, ed. Peter V. Marsden (Princeton, 2012), 130, 138, 178-207; David C. King and Zachary Karabell, *The Generation of Trust: Public Confidence in the U.S. Military since Vietnam* (Washington, 2003); Hunter Walker, “Harvard Poll Shows Millennials Have ‘Historic Low’ Levels Of Trust In Government,” *Business Insider*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/poll-millennials-have-historically-low-levels-of-trust-in-government-2014-4>; Stephen J. Hadley and William J. Perry, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century* (Washington, n.d. [2010]), 43; Golby, “Self-Interest Misunderstood.”

League were actually subsidized--paid for--by the Defense Department; between 2012 and 2015, the Pentagon paid over "\$10 million in marketing and advertising contracts with professional sports teams . . . for what . . . senators called 'paid patriotism.'"³⁷

A corollary to the myth of loving the military--that there is a contract or covenant between the American people and soldiers--is also suspect although commonly believed in the national security community. The contract was best articulated on the first page of the first joint officer guide put out by the new Department of Defense in 1950: "the Nation also becomes a party to the contract [with officers inherent in their commission], and will faithfully keep its bond with the man. While he continues to serve honorably, it will sustain and will clothe him with its dignity." The commission provides "a felicitous status in our society. . . . Should he become ill, the Nation will care for him. Should he be disabled, it will stand as his guardian through life. Should he seek to advance himself through higher studies, it will open the way."³⁸

Such a bargain has been partly true but for the citizen forces raised for major conflict until the 1970s. Mass armies before the 1940s involved thousands or millions of people who, with their families, were or would become voters. The pensions and bonuses created for soldiers and their families who had served or died in the Civil War (but for only one side) were the largest government social program in American history until then.³⁹ The symbol for the promise originated in the 1944 GI bill, which did so much to help veterans with loans for homes and businesses and education. In the last twenty years, those benefits have escalated with the merging in the public mind of citizen soldiers and professionals--and the need to recruit people into uniform for distant and controversial wars. A comprehensive "contract," fully funded and implemented, has not been the historical norm. Benefits expanded only with the merging of citizen-soldiers and professionals, the need to attract recruits, and the rise of trust and confidence for the military in the 1980s which has evolved into near adulation after 9/11, at least

³⁷ "Pro Football," *New York Times*, May 20, 2016, p. B14.

³⁸[S.L.A. Marshall], *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, 1950), 1-2. The first chapter is reprinted in the most recent edition as an appendix [U.S. Department of Defense, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, 2007), 149-158] because, while "Marshall's language is a bit dated, . . . the chapter retains its original ability to inspire officers of all generations alike" (p. xviii).

³⁹See William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York, 1918); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

rhetorically. A covenant appeared to be functional and necessary, and politically unassailable.⁴⁰

Promises to citizen armies have gone unfulfilled more often than we like to admit. Officers in the Continental Army came within a hair of revolting in Newburgh in 1783 over unpaid bonuses and pensions at the end of the Revolutionary War; World War I veterans, the Bonus Army, marched on Washington over promised payments in 1932, camping in Anacostia Flats until dispersed with force by the regular army. The Veterans Administration only became a cabinet department in 1988. The VA has often been underfunded, overworked, understaffed, mal-administered, and to be charitable, sluggish. Who can forget the way Vietnam servicemen were disparaged, or even reviled, or the way the VA resisted accepting disabilities for diseases related to Agent Orange, or PTSD, or Gulf War syndrome? Or the scandals over crippling delays in medical appointments, along with lies about the waiting times?⁴¹

However that consensus is fraying. Since the rise of the Tea Party, deficit hawks have attacked all government spending, fracturing longstanding Republican support for the military. The potential for the split was always there. In the late 1990s, in a bar in Newport, Rhode Island, I asked former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich whether Republicans cared more about tax cuts or a strong national defense. After glancing around as though to check whether someone might be listening, he replied: “tax cuts.” Knowledgeable people aware of the money going into military pay, retirement, and

⁴⁰For an example of the benefits now available, see the 2013 edition of *Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors* published by the Department of Veterans Affairs at http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/2013_Federal_Benefits_for_Veterans_English.pdf, and apparently published yearly. The edition cited is 132 pages long. Evidence for the dysfunction of the VA was in the news for most of 2014 and 2025.

⁴¹See Richard A. Oppel Jr., “Needing to Hire, Chief of V.A. Tries to Sell Doctors on Change,” Dave Phillips, “Veterans Affairs Official Overseeing Backlog of Claims Resigns” and “Report Finds Sharp Increase in Veterans Denied V.A Benefits,” *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 2014, A18, Oct. 17, 2015, A3, Mar. 30, 2016, A14; “Robert McDonald: Cleaning Up the VA; The Secretary of Veterans Affairs tells Scott Pelley about his personal mission to reorganize the troubled agency for his fellow vets,” CBS News *Sixty Minutes*, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/robert-mcdonald-cleaning-up-the-veterans-affairs-hospitals/>; David B. Caruso, “VA struggling to shorten waits,” James Ferguson, “An appalling record on caring for veterans,” *The News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), Apr. 10, 2015, 1A Apr. 22, 2014, 7A; Jordan Carney, “McCain wants answers on VA delays in healthcare for veterans,” *The Hill*, Aug. 13, 2015, <http://thehill.com/blogs/foot-action/senate/251108-mccain-wants-answers-on-va-glitch>.

health benefits predict that the all-volunteer military is unsustainable, and pressure has been building to revise the pay and benefits of the military.⁴²

So if there is a covenant, it is an uncertain one grounded in political and military expedience. With veterans dying at over 1000 a day, the larger wars fading into the past, and now paralyzing budget limits, the treatment of soldiers may well revert to some historical norm of neglect or at least inconsistency.

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A *sixth myth* is that Americans understand civilian control of the military.

If civilian control of the military were widely understood in government and by the American people, it is unlikely that there would be so much tension and conflict in the relationship, or so much confusion in the press or in public opinion. And there is much evidence for the latter: in the public's belief that, in wartime, military leaders should be unleashed to make strategy and even policy; in the deference, apprehension, and fumbling of political leaders in all three branches of the government when dealing with the military; and in the behavior and thinking of many officers at all ranks about civil-military relations.⁴³ Military subjects are not taught widely in the nation's college and universities. Yet decisions "about war and peace are made by civilians," two distinguished military historians have pointed out, "civilians who, increasingly, have no historical or analytical frameworks to guide them in making the most consequential of all decisions."⁴⁴ Military officers, while far better informed, spend little time studying or thinking about their relationship with such political leaders. A most distinguished retired officer with whom I worked on the civil-military gap study, and for whom I have enormous respect and admiration, once said to me, "Dick, I don't understand why you think we in the military are not committed to civilian control." I replied, "Walt, I understand that everybody in the military believes in civilian control. The problem is that large numbers of officers and sometimes the institutional culture seem not to understand civilian control, particularly many of the attitudes and behaviors that are necessary to make it work and operate smoothly and consistently."⁴⁵ Since that conversation, over

⁴²See, for example, Arnold Punaro, Conference on Civil-Military Divide and The Future of the All-Volunteer Force, session on "Redesigning The All-Volunteer Force of the Future," Center for a New American Security, Washington, D.C., November 20, 2014, [http://www.cnas.org/media/list?field_media_type_tid\[\]=541&field_media_type_tid\[\]=542](http://www.cnas.org/media/list?field_media_type_tid[]=541&field_media_type_tid[]=542), from 11:30 to 18:00 on the recording.

⁴³See the tables cited in note 7 above.

⁴⁴Tami Davis Biddle and Robert M. Citino, "The Role of Military History in the Contemporary Academy," Society for Military History White Paper, Nov. 2014, <http://www.smh-hq.org/docs/SMHWhitePaper.pdf>.

⁴⁵This exchange, with retired army lieutenant general Walter Ulmer, took place in 1999.

fifteen years ago, there has been improvement, but with the constant turnover of officers and the political leadership, the problems recur.

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What these examples, explored in the essays in this book, suggest is that the relationship between the most senior military officers and the political leaders with whom they interact at the top of the American government, is highly situational: dependent on the context, the issues, the people involved, and more.⁴⁶ There are some commonalities that repeat over time: differing perspectives, suspicion on both sides, frequent distrust, occasional conflict, and of course everyday cooperation and collaboration that we expect to be normal. The point is that civilian control is not a fact but a process that varies over time. It isn't a matter of control or a coup. We know who writes and signs the laws. We know who issues the orders. But civilian control in reality depends to a considerable extent on the relative power over national defense of the political leadership and the leaders of the uniformed military. What we are talking about is not "control," but who calls the tune, who frames the choices. The issue is what each side in a relationship, in which both are dependent on the other, can achieve at any given time if they have differing perspectives and judgments.

No discussion can be complete without addressing what might be labeled the "Zinni question," after retired Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni: what about the civilian side of civil-military relations? In March 2014 when I gave a version of this essay to the International Society of Barristers annual meeting, the General, a former commander of US Central Command, asserted that "If you want civilian control of the military—which I fully subscribe to" and "think . . . is absolutely a key underpinning of the way we govern—somebody had better teach those civilians how to use it." He is absolutely right. He and others emphasize the importance of educating the civilian leadership. "It's like giving the car keys to your sixteen-year-old son," Zinni said; "you don't give him the keys without first teaching him how to drive."⁴⁷

The difficulty is how to educate politicians and their appointees in military affairs in general and civil-military relations in particular. Years of pondering this part of the equation have led me to very low expectations. Civilian officials—elected and appointed—come and go. They are picked by voters and presidents for all sorts of reasons only a few of which have to do with experience and understanding of war, military institutions, and military service. Sometimes they are terrific despite thin backgrounds and sometimes they are terrible despite wide and deep experience in military subjects. Perhaps the best

⁴⁶I owe this insight to Alfred Goldberg, for over thirty years the chief of the historical office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, who offered the interpretation to me in the early 1980s based on his own observations and his wide knowledge of the history.

⁴⁷Gen. Anthony Zinni, "The New World Disorder," *International Society of Barristers Quarterly* 48 no. 3 (2014):49-50.

cabinet secretary in the history of American defense, Elihu Root, when offered the War Department in 1899, responded honestly "that it is quite absurd, I know nothing about war, I know nothing about the army." The response: "President McKinley directs me to say that he is not looking for anyone who knows anything about the army; he has got to have a lawyer to direct the government of these Spanish islands, and you are the lawyer he wants."⁴⁸ We've now had some sixteen years of Democratic presidents with Clinton and Obama, and of the seven Secretaries of Defense who have served them, three have been Republicans who occupied the office about half the time. What does that say about the situational nature of civilian leadership? Among other considerations, Republican appointees could stifle the charge of Democratic weakness on national defense. In his memoirs, Robert Gates wrote that Mr. Obama practically tried to handcuff Gates to the Pentagon.⁴⁹

In closing, I always remind military audiences that while the civilians are in charge, the military is the constant in the equation of civil–military relations, the steward of the military profession charged with the nation's defense over time. Lawyers, doctors, and other professionals essentially determine their relationship with their clients and patients. The military's client is the civilian political leadership. Other professions can refuse to advise or represent a client, but the military cannot. But like all professionals, the top generals and admirals can educate their bosses and shape to some degree the relationship, even if it is a less equal and more subordinate role than other professions possess. The military's bosses are whomever the American political system chooses.

One very high-ranking general said to me once, when a new administration took office, "You know, it's like waking up in the morning and looking across the bed, and you have a new spouse. You don't know who she is. You don't know what she thinks or is going to do." He looked at me. "We-all on this side of the river don't have to take it."

I asked, "What do you mean, you 'don't have to take it?'"

He said, "Well, I can resign."

I replied, "You certainly cannot. You can't resign; there's no tradition of that."

"Well, Ron Fogleman [Air Force chief of staff in the mid-1990s] resigned," he insisted.

⁴⁸Root remembered the telephone exchange some years later, in a speech, quoted in Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root*, vol. 1 (New York, 1938), 215. See pages 215-20 for some of the politics of the appointment and the reaction.

⁴⁹Gates, *Duty*, 430-31, 488-89.

“He did not,” I insisted. “I interviewed him after he left. I’ll send you the galley proofs of the article that showed that he did not resign.”⁵⁰

To civilian audiences, I close with a plea to take civil-military relations seriously. I ask them to reverse the old aphorism attributed to Mark Twain that “Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody is doing anything about it.” Turning it upside down: “Nobody talks about civil–military relations, but almost everyone is doing something about it (even if ignoring it).” If the public and the political leadership neglect this subject–don’t think about it, don’t care about it until it’s too late–and a crisis or a conflict threatens our military effectiveness or the trust that’s indispensable to decision-making in government, who then will be responsible for making the relationship work before something happens to produce disaster?

While the military defends the United States, the American people elect those who bear ultimate responsibility for the nation’s security. They must take military affairs seriously enough to learn to understand war and use the military instrument wisely. If top officials know nothing about war or the military, as Elihu Root and Abraham Lincoln did not when they embarked on high office, then they must study it, understand it, and try on their own side to build trust in the relationship with their military subordinates. Politicians should not manipulate the military or hide behind it, or use it for political purposes, as civilian leaders have often done.⁵¹ In the end, it’s up to the American people to make their government work. A lady accosted Benjamin Franklin as he emerged from the constitutional convention in 1787. “Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” Franklin replied: “A republic, if you can keep it.”⁵²

⁵⁰Conversation with a four-star officer, Washington, DC (January 2001). See “The Early Retirement of Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, Chief of Staff, United States Air Force,” ed. Richard H. Kohn, *Aerospace Power Journal* 15 (2001):6–23.

⁵¹See Richard H. Kohn, “Building Trust: Civil-Military Behaviors for Effective National Security,” *American Civil–Military Relations*, ed. Nielsen and Snider, 284–87.

⁵²Quoted in Richard H. Kohn, “Using the Military at Home: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Chicago Journal of International Law* 4 (2003):192.

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Civil-military relations at the pinnacle of government has often differed, and differed dramatically, in war from the relationship in peacetime. And relations have often differed depending on the era, country, type of war, personalities, and other variables. The "normative" theory in the United States, frequently voiced by political leaders since the Vietnam War and indeed extant in the scholarly literature beginning with Samuel P. Huntington's influential and iconic volume in 1957, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, is that once the fighting begins, the politicians set the goals and then turn the war over to the military, refraining from further direction and interference.

Such has not been the case in American history, at least for presidents since the beginning of the Republic, with the possible exception of Woodrow Wilson in World War I. And during the Cold War, from the mid-1940s to the beginning of the 1990s--a period marked by both active wars and periods without major military operations involving combat--American presidents and their secretaries of defense sometimes actively monitored and even directed strategy and military operations, and sometimes not--with inconsistent results. Eliot Cohen argues that a common pattern of successful wars has been the intervention of presidents and prime ministers at crucial points of their conflicts, contrary to what most political and military leaders think or say in the United States today.

Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), pp. 1-14, 199-207, 225-233, 239-248.

THE SOLDIER AND THE STATESMAN

Few choices bedevil organizations as much as the selection of senior leaders. Often they look for those with high-level experience in different settings: New York City's Columbia University sought out America's most senior general, Dwight D. Eisenhower, to lead it after World War II; President Ronald Reagan made a corporate tycoon his chief of staff in 1985; in the early 1990s, Sears Roebuck, an ailing giant, looked to the chief logistician of the Gulf War to help it turn around. Frequently enough the transplant fails; the sets of skills and aptitudes that led to success in one walk of life either do not carry over or are downright dysfunctional in another. The rules of politics differ from those of business, and universities do not act the way corporations do. Even within the business world, car companies and software giants may operate very differently, and the small arms manufacturer who takes over an ice-cream company may never quite settle in to the new culture.

To be sure, leaders at the top have some roughly similar tasks: setting directions, picking subordinates, monitoring performance, handling external constituencies, and inspiring achievement. And they tend, often enough, to think that someone in a different walk of life has the answers to their dilemmas, which is why the generals study business books, and

the CEOs peruse military history. But in truth the details of their work differ so much that in practice the parallels often elude them, or can only be discovered by digging more deeply than is the norm.

The relations between statesmen and soldiers in wartime offer a special case of this phenomenon. Many senior leaders in private life must manage equally senior professionals who have expertise and experience that dwarf their own, but politicians dealing with generals in wartime face exceptional difficulties. The stakes are so high, the gaps in mutual understanding so large, the differences in personality and background so stark, that the challenges exceed anything found in the civilian sector—which is why, perhaps, these relationships merit close attention not only from historians and students of policy, but from anyone interested in leadership at its most acutely difficult. To learn how statesmen manage their generals in wartime one must explore the peculiarities of the military profession and the exceptional atmospheres and values produced by war. These peculiarities and conditions are unique and extreme, and they produce relationships far more complicated and tense than either citizen or soldier may expect in peacetime, or even admit to exist in time of war.

“LET HIM COME WITH ME INTO MACEDONIA”

To see why, turn back to the year 168 B.C. The place is the Senate of the Roman republic, the subject the proposed resumption of war (for the third time) against Macedonia, and the speaker Consul Lucius Aemilius:

I am not, fellow-citizens, one who believes that no advice may be given to leaders; nay rather I judge him to be not a sage, but haughty, who conducts everything according to his own opinion alone. What therefore is my conclusion? Generals should receive advice, in the first place from the experts who are both specially skilled in military matters and have learned from experience; secondly, from those who are on the scene of action, who see the terrain, the enemy, the fitness of the occasion, who are sharers in the danger, as it were, aboard the same vessel. Thus, if there is anyone

who is confident that he can advise me as to the best advantage of the state in this campaign which I am about to conduct, let him not refuse his services to the state, but come with me into Macedonia. I will furnish him with his sea-passage, with a horse, a tent, and even travel-funds. If anyone is reluctant to do this and prefers the leisure of the city to the hardships of campaigning, let him not steer the ship from on shore. The city itself provides enough subjects for conversation; let him confine his garrulity to these; and let him be aware that I shall be satisfied with the advice originating in camp.¹

The Consul's cry for a free hand echoes that of generals throughout history—although the historian Livy records that, as a matter of fact, an unusually large number of senators decided to accompany him on campaign. Still, the notion that generals once given a mission should have near total discretion in its execution is a powerful one.

Popular interpretations of the Vietnam and Gulf wars, the one supposedly a conflict characterized by civilian interference in the details of warmaking, the other a model of benign operational and tactical neglect by an enlightened civilian leadership, seem to confirm the value of a bright line drawn between the duties of soldiers and civilians. Thus the chief of staff to General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of US forces in Southwest Asia: “Schwarzkopf was never second-guessed by civilians, and that's the way it ought to work.”² Or more directly, then-President George Bush's declaration when he received the Association of the US Army's George Catlett Marshall Medal: “I vowed that I would never send an American soldier into combat with one hand tied behind that soldier's back. We did the politics and you superbly did the fighting.”³ Small wonder, then, that the editor of the US Army War College's journal wrote to his military colleagues:

There will be instances where civilian officials with Napoleon complexes and micromanaging mentalities are prompted to seize the reins of operational control. And having taken control, there will be times when they then begin to fumble toward disaster. When this threatens to happen, the nation's top soldier . . . must summon the courage to rise and say to his civilian masters, “You can't do that!” and then stride to the focal point of decision and tell them how it must be done.⁴

Such a view of the roles of civilian and soldier reflects popular understandings as well. The 1996 movie *Independence Day*, for example, features only one notable villain (aside, that is, from the aliens who are attempting to devastate and conquer the Earth)—an overweening secretary of defense who attempts to direct the American military's counter-attack against the invaders from outer space. Only after the interfering and deceitful civilian is out of the way can the president, a former Air Force combat pilot who gets back into uniform to lead the climactic aerial battle, and his military assistants (with the aid of one civilian scientist in a purely technical role) get on with the job of defeating the foe. To this comfortable consensus of capital, camp, and Hollywood one can add the weight of academic theory. Samuel Huntington, arguably the greatest American political scientist of our time, in a classic work, *The Soldier and the State*,⁵ laid out what he termed a theory of "objective control," which holds that the healthiest and most effective form of civilian control of the military is that which maximizes professionalism by isolating soldiers from politics, and giving them as free a hand as possible in military matters.

THE NORMAL THEORY OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

We can call this consensus the "normal" theory of civil-military relations, which runs something like this. Officers are professionals, much like highly trained surgeons: the statesman is in the position of a patient requiring urgent care. He may freely decide whether or not to have an operation, he may choose one doctor over another, and he may even make a decision among different surgical options, although that is more rare. He may not, or at least ought not supervise a surgical procedure, select the doctor's scalpel, or rearrange the operating room to his liking. Even the patient who has medical training is well-advised not to attempt to do so, and indeed, his doctor will almost surely resent a colleague-patient's efforts along such lines. The result should be a limited degree of civilian control over military matters. To ask too many questions (let alone to give orders) about tactics, particular pieces of hardware, the design of a campaign, measures of success, or to press

too closely for the promotion or dismissal of anything other than the most senior officers is meddling and interference, which is inappropriate and downright dangerous.

The difficulty is that the great war statesmen do just those improper things—and, what is more, it is *because* they do so that they succeed. This book looks at four indubitably great and successful war leaders, Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill, and David Ben-Gurion. The period of their tenure spans a substantial but not overwhelming period of time and different kinds of democratic polities. These four politicians have enough in common to bear comparison, yet differ enough to exhibit various features of the problem of civil-military relations in wartime. Given the dangers of thinking through these problems exclusively from an American perspective, it makes sense that only one of them should come from the pages of American history.

Lincoln, Clemenceau, Churchill, and Ben-Gurion led four very different kinds of democracies, under the most difficult circumstances imaginable. They came from different traditions of civil-military relations, had had disparate personal experiences, and confronted different arrays of subordinates and peers. The nature of each of their democracies shaped the nature of the leadership that they could exert and that was required of them. They faced much in common, however. Institutions of a more or less free press and legislative bodies constrained their powers, and they had to deal with populations whose temper and disposition could affect their behavior directly. Powerful as each of these men was, he had to consider the possibility that his conduct of the war could bring about his fall from power by constitutional—that is, civilian—means. At the same time, in their dealings with the military they did not need to fear a violent coup. However, military opposition could and did translate into a variety of forms of political opposition, sometimes with a potential to overthrow them.

The period spanned here—a bit less than a century—saw the development of a distinctive style of warfare, sometimes called "total war" but perhaps more accurately described as "industrialized warfare." Success in war depended in large measure on an ability to obtain (through production or importation) mass-manufactured weapons. At the same time, these leaders did not have to cope with one of the distinctive challenges of a later strategic era, that of weapons of mass destruction. Interestingly enough, however, it was Churchill who early on grasped the para-

doxical peace-inducing nature of atomic terror, and Ben-Gurion who laid the groundwork for an Israeli nuclear program at a time when Israeli conventional strength was set on a course of prolonged improvement.

These four statesmen conducted their wars during what may come to be seen as the time of the first communications revolution, when it became possible to communicate useful quantities of information almost instantaneously and to move large quantities of men and war matériel at great speed by means of mechanical transportation. In physics, the product of velocity and mass is momentum, and the same is true of warfare. Thus, these statesmen had to conduct wars at a time when the instruments of conflict themselves were changing and gathering speed. One might suggest that a second communications revolution is now upon us, in which a further quantum increase in the amount of information that can be distributed globally has occurred, and the role played by that information in all of civilized life will again transform society and ultimately the conduct of war. Thus these four cases exhibit the problems of wartime leadership during a period of enormous change. By understanding the challenges of those times we may also understand better the nature of the changes that are upon us today, in an age that looks to be quite different. The fundamental problems of statesmanship faced by the leaders of today have not changed as much as one might think. These are matters that I will explore in the conclusion to this book.

Finally, these statesmen were separated in time but linked by deep respect. Clemenceau visited the United States after the Civil War and professed a great admiration for Lincoln; Churchill paid Clemenceau the homage of rhetorical imitation (verging on plagiarism) on more than one occasion. And Ben-Gurion paid a tribute to Churchill's leadership in a note written a few years before the latter's death: "It was not only the liberties and the honour of your own people that you saved," wrote one aged giant to another.⁶ Thus a thin but definite personal, not merely conceptual thread links these four men. The personal similarities and contrasts among them will bear examination. Three of them (Clemenceau, Churchill, and Ben-Gurion) assumed the reins of high command at an advanced age; two of them with very little in the way of preparation for the conduct of large-scale warfare (Lincoln and Clemenceau, although one might make a similar point about Ben-Gurion). Each exhibited in different ways similar qualities of ruthlessness, mastery of detail, and

fascination with technology. All four were great learners who studied war as if it were their own profession, and in many ways they mastered it as well as did their generals. And all found themselves locked in conflict with military men. When one reads the transcripts of Ben-Gurion's furious arguments in 1948 with the de facto chief of staff of the new Israel Defense Forces—Yigal Yadin, a thirty-two-year-old archaeologist who had never served in any regular army—they do not sound very different from the tempestuous arguments between Winston Churchill and the grim Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Alan Brooke, twenty-five years older than Yadin and with a career spent in uniform. For all of the differences in their backgrounds the backwoods lawyer, the dueling French doctor turned journalist, the rogue aristocrat, and the impoverished Jewish socialist found themselves in similar predicaments: admiring their generals and despairing over them, driving some, dismissing others, and watching even the best with affection ever limited by wariness.

"WAR IS NOT MERELY AN ACT OF POLICY,
BUT A TRUE POLITICAL INSTRUMENT."

If these four could have had a collective military adviser, one suspects that it would have been an older figure yet, Carl von Clausewitz, the greatest theorist of war, whose *On War* remains a standard text for aspiring strategists to the present day. For the Prussian general, who spent most of his adult life on active service fighting against the French Revolution and Napoleon, the attempt to separate the business of politicians and soldiers was a hopeless task. For that reason, early in the nineteenth century he rejected the "normal" theory. To understand why, at the deepest level, these statesmen did not delegate war fighting to the generals, one turns to Clausewitz's famous dictum, that war is merely the continuation of politics by other means. But by this he has something far more radical in mind than is commonly thought.⁷

"We see, therefore, that war is *not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument*, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with

other means.”⁸ The first part of the sentence (“not merely an act of policy”) illuminates the second and suggests its radical nature. For Clausewitz there is no field of military action that might not be touched by political considerations. In practice, politics might not determine the stationing of pickets or the dispatch of patrols, he writes, but in theory it could (and, one might add, in the day of CNN often does). Although Clausewitz fully recognizes the power of war untrammelled to overwhelm political rationality—by intoxicating men with blood lust, or through the sheer difficulty of making things happen, which he termed friction—he thought that all activity in war had potential political consequences and repercussions, and that every effort must therefore be made to bend war to serve the ends of politics.

The Clausewitzian view is incompatible with the doctrine of professionalism codified by the “normal” theory of civil-military relations. If every facet of military life may have political consequences, if one cannot find a refuge from politics in the levels of war (saying, for example, that “grand strategy” is properly subject to political influence, but “military strategy” is not), civil-military relations are problematic. The Clausewitzian formula for civil-military relations has it that the statesman may legitimately interject himself in any aspect of war-making, although it is often imprudent for him to do so. On most occasions political leaders will have neither the knowledge nor the judgment to intervene in a tactical decision, and most episodes in war have little or no political import. But there can be in Clausewitz’s view no arbitrary line dividing civilian and military responsibility, no neat way of carving off a distinct sphere of military action. “When people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not its influence. If the policy is right—that is, successful—any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good.”⁹

The political nature of war drives the Clausewitzian to this conclusion. So too does the curious nature of military professionalism. The peculiarities of that calling (see the appendix “The Theory of Civilian Control”) mandate more action by the politician than may be customary among the clients or employers of other professionals. The selection of and dismissal of generals is one such activity. Generals rarely enter a war having commanded for any length of time forces comparable to those assigned them on the outbreak of a conflict; hence they are almost always

unproved. It often falls to the political leadership to determine the competence—the narrower tactical ability, in fact—of the military leaders in the face of ambiguous information, for not all defeated generals are inept. Furthermore, it often occurs that generals fit for one type of operation fail dismally at another; the slashing, attacking commander may lack the talents of his more stolid brethren for conducting a defense or those of his more tactful colleagues for handling allies. Of course, contenders in lawsuits occasionally fire their attorneys, patients seek new doctors, and companies look for different engineers. But the problem of selecting military leadership is altogether more acute. Not only is it more pervasive (most patients, after all, do not in fact fire their doctors—or if they do decide to do so, they often come to that conclusion too late), but the problem of selecting military leadership frequently covers a far wider field. Rather than picking a single professional or firm to handle a task, politicians must select dozens, even scores. Often enough they cannot know that the next man they pick will be any better than his predecessor, for all alike are inexperienced at the task before them. Except at the end of a very long war, there is no recognized expert at hand with a proven record in the managing of complex military operations against an active enemy.

And there is little parallel in civilian life to the problems of morale and domestic political disharmony that beset a politician considering dismissal of a general. In daily life the professional’s employment is understood to be simply at the sufferance of his client; but in the world of war, generals become semi-independent political figures of considerable importance. Soldiers are not merely neutral instruments of the state but warriors, and in wartime warriors elicit respect and admiration. Most generals know this, and many are human enough to act accordingly. Rarely in wartime are senior military leaders cut off from the highest echelons of politics; rather they mingle (rather more than they do in peacetime, in fact) with legislators, journalists, and senior bureaucrats. They appear on the front pages of newspapers and are lionized by social élites, and they may even attempt to undermine their nominal superiors in the forum of public opinion.¹⁰ A dismissed lawyer or doctor does not normally seize such opportunities.

It is not, however, only the selection and dismissal of generals that constitute a politician’s chief responsibility in war, nor is it even (as the military textbooks would suggest) the articulation of goals or the alloca-

tion of resources. Rather, a politician finds himself managing military alliances, deciding the nature of acceptable risk, shaping operational choices, and reconstructing military organizations. During World War II, for example, the British War Cabinet found itself called upon to make decisions on matters as minute as whether certain trans-Atlantic convoys should travel at thirteen as opposed to fifteen knots, because although their naval advisers could tell them about the pros and cons of a decision on either side, the assumption of risk to Britain's lifeline to the outer world required a political decision.¹¹ Or, to take an even more telling case, in June 1943 it was a prime-ministerial decision whether or not to introduce WINDOW—radar-jamming chaff—to help British bombers break through to Germany. The Royal Air Force was divided: Bomber Command favored such a measure, but those responsible for the air defense of Great Britain, expecting enemy imitation of such a move, feared that for half a year they would lose all ability to defend the night skies over Britain.¹² Once again, the balance of risk required a political decision. In both these cases (and there are many more) the politicians had to resolve important questions not only because of the scope of the issues at stake, but because the professionals could not agree. Divided among themselves not merely by opinion but by professional background, military leaders often differ sharply about the best course of action. Ben-Gurion, for example, had to arbitrate between the home-grown socialist élites of the Palmach and the more stolid veterans of the British Army. As Stephen Rosen has noted, military organizations may be understood not simply as professional organizations but as political communities that struggle internally over fundamental issues. "They determine who will live and die, in wartime, and how; who will be honored and who will sit on the sidelines when war occurs."¹³

In all four of the cases we will examine here, there was little debate about the fundamental subordination of soldiers to civilian control. Co-existing, however, with that subordination—that acceptance of the legitimacy of civilian dominance—is a deep undercurrent of mutual mistrust. In practice, soldiers and statesmen in war often find themselves in an uneasy, even conflictual collaborative relationship, in which the civilian usually (at least in democracies) has the upper hand. It is a conflict often exacerbated by the differences in experience and outlook that political life and military life engender. These differences are not ideological but temperamental, even cultural.

"THIS MAN TOO HAS ONE MOUTH AND ONE HAND"

The memoirs of two soldiers turned politicians illustrate this. Ariel Sharon, prime minister of Israel as this book goes to press, was a uniformed hero of Israel's 1956, 1967, and 1973 wars, but subsequently became, in the eyes of many of his countrymen, a civilian villain as minister of defense during the 1982 war in Lebanon. His memoirs capture the essence of a general's mistrust of politicians, and render (perhaps disingenuously) his own wonderment at his entry into politics. He reflects on joining the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, for the first time:

Like politics, military life is a constant struggle. But with all the difficulties and bitterness that may develop, at least there are certain rules. In politics there are no rules, no sense of proportion, no sensible hierarchy. An Israeli military man setting foot in this new world has most likely experienced great victories and also terrible defeats. He has had moments of exultation and moments of deepest grief. He knows what it is to be supremely confident, even inspired. But he has suffered the most abject fear and the deepest horror. He has made decisions about life and death, for himself as well as for others.

The same person enters the political world and finds that he has one mouth to speak with and one hand to vote with, exactly like the man sitting next to him. And that man perhaps has never witnessed or experienced anything profound or anything dramatic in his life. He does not know either the heights or the depths. He has never tested himself or made critical decisions or taken responsibility for his life or the lives of his fellows. And this man—it seems incredible—but this man too has one mouth and one hand.¹⁴

Charles de Gaulle, writing more than half a century earlier, captured these fundamental differences no less starkly:

The soldier often regards the man of politics as unreliable, inconstant, and greedy for the limelight. Bred on imperatives, the military temperament is astonished by the number of pretenses in which the statesman has to indulge. . . . The impassioned twists and turns, the dominant concern with the effect to be produced,

the appearance of weighing others in terms not of their merit but of their influence—all inevitable characteristics in the civilian whose authority rests upon the popular will—cannot but worry the professional soldier, broken in, as he is, to a life of hard duties, self-effacement, and respect shown for services rendered.

Inversely, the taste for system, the self-assurance and the rigidity which, as the result of prolonged constraint, are inbred in the soldier, seem to the politicians tiresome and unattractive. Everything in the military code which is absolute, peremptory and not to be questioned, is repugnant to those who live in a world of rough and ready solutions, endless intriguing and decisions which may be reversed at a moment's notice.¹⁵

De Gaulle goes on to argue that this contrast explains the preference of politicians in peacetime for complaisant and docile military leaders, who frequently must be replaced at the outset of a war. Allowing for the differences in time and nationality, there is a kernel of truth here.

Yet the ultimate domination of the civilian leader is contingent, often fragile, and always haunted by his own lack of experience at high command, for he too is usually a novice in making the great decisions of war. For a politician to dictate military action is almost always folly. Civil-military relations must thus be a dialogue of unequals and the degree of civilian intervention in military matters a question of prudence, not principle, because principle properly opens the entire field of military activity to civilian scrutiny and direction. Perhaps the greatest of all leaders, Winston Churchill, noted in his reflections on World War II that "It is always right to probe."¹⁶

"THE SURPRISING CAPACITY OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE FOR ERROR"

A fictional general famously remarked:

. . . do you recall what Clemenceau said about war? He said war was too important to be left to the generals.

When he said that, fifty years ago, he might have been right.

But today, war is too important to be left to politicians. They have neither the time, the training, or the inclination for strategic thought.

The words, one suspects, would win approval from more than a few practitioners and observers of contemporary civil-military relations—until they realized that they were expressed by the half-crazed Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper, of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). There are few, if any, General Rippers in the American military, but the sentiment surely persists, and indeed is even shared by some politicians. "The notion that it is inappropriate for civilian leaders to involve themselves in the details of military operations is pervasive in the military," writes Scott Cooper, a Marine captain troubled by the views of the generals. "It is also misguided."¹⁷

The generals and politicians who nonetheless cling to the "normal" theory do so for understandable reasons. It has much to be said for it. The "normal" theory reaffirms our belief in a distinctive "military way," a compelling if somewhat anachronistic code by which most military officers live. There are military values that are indeed distinct from those of civil society: self-abnegation, altruism, loyalty, and of course, courage. To set aside those differences or to ignore their importance would be not merely unwise, but devastating to military effectiveness. Nor should anyone cast aside the ideal of political neutrality, which has, if anything, grown in importance in an age when politicians populate political staffs with officers, be it on Capitol Hill or in the White House.¹⁸ But where the "normal" theory goes awry is in its insistence on a *principled*, as opposed to a *prudential* basis for civilian restraint in interrogating, probing, and even in extremis, dictating military action. Taken to extremes, it would free politicians of real responsibility for the gravest challenges a country can face, and remove oversight and control from those whose job most requires it.

Only the surprising capacity of human intelligence for error can explain the opinion of prominent authorities who, although they acknowledge the role of politics in preparing for war and drafting the initial plan, rule out the possibility that politics can affect strategy

once a war has started . . . A politics that would renounce the retention of its authority over the leadership of a war and acknowledge the primacy of military specialists and silently conform to their requirements would itself acknowledge its own bankruptcy.¹⁹

Thus the words of a shrewd Russian strategist, a victim of Stalin's purges, who had studied closely the disaster that had befallen his country and the rest of Europe in 1914–1918, partly as a result of faulty civilian control of military operations.

It is not a popular view. The former Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, Admiral Harry Train, wrote in an analysis of the 1982 Falklands War, "when the duly accountable political leadership assumes the military role of deciding *how* the armed forces will perform their duties, the nation has a problem."²⁰ On the contrary, the truth is that when politicians abdicate their role in making those decisions, the nation has a problem. In the words of a wise observer of an earlier generation, reflecting upon the disaster of Vietnam and the role of weak civilian and unimaginative military leadership in bringing it about, "The civil hand must never relax, and it must without one hint of apology hold the control that has always belonged to it by right."²¹

Thus far the theory; we now turn to the practice.

“BY GOD, WE’VE KICKED THE VIETNAM
SYNDROME ONCE AND FOR ALL.”⁴⁷

Many soldiers and politicians thought that the Gulf war had put to rest the ghosts and demons of the Indochina war. Throughout the Gulf war President George H. W. Bush, by his own account, brooded about Vietnam—indeed, his exuberant declaration at the end of the war revealed how much it had preyed upon his mind. His diary for 26 February 1991, two days before the end of the war, includes a passage, “It’s surprising how much I dwell on the end of the Vietnam syndrome.”⁴⁸ “Vietnam will soon be behind us.” He regretted that the war had not ended with a “battleship *Missouri* surrender. This is what’s missing to make this akin to WWII, to separate Kuwait from Korea and Vietnam. . . .”⁴⁹ The very insistence on the “end of the Vietnam syndrome” (by which Bush seems to have meant sloppy, unsatisfying endings, internal divisions, and a hampered military) reveals, of course, just how painfully present that experience remained for him. The sloppy ending of the Gulf war—which left Saddam Hussein still in power, still a menace, and increasingly free of externally imposed sanctions a decade later—showed that the president had fallen short of his immediate objective as well.

For, in fact, the Gulf war did not end the “Vietnam syndrome” but, if anything, strengthened it. The lessons of the Gulf war learned by the American defense establishment amounted to a powerful reinforcement of deep-seated beliefs that go back to Vietnam and that amounted to a tremendous reinforcement, to the point of distortion, of the “normal” theory of civil-military relations. In the decade that followed, the twinned lessons of Vietnam and the Gulf combined to create a version of the “normal” theory of civil-military relations that ended by weakening the principle of civilian control of the military in the United States,

deepening mistrust between senior officers and politicians, and even, in some measure, politicizing the officer corps.

The lessons of Vietnam and the Gulf war did not disappear with the gradual retirement of the Vietnam generation of military officers. Extensive surveys of officers conducted by social scientists from the Triangle Institute for Security Studies in 1999 asked officers whether they should be neutral, advise, advocate, or insist on control of certain elements of the use of force. The results revealed that officers believed that it was their duty to “insist” on the adoption of certain courses of action (rather than advise or advocate), including “setting rules of engagement” (50 percent), developing an “exit strategy” (52 percent), and “deciding what kinds of military units (air versus naval, heavy versus light) will be used to accomplish all tasks” (63 percent).⁵⁰ What “insist” meant in this context was, of course, unclear. Still, something profound had changed in American civil-military relations. Officers, their self-confidence strengthened by two decades of increasing prestige and by a generally accepted version of civil-military relations marked by the morality tales of the Vietnam and Gulf wars, had come to believe that civilians had little business in probing *their* business.

The TISS survey data indicate that the post-Gulf war American military had a view of who should control the use of force very different indeed from the unequal dialogue discussed here. Nor is it the case that these views were theoretical propositions only, not reflected in action. When, for example, sources on the Joint Chiefs of Staff leaked military opposition on the conduct of the 1999 Kosovo war to the press, the stated objection was that “I don’t think anybody felt like there had been a compelling argument made that all of this was in our national interest”—as if the determination was the military’s to make.⁵¹ Indeed, by the turn of the twenty-first century it was the norm for military officers to leak to the press their opposition to government policy involving the use of force. This is a far cry from the outraged but dutiful muteness with which the chiefs of staff of the Army and Navy accepted President Roosevelt’s decision to invade North Africa in 1942, against their explicit and firm advice.

In the Gulf war, and in the host of small wars since then, military “advice” has not really been “advice” at all, but something different: a preparation of options, and sometimes a single option, for the civilian leadership. American civilian decision-makers hesitated before demanding much of their military subordinates. Having earlier denounced the

passivity of the first Bush administration in Yugoslavia and particularly in Bosnia, the Clinton administration in 1992 was paralyzed by military estimates that it would take 400,000 troops or more to intervene there.⁵² When American forces were used, it was with virtually no cooperation and communication with—let alone subordination to—a broader political effort. Indeed, Richard Holbrooke, America’s chief negotiator in the Balkans in 1995, recalls that his military counterpart, Admiral Leighton Smith, viewed himself as an independent force: “. . . he told me that he was ‘solely responsible’ for the safety and well-being of his forces, and he would make his decision, under authority delegated to him by the NATO Council, based on his own judgment. In fact, he pointed out, he did not even work for the United States: as a NATO commander he took orders from Brussels.”⁵³ Smith’s mulish opposition to the man charged with implementing American policy reflected the same kind of presumptuousness that, in far graver circumstances, had afflicted the relationship between Foch and Clemenceau. It was a reminder that coalition operations, now a staple of peacekeeping and limited interventions, produce their own difficulties in the area of civil-military relations.

The Somalia intervention of 1993 offered another such case. A commitment of American forces under the auspices of the United Nations allowed for the pursuit of parallel and conflicting policies, which culminated in a disastrous attempt to kidnap a Somali warlord whose cooperation was essential to any stable arrangement in Mogadishu. Here too civilian abdication, not military arrogance, was to blame. Deferring to a zealous United Nations high commissioner—an American—neither the president nor the secretary of defense regarded American forces operating in Mogadishu as forces fighting a low-level war, but a war nonetheless, in which some effort should be made by national authority to harmonize ends and means. Far from abusing the military by micro-managing it, the Clinton administration abused it by failing to take the war seriously and inquire into means, methods, and techniques. Its civilian leadership failed (to take just the Somalia case) by refusing to ask why American forces in Somalia were operating under several different commands—commands which communicated with one another poorly and in some cases not at all.

Particularly in the years after the Gulf war, it became expected that civilian leaders, not their military subordinates, would take responsibility for military failure. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin resigned follow-

ing the death of eighteen Rangers ambushed in downtown Mogadishu in 1993—even though his military advisers had not urged upon him a course of action other than that undertaken by American forces there, and had, in fact, favored the withdrawal of the one system that might have rescued the Rangers, the AC-130 aerial gunship. In a similar if less extreme vein, Secretary of Defense William Perry, confronted by the Senate Armed Services Committee, took responsibility for any failures associated with the bomb attack on the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, that killed nineteen servicemen in 1996, while the theater commander in chief sat silently beside him. Lower-level officers might suffer for sins of omission and commission (an Air Force brigadier general was denied promotion after the Khobar attack, which he could neither have prevented nor defended against more effectively than he did), but higher commanders were not penalized. For civilian leaders to hold military leaders accountable for their operational performance far graver failures, apparently, would have to occur.

The decline in the quality of American civil-military relations at the top has coincided with the emergence of an American military edge—technological, organizational, and quantitative—that stems from the United States' extraordinarily prosperous economy and the overall quality of its armed forces. Yet even in successes such as the 1999 Operation ALLIED FORCE, the NATO war with Serbia led by an American, General Wesley Clark, the failure of statesmen and commanders to come to terms with one another had deleterious consequences. Clark, a bright, ambitious, and politically sophisticated general, supported American policy as articulated by the secretary of state:

One of his colleagues asked him where his civilian pals were going to be if things went sour. Would they, like the civilians behind the Vietnam debacle, go off to write their books and take their big jobs, the way Mac Bundy and Bob McNamara had done? . . . In the military, someone who was too nimble, too supple with words, too facile, someone who was able to go to different meetings and seem to please opposing constituencies, was not regarded with admiration; he was regarded with mistrust.⁵⁴

Clark paid dearly for getting crosswise of military colleagues who had no use for the Kosovo war or for the president who had led them into it. But

neither the president nor the secretary of defense chose to speak with their theater commander, who found himself on the receiving end of admonitions from a hostile chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and uncooperative generals at home. "I had little idea, and never had during the entire crisis, how the commander in chief, or the secretary of defense were making their decisions."⁵⁵

For their part the civilians scrutinized target lists but generally approved the requests of their theater commander, who faced far more unwillingness from NATO allies. President Clinton, seeking to avoid casualties which he felt himself peculiarly unable to justify, declared early on that the United States would commit no ground forces to Kosovo—an indiscretion that virtually guaranteed a prolonged air campaign, during which Serb forces could massacre the Albanian Kosovars at leisure. This decision seems to have preceded rather than followed any strategic discussions with military leaders. An unthinking requirement for "force protection" as the first mission for American soldiers, ahead of any objective for which they might be put in harm's way, reflects an unwillingness to come to terms with what the use of force means; today, rather than the reckless dissipation of strength, it means an only slightly less reckless conservation of it.⁵⁶

The Kosovo war ended with no American combat casualties, and with the eviction of Serb forces from Kosovo. For this success Clark, who had no friends in the military high command and who had alienated Secretary of Defense William Cohen—a civilian leader who had absorbed the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—found himself unceremoniously retired early. In his place General Joseph Ralston, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had expressed all of the conventional military reservations about fighting the Serbs, moved up to become Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

"ROUTINE METHODS"

At one level, civil-military relations today are smooth and easy; senior military leaders mix far more easily with their civilian superiors than they did in Lincoln's or even Churchill's day. They attend the same

meetings of the Council on Foreign Relations and converse with equal ease on political, although not often military subjects. They share offices in the bureaucracy and interact easily in interagency meetings. This superficial harmony has even led some scholars to talk of a theory of concordance as a more attractive paradigm for civil-military relations.⁵⁷ This is, however, a mirage.

During the Cold War the American military accumulated, while scarcely being aware of it, an enormous amount of power and influence. It divided the world into theaters of operation; these have mushroomed into commands whose staffs dwarf those of the immediate office of the president.⁵⁸ In order to fight a Cold War characterized by multiple and often delicate alliances, it schooled its senior officers in politics, beginning when they were cadets at the military academies, by having them serve as interns in Congress. It taught politics, under the name of strategy, in its war colleges. At the same time, particularly after Vietnam, it deprecated efforts by civilian leaders to become overly expert in the details of military affairs. As for explaining its failures or half-successes since World War II, even thoughtful general officers declared that to have victories, "You must have the political will—and that means the will of the administration, the Congress and the American people. All must be united in a desire for action."⁵⁹ If accepted, such an extreme precondition—a unity that has escaped the United States in every major war except the World Wars—means that the civilians will always disappoint the military and the soldiers will always have an excuse.

There was nothing deliberately malign in this hardening of military views about the use of force, very much along the lines of Weinberger's rules and the Powell doctrine.⁶⁰ More deeply disturbing at the end of the century were signs that the American military was increasingly willing to take sides in politics in order to preserve its own interests. This politicization occurred as much at the top of the hierarchy as it did lower down. Having successfully wooed a group of recently retired general officers to endorse his candidacy in 1992, President Bill Clinton found himself trumped by the son of the man he had defeated. George W. Bush collected a longer and more impressive list, topped by three men who had retired only weeks or even days earlier from military service: the professional chiefs of the Navy and the Marine Corps, and the commander of the American forces in the Persian Gulf.⁶¹ The use of senior generals as props for political campaigns, and the flags' willingness to sign

up as partisans, was a long way from the standards of behavior set by men like George C. Marshall, the Army's chief of staff during World War II. Marshall chose not even to vote (admittedly an extreme choice) in order to avoid any partisan taint. In 1943 he lectured a subordinate: "We are completely devoted, we are a member of a priesthood really, the sole purpose of which is to defend the republic." Hence, he insisted, public confidence in a politically neutral military was "a sacred trust" to be borne in mind "every day and every hour."⁶²

There was a paradox here. The "normal theory, which called for sealing the military off from civilian meddling in the details, had eventually given way to a military willing to involve itself, if only tentatively at first, in politics. Yet this willingness follows from the "normal" theory's unrealistic view of the use of force as something divorced from politics in all but the broadest sense of the word. The post-Cold War world being one in which the interplay of force and politics has grown ever more complex, it is not surprising that soldiers tend to engage in politics, albeit with the best of motives. The tendency to do so was reinforced by the increasing gap between traditional military values of hierarchy, order, loyalty, and self-sacrifice and a civilian world that seems increasingly egalitarian (at least in work habits), fluid, individualistic, and acquisitive. Both the steady spread of gender integration in the modern military and weakening barriers to homosexual participation in the armed forces have quietly reinforced a sense of siege among more traditionally minded officers, even as they have blurred the barriers between institution and interest group for others.⁶³ These subtle but powerful societal forces exacerbated a sense of civil-military tension, if not of crisis, by the time a new president took office in 2001. Not entirely coincidentally his new secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, who had held the same job a quarter-century before, began his tenure with an elaborate set of defense reviews that ostentatiously excluded the active-duty military from participation save as a kind of uniformed research assistants. Until the outbreak of a new and different kind of war following the terror attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the Rumsfeld Pentagon exhibited levels of civil-military mistrust as bitter as anything seen in the Clinton administration.

For the leaders of America today, the strong temptation in a world dominated by American military power is to brush aside the lessons of civil-military relations hard won over a century of total wars. There is a

danger that absent recent or current experience of really dangerous war—war in which the other side can inflict damage and has options—civilian and military decision-makers alike will forget the lessons of serious conflict. Those lessons are, above all, that political leaders must immerse themselves in the conduct of their wars no less than in their great projects of domestic legislation; that they must master their military briefs as thoroughly as they do their civilian ones; that they must demand and expect from their military subordinates a candor as bruising as it is necessary; that both groups must expect a running conversation in which, although civilian opinion will not usually dictate, it must dominate; and that that conversation will cover not only ends and policies, but ways and means. “Our highest civilian and military heads [must] be in close, even if not cordial, contact with each other . . .,”⁶⁴ declared a weary but wise general officer veteran of the Vietnam war.

Just before the turn of the twenty-first century, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations was reviewing the 1999 war fought by the United States and its NATO allies against Serbia. “I was troubled,” Senator Gordon H. Smith, (R-Oregon), who was chairing the hearing, remarked, “over the degree to which political considerations affected NATO’s military strategy.” He was disturbed that matters had gotten “even to the point where politicians . . . questioned and sometimes vetoed targets that had been selected by the military.” He continued:

I firmly believe in the need for civilian control of the military in a democratic society, but I also believe we can effectively adhere to this critical principle by clearly outlining political objectives and then, within the boundaries of those objectives, allowing the military commanders to design a strategy in order to assure the achievement of those objectives.⁶⁵

The “normal” theory of civil-military relations was alive and well.

A great statesman is a rarity, and an average politician who poses as a Churchill or a Lincoln may come to grief. But it is also the case that a mediocre statesman who resorts to rules of thumb—including “defer to the professionals”—is heading, and probably by a shorter path, to ruin. Interestingly enough, General Colin Powell himself took as a life lesson, “Don’t be afraid to challenge the pros, even in their own back yard. Just as important, never neglect details, even to the point of being a pest.”⁶⁶

Except under uniquely favorable conditions (as, for example, in 1999 when the United States and its allies went to war with Serbia—a country whose gross national product was one fifteenth the size of the American defense budget) the outcome of civilians taking military advice without question is unlikely to be a good one.

The hopeful belief in bright dividing lines between civilian and soldier, political matters and military ones, is what Carl von Clausewitz termed a “theory of war”—a set of beliefs and doctrines that seem to make the use of force more manageable. As he also noted, however, in the absence of “an intelligent analysis of the conduct of war . . . routine methods will tend to take over even at the highest levels.”⁶⁷ The “normal” theory of civil-military relations is, in effect, an effort to make high command a matter of routine. The unequal dialogue, to which we turn next, is the essence of the technique of the successful war statesman discussed in previous chapters, and the opposite of Clausewitz’s “routine methods.”

APPENDIX

The Theory of Civilian Control

"A BODY OF MEN DISTINCT FROM THE BODY OF THE PEOPLE"

The issue of civil-military relations is one of the oldest subjects of political science. Plato's *Republic* discusses the difficulties inherent in creating a guardian class who would at once be "gentle to their own and cruel to enemies," men who, like "noble dogs," would serve as the ideal city's guardians.¹ Fear of military dictatorship plagued English and American political philosophers, who saw in both classical and recent history the threats to civil liberty that could arise from large standing armies. As a British parliamentarian put it in the eighteenth century: "[soldiers] are a body of men distinct from the body of the people; they are governed by different laws, and blind obedience, and an entire submission to the orders of their commanding officer, is their only principle . . . it is indeed impossible that the liberties of the people in any country can be preserved where a numerous standing army is kept up."² Despotism often wears a uniform, and even in republics such as early twentieth-century France statesmen urgently pondered ways and means of reducing military autonomy and ensuring adequate civilian control of the armed forces of the state. Despite the relatively small size of the peacetime military establishment of the United States, civil-military relations in this country have experienced periodic crises—most notably during the Civil War, when on more than one occasion President Abraham Lincoln found himself deeply at odds with his generals. The overall record of the American military, however, remains one of complete "subordination and loyalty" to the Constitution.³ For the United States, and indeed for most democracies, the central problem of civil-military relations has *not* been the most fundamental one—that of preventing a military takeover of the state. For many reasons, including the acculturation of the military itself and the presence of numerous countervailing forces and institutions,

that specter has never seriously haunted American statesmen. But the adjustment of relations regarding the preparation and use of force to serve the ends of policy has proven a very different matter.

The notion that if there is no fear of a coup there can be nothing seriously amiss with civil-military relations is one of the greatest obstacles to serious thinking about the subject. The proper roles of the military in shaping foreign policy, in setting the conditions under which it acts, in creating the kind of forces most appropriate for its tasks, in mobilizing civil society to support its activities—these are all contentious issues. The military is almost invariably the largest single element of national government; it claims a vast chunk of its discretionary spending, and it has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. There is nothing obvious or inevitable about the subordination of the armed forces to the wishes and purposes of the political leadership.

Almost half a century ago, in what became a classic work of political science, Samuel P. Huntington set out a theory of civil-military relations to guide both civilians and soldiers in their relationships. *The Soldier and the State* has ever since set the terms of debate about civil-military relations in this country. A simplified secondhand version of the book has come, in fact, to be commonly viewed as the “normal” theory of civil-military relations—the accepted theoretical standard by which the current reality is to be judged.⁴ Like most classics *The Soldier and the State* is more cited than read, and many of its subtleties have been lost on those who have admired it most. But extraordinarily influential it remains.

Huntington begins with an analysis of officership as a profession, much like medicine or the law. Like those vocations, he writes, officership is distinguished by *expertise* in a particular area of human affairs, a sense of *responsibility* that lends an importance transcending monetary rewards to one’s work, and *corporateness* or a sense of community and commitment to members of one’s group.⁵ For Huntington, the central skill of the soldier is the “management of violence,” the arts of planning, organizing, and employing military force, but not applying it. At least in ground and naval warfare, officers orchestrate and coordinate the use of force: they do not, except *in extremis*, fight themselves. To be sure, this may mean that “not all officers are professional military officers” in the restricted sense of the term.⁶ Those who specialize in career areas not directly related to the management of violence are not truly professional

according to this admittedly narrow set of criteria. Neither, by implication, are those whose specialty is the direct *application* of violence rather than its management and planning.

Huntington believes in the distinctiveness of the military mindset. It is, he says in a notable passage, “pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power-oriented, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist, and instrumentalist in its view of the military profession. It is, in brief, realistic and conservative.”⁷ To be sure, this is an ideal type. But he maintains that it is powerful nonetheless, and that this military ethos is a source of great strength not merely for the military but for society more broadly. In *The Soldier and the State*’s concluding pages he draws a striking contrast between the appearances and the inner realities of the United States Military Academy at West Point and the neighboring town of Highland Falls, New York—appearances that reflect cultural differences. The austerity and purposefulness of the military order has something to teach, or at least complement, the dazzling heterogeneity and anarchy of democratic society.

Huntington offers a recipe for ensuring civilian dominance over the armed forces, arguing as he does for a sharp division between civilian and military roles. “Objective control”—a form of civilian control based on efforts to increase the professionalism of the officer corps, carving off for it a sphere of action independent of politics—is, in his view, the preferable form of civil-military relations. He contrasts “objective control” with what he calls “subjective control,” which aims to tame the military by civilianizing it, thus rendering it politically aware, or by controlling it from within with transplanted civilian elites. In the contemporary world those who support this latter means of control are “fusionists” who believe that the old categories of political and military matters are difficult to distinguish.⁸ In a previous age these fusionists would have asserted civilian control by keeping officership the preserve of the ruling social class; in the current era they seek to blur the autonomous nature of military professionalism. “The essence of objective civilian control,” by way of contrast, “is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism.”⁹ There is good news here: soldiers not only respect the bounds of democratic politics when subject to objective control, they also fight more effectively. When politicians leave purely military matters to officers, and when they draw clear distinctions between their activities and those of civilians, outstanding military organizations

emerge. Officers motivated by dedication to a politically sterile and neutral military ideal—"the good soldier," and "the best regiment"—will turn in a performance superior to those motivated by ideology or merely personal drives such as ambition or vainglory.¹⁰

This view has profound implications for strategy. Huntington quotes approvingly a Command and General Staff College 1936 publication:

Politics and strategy are radically and fundamentally things apart. Strategy begins where politics ends. All that soldiers ask is that once the policy is settled, strategy and command shall be regarded as being in a sphere apart from politics . . . The line of demarcation must be drawn between politics and strategy, supply, and operations. Having found this line, all sides must abstain from trespassing.¹¹

This sharp separation is possible because military expertise is, indeed, definable and isolatable. "The criteria of military efficiency are limited, concrete, and relatively objective; the criteria of political wisdom are indefinite, ambiguous, and highly subjective."¹² Political leaders enhance their control by making the military austere professional, while reserving to themselves alone the passing of judgments on matters of policy as opposed to technical military matters.

Many democratic politicians and even more of their fellow citizens find the understanding of strategy as craft reassuring. To believe that war is a professional art is to believe that it is not subject to the errors and follies, the bickering and pettiness, the upsets and unpredictabilities that characterize politics. Military expertise, in this view, is a constant.

The peculiar skill of the military officer is universal in the sense that its essence is not affected by changes in time or location. Just as the qualifications of a good surgeon are the same in Zurich as they are in New York, the same standards of professional military competence apply in Russia as in America and in the nineteenth century as in the twentieth.¹³

Such a belief offers reassurance to perplexed politicians and anxious citizens. As many an injured or sickly patient in desperate straits yearns to

trust a doctor with a soothing bedside manner, so too many civilians look to put their reliance in generals who cultivate a calm or dominating demeanor and an attitude of command. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is in matters of life and death that many people become more rather than less trustful of the professionals. And indeed this, in Huntington's view, is how the United States did so well during the Second World War: "So far as the major decisions in policy and strategy were concerned, the military ran the war."¹⁴ And a good thing too, he seems to add.

A simplified Huntingtonian conception of military professionalism remains the dominant view within the American defense establishment. In the mid-1980s the Congress conducted a debate on military reforms that led to the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which substantially increased the power of the Joint Staff and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the expense of the military services and even, to some extent, that of the office of secretary of defense.¹⁵ Not only did the originators of that legislation explicitly endorse Huntington's reading of American military history; they saw their responsibility as one of providing more and better centralized, autonomous military advice to civilian leaders.¹⁶

Huntington's theory has particular importance in a period during which the United States finds itself chronically resorting to the use of force. The concept of "objective control" offers a way of coping with the dangers that military organizations pose for democracies—what Tocqueville described as "a restless, turbulent spirit" that "is an evil inherent in the very constitution of democratic armies, and beyond hope of cure."¹⁷ Objective control offers a simple formula for the guidance of politicians and the education of officers and it promises not merely civilian control and constitutional governance but strategic success.

And yet the theory of objective control does not suffice as a description of either what does occur or what should. Scholarly critics have taken issue with its assumptions about the nature of military professionalism and, as we shall see, these views have some foundation. Furthermore, an examination of recent history—including even the relatively successful Gulf war—suggests that the Huntingtonian model of desirable civil-military relations does not characterize conflict. The most successful cases of wartime leadership in a democratic state—Lincoln's stewardship of the Union cause in the American Civil War, Winston Churchill's conduct of British affairs during World War II, or David

Ben-Gurion's skillful handling of Israeli war policy during the country's struggle for existence—reveal nothing like the rigid separations dictated by the “normal” theory of civil-military relations.

CRITICS OF THE “NORMAL” THEORY

The standard conception of military professionalism, despite its general acceptance, nonetheless attracted criticism from a number of sources. Historian Allen Guttman contended that Huntington had misinterpreted American history in constructing his argument.¹⁸ Rather than being isolated from the American polity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and during the interwar years, Guttman argued, American officers were in fact quite representative of it. And rather than adhering to a conservative world view at odds with that of the broader society, they shared the pragmatic and democratic views of American society generally. Huntington detects and approves of a deep tension between civil and military values, and asserts the value of military detachment from society. Guttman rejects that assessment and deprecates Huntington's endorsement of it.

Huntington's ideal officer is a well-defined aristocratic type—a Helmuth von Moltke, to take a Continental example—who is at once patriotic and yet, in some fashion, almost above patriotism in his sense of membership in the brotherhood of arms. Where Huntington noted and celebrated the honor of soldiers as a central aspect of the military way, Guttman points out the stubborn pragmatism of American generals. Guttman observes that such quintessentially American figures as Stonewall Jackson had little sense of the punctilious chivalry that European officers admired, and that (in his view) characterize Huntington's theory.¹⁹ When a Confederate colonel reporting on the successful and bloody repulse of a Yankee attack expressed his admiration for the enemy's bravery and his regret at having to kill such courageous foes, Jackson replied, “No. Shoot them all. I do not wish them to be brave.”²⁰ Other observers of the American military, taking a somewhat different tack but arriving at a similar conclusion, note the conventionality of its officer corps, which is solidly middle class in its values and aspirations

and thus firmly anchored in the society from which it emerges.²¹ Huntington's hopes for creative tension between civilian and military values find no resonance in a military that watches the same television programs and listens to the same music as society at large.

Sociologist Morris Janowitz and others have made a similar if more contemporary argument. The traditional notion of professionalism has weakened, they contend, as war itself has changed. “As a result of the complex machinery of warfare, which has weakened the line between military and nonmilitary organization, the military establishment has come more and more to display the characteristics typical of any large-scale organization.”²² While Huntington's concept of “objective control” may have made sense in the age of the World Wars, the nuclear revolution gave birth to “a convergence of military and civilian organization.” Janowitz proposes what he calls a “constabulary concept” of officership—one dedicated to the limited use of force in carefully defined circumstances.²³ He draws a distinction between “heroic leaders, who embody traditionalism and glory, and military ‘managers,’ who are concerned with the scientific and rational conduct of war.”²⁴ There is little doubt in his mind that it is the modern military managers who are winning out, and a good thing too, he seems to believe. Janowitz thus appears to have accepted Huntington's definition of military professionalism but to have smoothed off its rough edges: where Huntington anticipates—indeed welcomes—a divergence between civilian and military values as a by-product of professionalism, Janowitz sees no such necessity.

Other military sociologists have gone even further. In 1977 Charles Moskos suggested that the military had begun a slow, but steady transformation from an institution—“legitimated in terms of values and norms”—to an occupation—“legitimated in terms of the marketplace, i.e., prevailing monetary rewards for equivalent competencies.”²⁵ The increasing harmonization of military and civilian pay scales, the reduction of special military perquisites (e.g., the PX and the commissary) seemed to him to weaken the distinctiveness of the military way of life. Implicitly, at any rate, all militaries exist under some form of what Huntington would call “subjective control.” Indeed, one optimistic scholar proposes a theory of “concordance” in which “the very idea of ‘civil’ may be inappropriate.”²⁶ It is a theory of “dialogue, accommodation, and shared values or objectives among the military, the political elites, and society.”²⁷ In some ways, this practically defines away the problem of civil-military relations.

Disagree as they might, Huntington and these critics of his ideas both deliver reassuring if conflicting messages. For Huntington the good news lies in his discovery that those elements of the military persona and outlook that liberal America finds unsettling (indeed, he contends that "liberalism does not understand and is hostile to military institutions and the military function")²⁸ are, in fact, not merely functional but desirable. For Guttman, Janowitz, and Moskos the good news was just the reverse: the military *resembles* America, shares its elite's values and, increasingly, parallels its social origins and way of life. As the all-out conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gave way to more limited struggles, the military internalized civilian views of how it should conduct military operations. The stark differences between the military and civilian mind, so central to Huntington's theory, have blurred.

For neither Huntington nor his critics, however, is there anything intrinsically problematic about combining civilian control and military effectiveness, in peace or in war. Indeed, for more than one writer the term "civilian control" is a faintly absurd echo of dark popular fantasies like the 1964 film *Seven Days in May*, in which the military tries to take over the government.²⁹ "The concept of civilian control of the military has little significance for contemporary problems of national security in the United States,"³⁰ wrote one author in 1961—a dubious assertion, it now appears, at the beginning of a decade that spawned some of the most destructive tensions between civilians and soldiers the United States has ever seen. Similarly, in 1985 Congressional staff drawing up legislation aimed at enhancing the power of the military declared that "instances of American commanders overstepping the bounds of their authority have been rare. . . . None of these pose any serious threat to civilian control of the military."³¹

Neither Guttman nor Janowitz nor Moskos, we should note, delve into civil-military relations in wartime. They accept much though not all of Huntington's characterization of America's military history in war. Indeed, some of the most influential writings on civil-military relations criticizing Huntington barely mention warfare at all.³² And, in fact, most of the civil-military-relations literature, with the exception of Huntington, has somewhat oddly steered away from close examination of what happens during wartime.

An exception is British scholar S. E. Finer, whose critique of Huntington is very different from his American counterparts'. He argues that Huntington has severely *underestimated* the problem of civilian control. Blessed with the advantages of centralized command, hierarchy, discipline, and cohesion, and embodying virtues (bravery, patriotism, and discipline, for example) that civil society finds attractive, the military can resist civilian control effectively.³³ Noting that one of the armies that Huntington has praised as the most professional—the German—has repeatedly intervened in politics, Finer suggests that military professionalism could in fact incline militaries to engage in politics rather than not.³⁴ And in wartime in particular civilians are often too insecure about their knowledge, too fearful of public opinion, and too overawed by their military's expertise to exercise much control at all. "War is too important to be left to the generals.' Few civilians seem to have agreed with this and still fewer generals," Finer writes.³⁵ A difference in national experience may have been at work here as well. In the United States the archetypal civil-military conflict was between the imperious general Douglas MacArthur and the doughty president Harry Truman, a confrontation crisply decided by the dismissal of the former by the latter. For British authors, the Curragh mutiny (or, as some would prefer, "incident") of 1914, in which a group of cavalry officers (fifty-seven out of seventy in one brigade) offered their resignations rather than suppress Ulster loyalists determined to keep Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom, presents a more typical and a more disturbing threat to civilian control.³⁶ More instructive yet in the British experience is the struggle between civilian and military leadership during World War I. Prime Minister David Lloyd George believed himself thwarted and even endangered by a military clique resting on an alliance between the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson, and the commander of British forces in France, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, aided by docile civilian politicians and journalists.³⁷ Finer contends that by construing civilian control too narrowly, as the formal subordination of the military to the civilian power, and particularly in peacetime, one may underestimate the difficulty of controlling the use of military power in wartime. Precisely because, unlike most other students of civil-military relations, Finer has looked at war, he has a considerably more pessimistic view of the prospect for civilian control.

THE EXCEPTIONAL PROFESSION

Despite these various rebuttals of Huntington's argument, his general concept still stands and retains its popularity. Military life has witnessed many changes, but it nonetheless remains a way apart—a point brought home to the Clinton administration in 1993, when the president attempted to lift the US military's ban on homosexuals serving in uni-

form. Journalist Tom Ricks may have said it best when he described life in today's military as "what Lyndon Johnson's Great Society could have been. . . . It is almost a Japanese version of America—relatively harmonious, extremely hierarchical, and nearby always placing the group above the individual."⁶⁵ With its distinctive way of life on self-contained bases, a perhaps anachronistic commitment to service, discipline, and honor continue to pervade an institution that, for example, will still penalize a senior officer for adultery—a sin usually overlooked by the civilian society around it.

Those who predicted a mere constabulary role for the military, hence its transmutation into a kind of heavily armed police force, have also been proven wrong. Two real wars—Vietnam and the Persian Gulf—have been fought between the time those predictions appeared and the present day. The rarity of large wars is not, of itself, an indication of the obsolescence of the military profession understood as the management of large-scale force. There are other explanations including the configuration of international politics in which one country, the United States, dominates all others, and the possession of overwhelming power by the status quo dominant nations. Even so, Keegan's curious declaration that "the suspicion grows that battle has already abolished itself"⁶⁶ rings hollow, followed as it has been by conventional conflicts such as the Falklands, Lebanon, Persian Gulf, and Yugoslav wars, to name only the larger ones.

Furthermore, and contrary to what proponents of the "constabulary function" of the military suggest, the minor interventions, demonstrations of force, and peacekeeping operations of today do not diverge from the norms of the past. Soldiers and Marines of a bygone era suppressed hostile Indians and Nicaraguan rebels; their counterparts today have returned to Haiti, invaded Grenada, overthrown a Panamanian dictator, dueled with Somali tribesmen, and suppressed Serb paramilitaries. The differences do not look all that great. As intellectually intriguing as the arguments of the strategic nihilists might be, they too have proven ultimately unconvincing. Some wars and lesser uses of force clearly achieved their objectives (for example, Egypt's October 1973 campaign which broke the Arab-Israeli peace deadlock, or the Gulf war). Beyond this, nihilism is ultimately a doctrine of irresponsibility that provides no standards of conduct for either statesman or soldier. Even Finer's dispute with Huntington seems to be confounded by the apparent deference of military leaders to their civilian superiors. With the sole

exception of the MacArthur controversy, and perhaps not even that, the Western world has not recently witnessed the kind of virulent antipathy between "brass hats" and "frocks" that in 1914–1918 characterized civil-military relations in both Britain and France.

There is, however, another possible critique of Huntington's theory, and that rests on his and his critics' conception of professionalism. Put simply, it is that although officership is a profession, it differs in many respects from all others: in some of the most important respects it does not, in fact, resemble medicine or the law. Indeed, the Huntingtonian construct represents a concept of professionalism prevalent in the 1950s, but since challenged in many spheres as unrealistically pristine; "incomprehensibility to laymen, rather than rationality, is the foundation of professionalism," in the acid words of a scholar writing in the more cynical 1970s.⁶⁷ Officership differs in a number of important ways from other professions. Unlike law, medicine, or engineering, it binds its members to only one employer, the government, and has only one fundamental structure—the large service branch. But other differences are more important, in particular those bearing on the goals of the professional activity and the nature of the expertise involved.

All professional activities present difficulties of moral choice and ultimate purpose to those who practice them. The wrenching choices involved in the treatment of terminally ill patients are well known; so too are the ethical dilemmas of a lawyer who becomes privy to knowledge of the criminal activities of his client. But by and large in the professions of law and medicine, on which the classic conception of professionalism is based, the ultimate goals are fairly straightforward. They are, for the doctor, to cure his patients of their diseases, or at least to alleviate the pain they suffer. Occasionally, of course, these two imperatives conflict. For the lawyer they are, at least within the American legal system, to achieve the best possible result (be it acquittal, or, in civil cases, maximum financial and other forms of redress) for his clients.

The soldier's ultimate purposes are altogether hazier: they are, as Clausewitz and others insist, the achievement of political ends designated by statesmen. But because political objectives are just that—political—they are often ambiguous, contradictory, and uncertain. It is one of the greatest sources of frustration for soldiers that their political masters find it difficult (or what is worse from their point of view, merely inconvenient) to fully elaborate in advance the purposes for which they

have invoked military action, or the conditions under which they intend to limit or terminate it. The "professional" concept of military activity, moreover, depicts political purpose in war as purely a matter of foreign policy; and yet in practice the "high" politics of war is suffused as well with "low" or domestic politics. President Lincoln wants a victory at Atlanta in the summer of 1864 in order to crush the Confederacy—but also to boost his own chances of reelection, which in turn is necessary for the ultimate victory of the Union. President Roosevelt dismisses professional military advice and orders an invasion of North Africa in 1942 rather than a landing in France in 1943—this, he explains, in order to engage American public opinion in the fight in the European theater, rather than in hopes of achieving an early end to the war. President Johnson limits air attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong in 1965–1968 in part to preserve his ability to launch the Great Society, but also to limit the chances that China will enter the war.

The traditional conception of military professionalism assumes that it is possible to segregate an autonomous area of military science from political purpose.⁶⁸ In many ways one can. Frequently, however, a seemingly sharp separation crumbles when it encounters the real problems of war. Consider the question confronted by the Allies in the late summer and fall of 1944 in France: whether to advance on a wide front or to concentrate scarce logistical resources behind a northern thrust along the French, Belgian, and Dutch coasts (directed by a British general) or a southern thrust into central Germany (directed by an American general). One might say that there was a military "best answer," assuming that the ultimate objective was simply the defeat of Germany—which in turn incorrectly assumes that the word "defeat" lends itself to a simple definition. But in fact the political objectives of even the Second World War were far more complex than that; they involved questions of cost in lives and treasure, minimization of damage to Allied civilian populations (including Londoners under threat from V-2 missiles launched in Holland), and matters of national prestige. These were not political modifications to a "military" objective of defeating Germany, but essential to it. "The distinction between politics and strategy diminishes as the point of view is raised. At the summit true politics and strategy are one."⁶⁹ Careless readers of Huntington have missed his awareness that these kinds of mixed political-military decisions do indeed occur; in truth, they occur even more frequently than the "normal" theory would suggest.

That the good military officer requires technical expertise no one would deny. But is it indeed true that "the peculiar skill of the military officer is universal" across time, nationality, and place? The qualifications of a good North Vietnamese infantry officer in Indochina in 1965 would surely have differed in some important respects from those of a good American officer opposing him. The Vietnamese would have needed a ruthless disregard for his own men's suffering and casualties that would have rendered an American not merely morally unfit to command, but a likely candidate for "fragging"—assassination—by his own men. He could have easily remained ignorant of large areas of technical knowledge (for example, the employment of close air support, or planning procedures for heliborne movements) that the American required. More than one author has suggested that the Vietnam failure stemmed at least in part from the stubborn resistance of American officers to adapting their conception of professionalism to the war before them. And American bafflement when facing unconventional opponents like Somalia's Muhammad Farah Aideed reflects, in part, the American military's reluctance to walk away from an essentially conventional conception of what it is to be "a professional."⁷⁰

Huntington's assertion that, in the modern age at any rate, professional armies are better armies may require at least some revision, although it is a belief in which many regular armies take comfort.⁷¹ The more research is done on one of the most formidable fighting machines of all time, the German Wehrmacht, the greater the role of its ideology appears to be.⁷² For a generation after World War II scholars attributed the fighting abilities of the Germans in World War II to neutral, professional characteristics: small-unit cohesion and careful practices of officer and noncommissioned officer selection and recruitment.⁷³ More prolonged and careful investigation, however, has revealed that the permeation of the German army by Nazi ideology made it a better fighting force.⁷⁴ Not only did it instill in a large proportion of its men a fanatic determination to fight—it also contributed indirectly to the maintenance of tactical effectiveness. The ruthlessness of the Nazis allowed for the harshest possible repression of dissent or doubt. The Germans, who had executed forty-eight of their own men during World War I, shot somewhere between 13,000 and 15,000 during World War II; the comparable numbers for the British army were 356 in World War I and 40 in World War II.⁷⁵ At the same time, the Hitler Jugend provided a reserve of

junior officers and leaders while Nazi ideology reinforced the central virtues of military leadership, including selflessness, physical courage, and initiative.⁷⁶ Perhaps the greatest proof of the contribution of ideology lies in the record of the units of the *Waffen-SS*, which by war's end constituted no less than a quarter of Germany's army, and which repeatedly turned in an outstanding fighting performance. Of Theodor Eicke, the leader of one of the most successful of the *Waffen-SS* divisions, the *Totenkopf* (Death's Head), one historian notes: "Eicke's style of leadership differed little in practice from the methods he had used to administer the prewar concentration camp system. . . . What he lacked in formal training, imagination, and finesse, he attempted to overcome through diligence, energy, and a constant effort to master the baffling technical intricacies of mechanized war."⁷⁷ Eicke was a successful military leader not in spite of those characteristics that would have earned him a trial for his numerous crimes against humanity had he survived the war, but because of them.

Nor is the German experience unique. Ideological armies—the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War, and the preindependence Palmach in Palestine are all examples—have often turned in superior tactical performances against larger and better equipped regular forces. The ideologically motivated fighter may make a good junior officer—he often embodies the self-sacrifice, integrity, and drive the leaders of soldiers in battle require. More than a few higher-level commanders as well have—like Eicke, albeit in very different causes—demonstrated high orders of ability.⁷⁸

If the content of military professionalism is, as Huntington contends, the "management of violence," that is a definition that excludes large areas of military activity (logistics, for example) which often have considerable civilian analogues and yet are indispensable to military operations.⁷⁹ Many of these skills are readily transferable to or from the civilian world. It is no accident that the US Army's chief logistician in the Persian Gulf, Lieutenant General Gus Pagonis, became, immediately upon retirement, an extremely successful executive at Sears, in the same way that the military rapidly promoted civilian executives to high military rank during the World Wars. Moreover, although all serious modern military organizations devote a great deal of effort to schooling and training, history is filled with examples of soldiers taken up from civilian life who very quickly master the essentials of military affairs. The World

Wars offer examples of great soldiers who spent only brief peacetime periods of their life in regular military organizations, and then flourished in times of actual war. General Sir John Monash, one of the best generals of World War I, was a civil engineer whose prewar experience consisted solely of militia duty. Yet he rose to command perhaps the most formidable of all Allied units, the Australian Imperial Force.⁸⁰ There are hardly any accounts, even a century ago, of self-taught or part-time doctors and engineers performing nearly so well.

Military professionalism is job-specific, much as business management is. Brilliant entrepreneurs may prove utterly unable to cope with the problems of running the corporations their creative genius brought into the world. Skilled managers of a long-established high-technology firm like IBM would probably find it difficult to assume equal responsibilities in an entertainment company like Disney. There is, to be sure, enough commonality in management experience to make it plausible to put a former manufacturer of repeating rifles in charge of a large ice cream company (Ben & Jerry's), but that does not guarantee success. The ruthless churning of higher management in many companies reflects what might be thought of as "wartime" conditions—a ceaseless turnover of executives who, though qualified by training and experience for the highest office, nonetheless prove unfit for their tasks, exhausted by their previous work, or merely, but fatally, unlucky. In this above all they resemble generals in an intense war. This should not surprise us, for in some sense businesses fight their "wars" every day, unlike military organizations.

This observation suggests a deeper problem with the notion of expertise in the management of violence as the essence of the military profession. Where lawyers continually appear in court or draw up legal instruments, where doctors routinely operate or prescribe medication, where engineers build bridges or computers, soldiers very rarely manage violence, or at least not large-scale violence. They prepare to manage violence; they anticipate its requirements; they study past uses of violence, but they very rarely engage in the central activity that defines their profession. In the words of one British general writing after World War I:

Imagine an immense railway system, created but not in use, held in reserve to meet a definite emergency which may emerge on any indefinite date, a date certain (with the British) to be fixed by the Di-

rectors of another, and a rival, system, instead of by its own. Once a year, and once a year only, the railway is allowed to be partially opened to traffic for a week (maneuvers): for the remaining fifty-one weeks not only are there no train services, but the locomotives are stripped, many of their essential parts being stacked in out-of-the-way parts of the Kingdom. Yet, let the signal be given, and in four days' time the parts of the engines have to be assembled, wheels have to be fixed to dismantled trucks, cushions have to be fixed to the first-class carriages, the personnel must be at their posts, the coal—mountains of it—has to be on the spot, and a huge, complicated, most rapid and crowded process of transportation and movement comes straightway into being—provided—the rival company has not sandbagged the manager or dropped a few bombs upon the terminus.⁸¹

Many, perhaps most, officers spend entire military careers without participating in a real way in war. And even those who do fight in wars do so for very small portions of their careers, and very rarely occupy the same position in more than one conflict. A lawyer may try hundreds of cases, or a doctor treat hundreds or even thousands of medical problems, of an essentially similar type during the course of several decades; a soldier will usually have only one chance to serve in a particular capacity. There are few generals who have had the experience of being divisional or corps commanders—let alone theater commanders or chiefs of general staffs—in more than one war. As a result then, particularly at the beginning of a war, a country's most senior leaders—nominally the most seasoned veterans—are in a professional position as close to that of the novice lawyer or doctor as to that of the senior partner in a law firm or the chief surgeon in a hospital.

The lack of practice military people have in their profession at the highest level is only one factor in the astounding, and by no means infrequent, catastrophic errors made by supposedly competent military organizations.⁸² The errors of the Schlieffen Plan were not merely political but logistical: those who concocted it had assumed away problems of supply and marching endurance that made it nearly impossible of execution. The highly skilled tacticians of Germany launched in March 1918 the ruinous MICHAEL offensive, which shattered the German army and made inevitable their country's defeat. The pioneering air generals of

the US Army Air Forces in World War II embarked upon a ruinous, unescorted daylight precision-bombing campaign against Germany that collapsed in the Schweinfurt débâcles of 1943. The Israelis in 1973 adhered to a doctrine of tank warfare that proved utterly unsuited against modern hand-held anti-tank weapons, and as a result suffered heavy losses in the first days of fighting against Egyptian infantry armed with portable missiles and rocket-propelled grenades. The United States Army in Vietnam, led by experienced and able veterans of World War II, adopted a strategy of "search and destroy" predicated on entirely false assumptions about its ability to control the loss rates of the Vietnamese Communists.⁸³ These and other calamities stem not from incompetence as normally understood, but from the features that make the waging of war different from other professions: the distorting psychological effects of fear, hatred, and the desire for glory; the nature of a reacting opponent; and the absence of rules that bound the activity concerned. As Clausewitz observed, "every war is rich in unique episodes. Each is an uncharted sea, full of reefs."⁸⁴ Each age has its "own theory of war, even if the urge has always and universally existed to work things out on scientific principles."⁸⁵ War is too varied an activity for a single set of professional norms.

THE UNEQUAL DIALOGUE

One should not carry such arguments against a rigid division of "professional" and "political" too far. Clearly, no one fresh from the office or the classroom can command an aircraft carrier or an armored division, much less pilot a fighter plane or repair an infantry fighting vehicle. The politician who plans his own commando operation will almost surely regret it. More than one group of revolutionary leaders, from Bolshevik commissars in 1919 to Iranian mullahs over half a century later have, willy nilly, turned to officer experts whom they may not have trusted but whose services they required. Enough of the officer's code survives, despite the allure of a materialistic culture, to make concepts like honor distinguishing characteristics of the military way. "The officer's honor is of paramount importance," write founding members of the Army's Cen-

ter for the Professional Military Ethic.⁸⁶ That a profession of arms exists—even though a more amorphous one than one might at first think—cannot be doubted. Even at the height of the Cold War an eminent British officer could detach the purposes of warfare from professionalism: “I suppose there are some, in Western countries, who have become professional fighting men to fight Communism, though I hope not.”⁸⁷ It is a remark instantly comprehensible to other professional soldiers, if not perhaps to most citizens.

Besides, a repudiation of “objective control” carries with it grave risks. To reject Huntington’s idea of sequestering issues of policy from those of military administration or operations is to open the way to a military that is politicized and, by virtue of its size and discipline, a potentially dominant actor in the conduct of foreign and internal affairs. In states with less-established democratic traditions such changes would open the path to direct military intervention in politics. Huntington is correct in his contention that such partisanship will eventually diminish military proficiency.

But the “normal” theory still requires emendation in its understanding of the military profession and hence in its understanding of civilian control. If, as argued above, officership is a unique profession, military expertise is variable and uncertain, and if the boundaries between political ends and military means are more uncertain than Huntington suggests, civilian control must take on a form different from that of “objective control,” at least in its original understanding.

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Former Marine and award-winning author Phil Klay argues in this essay that “patriotic correctness”—the respect and admiration that Americans show for their soldiers which can privilege military opinion and dismiss dissent —should not diminish the influence or authority that outsiders should be accorded when they voice their views on national security and military subjects. Indeed he believes that more than a little contempt servicemen and women often feel, and occasionally express, for civilians and civilian society contributes to the gap between the military and society.

Is his argument persuasive? Is it healthy for civil-military relations if the American people ignore military affairs and disrespect or dismiss the questions and views of non-veterans because they haven’t served? How might civil-military relations be harmed if contempt for civilian society is widespread within the armed forces?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/14/opinion/sunday/the-warrior-at-the-mall.html>

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OPINION

The Warrior at the Mall

By Phil Klay

Mr. Klay is an author and a veteran of the United States Marine Corps.

“We’re at war while America is at the mall.”

I’m not sure when I first heard this in Iraq, but even back in 2007 it was already a well-worn phrase, the logical counterpart to George W. Bush’s arguing after the Sept. 11 attacks that we must not let the terrorists frighten us to the point “where people don’t shop.”

Marines had probably started saying it as early as 2002. “We’re at war while America is at the mall,” some lance corporal muttered to another as they shivered against the winds rushing down the valleys in the Hindu Kush. “We’re at war while America is at the mall,” some prematurely embittered lieutenant told his platoon sergeant as they drove up to Nasiriyah in a light armored vehicle.

Whatever the case, when I heard it, it sounded right. Just enough truth mixed with self-aggrandizement to appeal to a man in his early 20s. Back home was shopping malls and strip clubs. Over here was death and violence and hope and despair. Back home was fast food and high-fructose corn syrup. Over here, we had bodies flooding the rivers of Iraq until people claimed it changed the taste of the fish. Back home they had aisles filled wall to wall with toothpaste, shaving cream, deodorant and body spray. Over here, sweating under the desert sun, we smelled terrible. We were at war, they were at the mall.

The old phrase popped back into my head recently while I was shopping for baby onesies on Long Island — specifically, in the discount section on the second floor of the Buy Buy Baby. Yes, I was at the mall, and America was still at war.

There's something bizarre about being a veteran of a war that doesn't end, in a country that doesn't pay attention. At this point, I've been out of the military far longer than I was in, and the weight I place on the value of military life versus civilian life has shifted radically. On the one hand, I haven't lost my certainty that Americans *should* be paying more attention to our wars and that our lack of attention truly does cost lives.

“We've claimed war-weariness, or ‘America First,’ and turned a blind eye to the slaughter of 500,000 people and suffering of millions more,” the former Marine Mackenzie Wolf pointed out in a March essay on America's unconscionable lack of action in Syria up to that point. On the other hand, I'm increasingly convinced that my youthful contempt for the civilians back home was not just misplaced, but obscene and, frankly, part of the problem.

After four United States soldiers assigned to the Army's Third Special Forces Group were killed in an ambush in Niger, the American public had a lot of questions. Why were they in combat in Niger? What was their mission? How do you pronounce “Niger”? Answering these questions would have required a complex, sustained discussion about how America projects force around the world, about expanding the use of Special Operations forces to 149 countries, and about whether we are providing those troops with well-thought-out missions and the resources to achieve them in the service of a sound and worthwhile national security strategy.

And since our troops were in Niger in a continuation of an Obama administration policy that began in 2013, it also would have meant discussing the way that administration ramped up “supervise, train and assist” missions in Africa, how it often tried to blur the line between advisory and combat missions to avoid public scrutiny, and how the Trump administration appears to have followed in those footsteps. It would have required, at a bare minimum, not using the deaths as material for neat, partisan parables.

Naturally, we didn't have that conversation. Instead, a Democratic congresswoman who heard the president's phone call to the widow of one of the fallen soldiers informed the news media that Mr. Trump had ineptly told the grieving woman that her husband “knew what he signed up for.”

Quickly, Americans shifted from a discussion of policy to a symbolic battle over which side, Democratic or Republican, wasn't respecting soldiers enough. Had the president disrespected the troops with his comment? Had Democrats disrespected the troops by trying to use a condolence call for political leverage? Someone clearly had run afoul of an odd form of political correctness, “patriotic correctness.”

Since, as recent history has shown us, violating the rules of patriotic correctness is a far worse sin in the eyes of the American public than sending soldiers to die uselessly, the political battle became intense, and the White House was forced to respond. And since in a symbolic debate of this kind nothing is better than an old soldier, the retired Marine general and current chief of staff, John Kelly, was trotted out in an Oct. 19 news conference to defend the president.

He began powerfully enough, describing what happens to the bodies of soldiers killed overseas, and bringing up his own still painful memories of the loss of his son, who died in Afghanistan in 2010. He spoke with pride of the men and women in uniform.

But then, in an all too common move, he transitioned to expressing contempt for the civilian world. He complained that nothing seemed to be sacred in America anymore, not women, not religion, not even “the dignity of life.” He told the audience that service members volunteer even though “there’s nothing in our country anymore that seems to suggest that selfless service to the nation is not only appropriate, but required.” He said veterans feel “a little bit sorry” for civilians who don’t know the joys of service.

To cap things off, he took questions only from reporters who knew families who had lost loved ones overseas. The rest of the journalists, and by extension the rest of the American public who don’t know any Gold Star families, were effectively told they had no place in the debate.

Such disdain for those who haven’t served and yet dare to have opinions about military matters is nothing new for Mr. Kelly. In a 2010 speech after the death of his son, Mr. Kelly improbably claimed that we were winning in Afghanistan, but that “you wouldn’t know it because successes go unreported” by members of the “‘know it all’ chattering class” who “always seem to know better, but have never themselves been in the arena.” And he argued that to oppose the war, which our current secretary of defense last year testified to Congress we were not winning, meant “slighting our warriors and mocking their commitment to the nation.”

This is a common attitude among a significant faction of veterans. As one former member of the Special Forces put it in a social media post responding to the liberal outcry over the deaths in Niger, “We did what we did so that you can be free to naïvely judge us, complain about the manner in which we kept you safe” and “just all around live your worthless sponge lives.” His commentary, which was liked and shared thousands of times, is just a more embittered form of the sentiment I indulged in as a young lieutenant in Iraq.

It can be comforting to reverse the feelings of hopelessness and futility that come with fighting seemingly interminable, strategically dubious wars by enforcing a hierarchy of citizenship that puts the veteran and those close to him on top, and everyone else far, far below.

But John Kelly’s contempt for modern civilian life wasn’t a pep talk voiced in a Humvee traveling down an Iraqi highway, or at a veterans’ reunion in a local bar. He was speaking to the American people, with the authority of a retired general, on behalf of the president of the United States of America. And he was letting us know our place.

Those with questions about military policy are being put in their place more and more often these days. When reporters later asked the White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, about some of Mr. Kelly’s claims, which had proved false, she said, “If you want to get into a debate with a four-star Marine general, I think that’s highly inappropriate.” It was an echo of the way Sean Spicer tried to short-circuit debate about the death of a Navy SEAL in Yemen by claiming that anyone who questioned the success of the raid “owes an apology” to the fallen SEAL.

Serious discussion of foreign policy and the military's role within it is often prohibited by this patriotic correctness. Yet, if I have authority to speak about our military policy it's because I'm a citizen responsible for participating in self-governance, not because I belonged to a warrior caste.

If what I say deserves to be taken seriously, it's because I've taken the time out of my worthless sponge life as a concerned American civilian to form a worthy opinion. Which means that although it is my patriotic duty to afford men like John Kelly respect for his service, and for the grief he has endured as the father of a son who died for our country, that is not where my responsibility as a citizen ends.

I must also assume that our military policy is of direct concern to me, personally. And if a military man tries to leverage the authority and respect he is afforded to voice contempt for a vast majority of Americans, if he tries to stifle their exercise of self-governance by telling them that to question the military strategy of our generals and our political leaders is a slight to our troops, it's my patriotic duty to tell him to go pound sand.

If we don't do this, we risk our country slipping further into the practice of a fraudulent form of American patriotism, where "soldiers" are sacred, the work of actual soldiering is ignored and the pageantry of military worship sucks energy away from the obligations of citizenship.

I understand why politicians and writers and institutions choose to employ the trope of veterans when it comes to arguing for their causes. Support for our military remains high at a time when respect for almost every other institution is perilously low, so pushing a military angle as a wedge makes a certain kind of sense. But our peacetime institutions are not justified by how they intermittently intersect with national security concerns — it's the other way around. Our military is justified only by the civic life and values it exists to defend. This is why George Washington, in his Farewell Orders to the Continental Army, told his troops to "carry with them into civil society the most conciliating dispositions" and "prove themselves not less virtuous and useful as citizens than they have been persevering and victorious as soldiers."

Besides, let's not pretend that living a civilian life — and living it *well* — isn't hard. A friend of mine, an officer in the Army Reserves, told me that one of his greatest leadership challenges came not overseas, but when a deployment to Afghanistan got canceled and his men were called to the difficult and often tedious work of being husbands, fathers, members of a community.

My wife and I are raising two sons — the older one is 2 years old, the little one 6 months. And as we follow our national politics with occasional disgust, amusement, horror and hope, we regularly talk about the sort of qualities we want to impress upon our boys so they can be good citizens, and how we can help cultivate in them a sense of service, of gratitude for the blessings they have, and a desire to give back. It's a daunting responsibility. Right now, though, the day-to-day work of raising these kids doesn't involve a lot of lofty rhetoric about service. It involves drool, diapers and doing the laundry. For me, it means being that most remarkable, and somehow most unremarkable of things — a dad.

Which is how I found myself that day, less a Marine veteran than a father, shopping with the other parents at Buy Buy Baby, recalling that old saying, "We're at war while America is at the mall." I wondered about the anonymous grunt poet who coined it. Whoever he was, there's a good chance that even by the time I heard it, he'd already done his four years and gotten out.

Maybe he'd left the Corps, settled into civilian life. Maybe he was in school. Perhaps he was working as a schoolteacher, or as a much-derided civil servant in some corner of our government. Perhaps he found that work more satisfying, more hopeful and of more obvious benefit to his country than the work he'd done in our mismanaged wars.

Or perhaps, if he was as lucky as I have been, he was in some other mall doing exactly what I was — trying to figure out the difference between 6M and 3-6M baby onesies. If so, I wish him well.

Phil Klay (@PhilKlay) is the author of the short story collection "Redeployment" and a veteran of the United States Marine Corps.

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For decades, retired senior officers have participated in public in national security affairs, either as commentators in the media, as authors of articles and books, in testimony before Congress, and in other venues. However direct participation in partisan politics by retired generals and admirals is a relatively recent phenomenon, begun most visibly with the endorsement of Bill Clinton by the recently retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, ADM William Crowe, and several other retired flags, in 1992. Since then more and more have endorsed presidential candidates to the point where over 500 endorsed Mitt Romney in 2012. Beginning in 1996, retired flags also began speaking at the party nominating conventions, most recently when retired army LTG Michael Flynn and retired Marine GEN John Allen.

Scholars of civil-military relations and many retired flags, the overwhelming majority of which have not engaged in such partisan activity, worry that endorsements erode the trust of political leaders and the public in the military profession. In a letter to *The Washington Post* and subsequent essay, retired Chairman Martin Dempsey makes these points. In anticipation of disagreement, GEN Dempsey differentiated retired flags opining to the public on areas of their expertise, or running for office themselves, with using their rank to make a personal endorsement for a presidential candidate. He also agreed that retired flags have the right to speak up. Thus a longstanding discussion about politicization and participation in national debate burst again into public view.

These readings raise the issue of whether there are limits or unspoken norms for public involvement in politics and national security by retired flag officers. Certainly they have the right to make their views known; some would say even the obligation. Are there implications for civil-military relations? Does testimony, such as that of retired LTG Flynn, affect the ability of active duty military leaders to serve their civilian superiors? If so, in what way? How do you think political leaders view such participation and endorsements in presidential campaigns? Do you think there is some “waiting period” after retirement for participation? Why or why not? If so, how long should it be? What is your view of the benefits and dangers of retired flag officers participating in presidential campaigns, partisan politics, and national policy more generally?

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/military-leaders-do-not-belong-at-political-conventions/2016/07/30/0e06fc16-568b-11e6-b652-315ae5d4d4dd_story.html

Letters to the Editor

Military leaders do not belong at political conventions

Washington Post, July 30

The military is not a political prize. Politicians should take the advice of senior military leaders but keep them off the stage. The American people should not wonder where their military leaders draw the line between military advice and political preference. And our nation's soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines should not wonder about the political leanings and motivations of their leaders.

Retired Marine Gen. John Allen and retired Army Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn weren't introduced at the Democratic and Republican conventions, respectively, as "John" and "Mike." They were introduced as generals. As generals, they have an obligation to uphold our apolitical traditions. They have just made the task of their successors — who continue to serve in uniform and are accountable for our security — more complicated. It was a mistake for them to participate as they did. It was a mistake for our presidential candidates to ask them to do so.

Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, Raleigh, N.C.

The writer is former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

<http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/08/keep-your-politics-private-my-fellow-generals-and-admirals/130404/>



Keep Your Politics Private, My Fellow Generals and Admirals

By Martin Dempsey

August 1, 2016

The relationship between elected leaders and the military is established in the Constitution and built on trust.

As a matter of law, we follow the orders of the duly elected commander-in-chief unless those orders are illegal or immoral. This is our non-negotiable commitment to our fellow citizens.

They elect. We support.

From my personal experience across several administrations, the commander-in-chief will value our military advice only if they believe that it is given without political bias or personal agenda.

Generals and admirals are generals and admirals for life. What they say carries the weight of their professional judgment and the credibility of their professional reputation.

More than an individual reputation, retired generals and admirals enjoy a collective reputation earned by having been part of a profession. It is therefore nearly impossible for them to speak exclusively for themselves when speaking publicly. If that were even possible, few would want to hear from them. Their opinion is valued chiefly because it is assumed they speak with authority for those who have served in uniform. And their opinion is also valued because our elected leaders know that the men and women of the U.S. military can be counted upon follow the orders of their elected leaders.

This is where the freedom of speech argument often invoked in this debate about the role of retired senior military officers in election campaigns fails. Unquestionably, retired admirals and generals are free to speak to those seeking elected office. But they should speak privately, where it will not be interpreted that they are speaking for us all.

Publicly, they can speak to their experiences with the issues. Not about those seeking office. Not about who is more suited to be elected. That will be decided by the voters, and they have an obligation to learn about the candidates before casting their vote.

But not from us.

Because we have a special role in our democracy, and because we will serve whoever is elected.

So retired generals and admirals can but should not become part of the public political landscape. That is, unless they choose to run for public office themselves. That's different. If they choose to run themselves, they become accountable to voters. In simply advocating—or giving speeches—they are not.

One of the two candidates is going to be elected this November. They each now have reason to question whether senior military leaders can be trusted to provide honest, non-partisan advice on the issues and to execute the orders given to them with the effort necessary to accomplish them.

Moreover, if senior military leaders—active and retired—begin to self-identify as members or supporters of one party or another, then the inherent tension built into our system of government between the executive branch and the legislative branch will bleed

over into suspicion of military leaders by Congress and a further erosion of civil-military relations.

Worse yet, future administrations may seek to determine which senior leaders would be more likely to agree with them before putting them in senior leadership positions.

In the political world, trust is generally derived from party loyalty. In the interchange between civil and military, trust is derived from party neutrality.

Political candidates will continue to seek retired generals and admirals to endorse them. In the competition for public office, politicians will always seek to surround themselves with as many credible allies as possible. But we retired generals and admirals should not heed their request.

This is not something that needs to be fixed with law, policy, or administrative rule. All we have to do is say no.

The image of generals and admirals that is held in esteem by the American people is the image of loyal, determined, selfless professionalism keeping watch for threats to our country from abroad. It's not the image of angry speeches in front of partisan audiences intended to influence politics at home.

As I said, what we saw at the conventions is a mistake. Both by those who participated and by those who invited them.

I could be wrong. I suppose we could adopt a reality-TV model for our civilian-military interactions instead of the model based on our standing with the American people as a profession. Perhaps we could imitate "The Bachelor." We'll troop out as many retired generals and admirals as we can for each side, decide who has the most persuasive group, and make our decision about suitability to be commander-in-chief on that basis.

I don't think that's what we want.

Martin Dempsey, a retired U.S. Army general, served as the 18th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Generals and Political Interventions in American History

James Joyner | August 4, 2016

In a curt letter to *The Washington Post*, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey, reacting to speeches by two recently retired generals — Michael Flynn and John Allen — before the Republican and Democratic conventions, declared that, “The military is not a political prize.” Dempsey explained:

The American people should not wonder where their military leaders draw the line between military advice and political preference. And our nation’s soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines should not wonder about the political leanings and motivations of their leaders.

Certainly, this is not a new controversy. Way back in 1992, one of Dempsey’s predecessors Admiral William Crowe gave a speech endorsing Bill Clinton for the White House as the future president was facing criticism over his dodging of the draft during Vietnam. He was soon joined by another 20 retired generals and admirals, many of whom, like Crowe, had seen their military advice overruled by Clinton’s opponent, sitting President George H.W. Bush.

Moreover, the United States has a long history, literally going back to the founding, of retired generals entering politics. George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses Grant, Rutherford Hayes, Franklin Pierce, James Garfield, Chester Arthur, Benjamin Harrison, and Dwight Eisenhower all rose to the presidency at least partially on the strength of their military records. In recent times, Wesley Clark ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination and there was a serious effort to recruit Colin Powell to run as well. Indeed, there was an effort this cycle to draft Jim Mattis, who showed no interest in the pursuit.

Retired generals have involved themselves into political debates in myriad other ways. Ten years ago, in what came to be called the “revolt of the generals,” when several just-retired generals, most of whom had been “in the inner circle of policy formation or execution of the Administration,” openly lambasted Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, with whom they’d had disagreements while in uniform, over the Iraq War. And, of course, the nickname of the controversy was a play on the “revolt of the admirals” of 1949, in which active and retired flag officers squared off against President Harry Truman over a decision to cut an aircraft carrier to fund a new strategic bomber.

The ethical norms around each of these political interventions differs and none of them are particularly well-settled. There is no serious question whether they have a legal right to do any of these things; they clearly do. Yet there is reason to be concerned about the impact on civil-military relations when the most senior officers join the political fray.

Clearly, there’s a distinction between declaring oneself a candidate for office and endorsing a candidate. As Duke political scientist Peter Feaver notes, “When you stand

for office you officially cross over and become a politician — you are viewed as a partisan politician and thenceforth can only speak as a partisan.”

But what about endorsing? Obviously, it makes no sense to declare a moratorium on any veteran or former soldier ever speaking about politics. That would disenfranchise a huge number of people and deprive the public debate of an important perspective. And, indeed, it would be an odd argument for me to make, since I’m a former Army officer.

While there is no clear standard, the rank at which one separated from the service and the proximity of said separation are part of the equation. Nobody seriously thinks someone who left active duty as a first lieutenant, as I did, represents the service. And, even for very senior officers, that presumption fades with time.

Dempsey took a stab at laying out the distinction while he was still chairman. In a May 2014 session at the Atlantic Council, he observed:

If you want to get out of the military and run for office, I’m all for it. But don’t get out of the military – and this is a bit controversial, I got it – don’t get out of the military and become a political figure by throwing your support behind a particular candidate.

His rationale is spot on

[I]f somebody asks me, when I retire, to support them in a political campaign, do you think they’re asking Marty Dempsey, or are they asking General Dempsey? I am a general for life, and I should remain true to our professional ethos, which is to be apolitical for life unless I run.

Retired Navy Vice Admiral Doug Crowder, writing in *Proceedings* last November, expanded that argument, contending that those who wear stars on their shoulder boards “are not merely private citizens after retirement” but rather part of a unique vanguard: a general or “admiral for life.”

Crowder explains that his view on the issue was informed by his experience serving on the Joint Staff early in the Clinton administration when a civilian staffer, annoyed at being told that an issue being proposed would be opposed by the chairman, responded,

“Well, maybe it’s time we got some Clinton generals in here.”

He was aghast at the notion that the civilian leadership would think senior officers would fail to support the elected commander-in-chief for partisan reasons, until he remembered that Crowe had in fact joined the fray in endorsing Clinton during the campaign. Crowder writes, “I have never met a finer officer and gentleman, but I could see how the public could misunderstand why an admiral was making a public political endorsement of a presidential candidate.”

As Crowder notes, “the Crowe endorsement opened the floodgates for future retired flag and general officer political endorsements.” They are now routinely trotted out by both parties. During the 2012 cycle a full page newspaper ad ran “listing the well over 300

retired flag and general officers who ‘Proudly support Governor Mitt Romney as our nation’s next President and Commander-in-Chief.’”

Certainly the Republic has not crumbled as a result. And the military continues to be near the top of all institutions in terms of the confidence of the American public. Still, the next president will surely have cause to wonder about the loyalty of the senior officers upon whose “best military advice” they are counting.

There are few general officers, active or retired, whose judgment on national security matters I respect more than John Allen’s. While there are things in his convention speech with which I disagree, I share his assessment that Hillary Clinton is more fit to serve as commander-in-chief than Donald Trump (granted, a low bar).

But Allen didn’t simply present himself as a seasoned policy hand. His very first words in his convention speech were,

My fellow Americans, I stand with you tonight as a retired four-star general of the United States Marine Corps, and I am joined by my fellow generals and admirals, and with these magnificent young veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan” [emphasis mine].

He thus wrapped himself not only in his own substantial personal credibility but in that of his profession.

That continued after the speech. Trump, as is his wont, counterpunched, calling Allen “a failed general.” In response, Allen invoked the prestige of his profession, retorting, “He has no credibility to criticize me or my record or anything I have done.” He continued, “If he’d spent a minute in the deserts of Afghanistan or in the deserts of Iraq, I might listen to what he has to say.” Worse yet, he termed Trump’s comments “a direct insult to every single man and woman who’s wearing the uniform today.”

Now, Trump’s assertion that Allen is a “failed general” because we haven’t defeated the Islamic State is at best simplistic and arguably absurd. But, having joined the political fray in such a full-throated way, Allen is fair game. Hiding behind the armor of the uniform he proudly wore and the troops who now serve is highly problematic for the institution, which holds such high prestige and has such tremendous value in our system of government precisely because it is viewed as a loyal servant of the nation rather than a partisan tool.

Further, it makes Allen’s warnings that electing Trump could result in “a civil military crisis, the like of which we’ve not seen in this country,” especially ominous. He was, rightly, pointing out the moral dilemma that would face the uniformed leadership were Trump to assume office and actually try and enact some of the off-the-cuff musings on international relations as policy. Were Trump to assume the mantle of commander-in-chief and issue an order the brass believed unlawful, they would have a duty to advise him accordingly and to abide by the laws of this nation and the laws of war. There are appropriate venues for airing that discussion, such as a Congressional hearing. A national political convention is not one of them. But, in context of a retired general who has just

spoken as a party convention, it comes across as a warning that the military would be disloyal if a president of the wrong party were elected. This could lead to a calamitous state of affairs.

Meanwhile, Flynn not only spoke at the Republican convention but was purportedly on the short list to be Trump's running mate. Even though he was not selected for the ticket, he has taken on an attack dog role, even carrying the fight to Twitter where, in what one hopes was a newbie's incompetence, he enthusiastically retweeted an anti-Semitic attack on Clinton. That is, to say the least, not a good look.

Flynn, who retired as the three-star head of the Defense Intelligence Agency just shy of two years ago, has been an active opponent of the Obama White House almost from the moment he hung up his uniform. He declared last year that, "The people in the United States have lost respect and confidence in their government to be able to solve the problems that we face now and in the future." Feaver warned at the time that Flynn's aggressive criticism could undermine policymakers' confidence in the brass: "If they suspect 'this guy's going to retire and then go on MSNBC and bash me,' [they might decide] 'let's not have that person in the room when we're really discussing the issues.'"

That would be both understandable and catastrophic.

It is technically true, as Richard Swain argues, that "retired officers remain members of the armed forces by law and regulation" and it is therefore reasonable to assume that "they remain at least ethically obliged to observe the limitations imposed by commissioned service." But there has been little precedent for holding them to that standard. Nor is it reasonable to expect, for example, a retired lieutenant colonel, who already rendered at least two decades of service, to continue to abstain from the full rights and privileges of citizenship for the remainder of his life.

Still, we can nonetheless formalize professional norms for retired generals and admirals. Don Snider, a retired Army colonel and longtime scholar of the profession, argues:

While retirement from active duty does make each one a newly nonpracticing professional, in the world of public perceptions they still act and speak, and are seen and heard, as an esteemed member of the military profession.

As such, they continue to have an obligation to ensure that officership is perceived as "a real profession as opposed to just another governmental bureaucracy." Otherwise, they undermine the confidence of the civilian leadership, the American public, and rank-and-file soldiers.

We can begin with the distinction that holds for active duty officers and, to a lesser extent, civilian employees of the Defense Department between partisan politicking and issue advocacy. It's perfectly reasonable and likely valuable for retired officers to weigh in on public debates on controversial issues, like gender integration or proposed military action, where it would be inappropriate or difficult for serving generals to weigh in where their civilian masters have spoken. (Although, here, the rule may well be the opposite as

that for partisan endorsements: the longer the officer has been out of uniform, the less valuable his expertise.)

At the same time, it's clearly inappropriate for retired generals and admirals to endorse or oppose the re-election of officials they've recently served or worked alongside. It simply smacks of disloyalty and brings into retrospective question the advice they rendered while in uniform. Further, it gives the impression, true or otherwise, that their views are shared by their successors — especially those who were protégées. Relatedly, if the endorser is later appointed to a plum post in the administration, as Crowe was, then it looks very much like the imprimatur of the military profession has been auctioned off for advancement.

We already impose a statutory moratorium on certain senior officers from lobbying or accepting a contract from their former agency for two years after retirement. Adding a ban on using their title in partisan political activity for, say, five years would serve the same purpose — removing the appearance of impropriety — without permanently taking them out of the arena. This wouldn't solve the problem entirely but would put some space between an individual's time in uniform and partially mitigate the impression that they are speaking for those with whom they recently served.

In an ideal world, retired generals and admirals would simply refrain, as non-practicing members of the profession of arms, from endorsing political candidates or otherwise engaging in partisan activity. A Flynn or Allen could still speak out on national security issues that concern them, including those that are part of an ongoing campaign, without explicitly endorsing candidates or appearing at a party convention. Few would criticize them if they had instead appeared at a think tank or before Congress arguing for a more aggressive approach to fighting ISIL, warning of the dangers to embracing torture, or abandoning protections for non-combatants.

It is essential that our generals and admirals are perceived as loyal to the Constitution, not a political party. A commander-in-chief should have every confidence that they are receiving the best military advice from the chairman, the service chiefs, combatant commanders, and other senior military leaders. Otherwise, it would absolutely be appropriate for the next president to look for “Clinton generals” or “Trump admirals” to fill the top billets. And we clearly do not want that to happen.

James Joyner is a security studies professor at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College and a nonresident senior fellow with the Brent Scowcroft Center for International Security at the Atlantic Council. These views are his own.



Don't Box Retired Generals Out of Politics

By Eric T. Olson

August 11, 2016

General Marty Dempsey recently sent a clear and forceful message to his fellow retired generals and admirals: Keep your politics private. This position is not new for the former Joint Chiefs chairman; he has held these views for many years, articulating them while on active duty and now in retirement.

It is hard for those of us who have served as flag officers and are now retired to argue with General Dempsey, for many reasons. Not the least of these is the enormous respect and credibility that he has gained with us through the many years of his distinguished service. We do not exaggerate or off-handedly flatter him when we observe that he is one of the best in our cohort.

But in this instance he has overstated his case, and in so doing may have done a disservice to some of our peers who have contributions to make towards an informed electorate—and the voting public as a whole.

No doubt General Dempsey wrote his article in response to the actions of several generals or admirals who have recently and publicly voiced opinions about candidates, most notably two who had prominent speaking roles during the recent Republican and Democratic party conventions. His primary concern seems to be captured in this passage: “The image of generals and admirals that is held in esteem by the American people is the image of loyal, determined, selfless professionalism keeping watch for threats to our country from abroad. It’s not the image of angry speeches in front of partisan audiences intended to influence politics at home.”

Elsewhere, he states that as a result of senior retired military leaders’ participation in campaign activities, elected officials and the public at large “may now question whether senior military leaders can be trusted to provide honest, non-partisan advice on the issues and to execute the orders given to them with the effort necessary to accomplish them.”

Most of us probably would argue that certain recent appearances of and presentations by retired generals have fallen in the category of the type of partisan politics that General Dempsey had in mind when he was crafting his thoughts on his article — general attacks on the character of candidates, personal judgments about unsuitability for office, cheerleading for rowdy convention crowds, and the like.

But in condemning broadly a whole category of political activeness as choosing to “become part of the public political landscape,” does he preclude the valuable contributions that experienced former military and defense officials can make as we seek wise choices about the next commander-in-chief? Specifically, don’t we want to hear from retired senior officers who have worked directly for or with individual candidates about those qualities that will serve them—and us—well if they are elected and cast into the role of leader of the most powerful and complex military establishment in the world?

To be clear, retired military leaders who make charges against candidates based not on direct experience or knowledge of her or his qualities or attributes but on talking points provided by campaign staffs, or observations about suitability for office that refer to areas of interest or expertise that are completely beyond the ken of the officer making the statement are usually inappropriate. But doesn’t the average voter understand that a retired general or admiral is not the expert that one should listen to when trying to decide which candidate will be best for the U.S. economy or the health-care system? And don’t we think that voters want to hear from senior officials with years of experience about matters of national security and foreign policy?

Specifically, what was wrong with Gen. John Allen noting that, based on his personal experience working with her and his direct observations of her actions and decisions in tough situations, that one of the candidates has what it takes to ensure that the U.S. will continue to play a role as an “indispensable, transformational power in the world.” No doubt there are voters who are wondering about how a candidate will perform under pressure, how she will work with serving military leaders, whether she will listen to commanders on the ground and take their advice. They should be able to get the views of a well-respected retired military official who has reason to know the answers to those questions.

One other point: how far is General Dempsey willing to take his argument about what is proper for a general or admiral to do in retirement? Should retired senior officers refuse to serve in key appointive positions when asked by elected officials—as presidential envoys, advisers on tough national-security problems, special representatives, and the like—for fear that in doing so they will be viewed as political appointees and risk casting into suspicion the impartial best military judgement that they provided while on active duty? Or that of those whom they knew on active duty who are still serving? What about the 4-stars who take positions in the world of business and finance? Do we start wondering if they are in the pocket of Wall Street or the defense industry now and may have been unduly influenced while on active duty?

There is no question that we must preserve the principle that military advice must be given by serving flag officers “without political bias or personal agenda.” It is almost inconceivable that the outcome of any election could be so important that we would be willing to accept risk to that principle. But the observation that “generals and admirals are generals and admirals for life” cuts both ways. True, there are certain partisan activities that must be avoided because they risk creating a perception that is unhealthy to good

civil-military relations and the trust that the American people have in their military leaders. But it is also true that retired generals and admirals have garnered the experience to be among the best judges of the qualities that it takes to command at the highest level. We should be able to hear from them in an appropriate fashion to help us decide who to support as the person to lead our military for the next four years.

Eric Olson reached the rank of major general in the U.S. Army before retiring from active duty in 2006. He subsequently served as the deputy director in the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office and as the chief of staff to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

WAR ON THE ROCKS

DANGER CLOSE: MILITARY POLITICIZATION AND ELITE CREDIBILITY

MICHAEL A. ROBINSON

AUGUST 21, 2018

COMMENTARY

Speaking at a National Guard leadership conference in 2011, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey mused on a request he made to U.S. Army War College leaders to explain why the military was so popular: “Maybe if I knew what it would take to screw it up, I could avoid it.” If the ongoing debate over retired officers and the partisan political sphere is to be believed, the general can stop searching. Retired general and flag officers have risen lead the Pentagon, White House staff, the National Security Council staff — even a misfire attempt at Veterans’ Affairs — and become outspoken voices as commentators, analysts, and activists. What’s also risen is a concern over how an increasingly visible military presence in politics might affect the credibility of the military institution.

Why does the public credibility of the military matter? Aside from the inherent value of the public’s trusting an essential arm of their government, military leaders are critical sources of information. While many dispute the virtue of military figures engaging in opinion-shaping, even the most traditional civil-military scholars should accept that a military institution perceived as trustworthy is in the best interest of civilian leaders who rely on it for advice. But the public at large also benefits from a trusted military. When citizens need information or cues on how to think about subjects as diverse as torture, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, foreign intervention, and relations with the press, they will likely seek out trusted voices in the discourse.

But if preserving a trustworthy voice is important, does using it damage the institution? The discussion over this question has largely depended on subjective critiques and conjecture. Dempsey’s remarks were in response to a 2011 Gallup survey on trust in institutions that ranked the military favorably, a trend that has not changed considerably since. If trust among the public has not shifted, do we have anything to fear about the military losing credibility? I argue that the answer is yes, by analyzing this question with a data-driven focus. If partisan activism is to threaten military credibility, there is likely to be two indicators: first, a loss of generalized trustworthiness when speaking on military issues, and, second, the loss of a broad audience.

To the first point, I discuss the results of original survey experimentation I conducted in a working paper probing how knowledge of a retired military officer's partisan history affected their influence. In order to examine the second idea, I explore the social media follower networks of several prominent retired military leaders and the ideologies of the audiences they cultivate. As Heidi Urben details at length, the realm of social media is one of the ungoverned spaces where military partisan expression is widespread. Across both domains, we can gain some visibility on a threat that, for many, has existed so far as normative alarmism.

How to Lose Trust and Politicize People

Senior retired military officials can have a significant effect on how the public receives and interprets information on pressing issues. Being out of uniform has little bearing on their influence, as their credibility as a speaker comes from their erstwhile career: "Like princes of the church", historian and civil-military scholar Richard Kohn remarks, "They represent the culture and the profession just as authoritatively as their counterparts on active duty." But how does public knowledge of political activism affect their influence as a source of political information?

As part of my own research, I examined some of this question through several experimental survey instruments measuring public attitudes on the military and elite credibility. Over 1,000 respondents were given a short biography about a retired senior military officer whose background after service included either non-partisan research or a history of candidate endorsements and commentary on partisan cable networks. It then measured impressions of credibility for the general on a battery of questions regarding the individual's trustworthiness and expertise.

The study revealed several key patterns regarding how partisan generals fared against their non-partisan counterparts. Activist generals were seen as less credible, but only by those on the other side of the political spectrum. Co-partisans — those on the same political side as the activist general — actually found political generals to be slightly more credible. In a working paper based on this research, I find that generals who endorsed the other side scored considerably lower than the non-partisan in terms of credibility, even if both had identical qualifications. Exposure to a partisan general from across the aisle also damaged individual impressions of the military's trustworthiness and expertise, compounding the credibility problem.

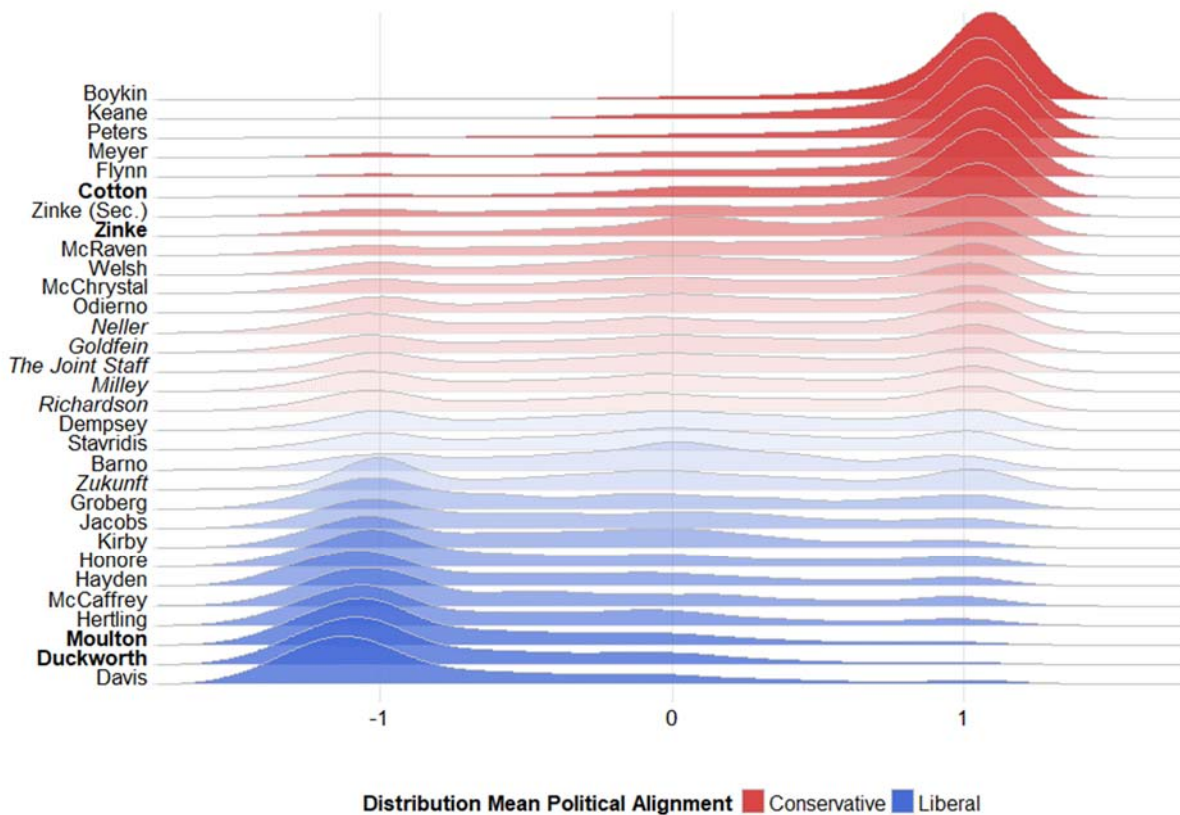
These voices were also far less effective when providing information to the public on policies within their expertise. The respondents were told that the figure they had seen endorsed a pre-emptive strike on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Compared to hearing an endorsement from the non-partisan, public support for the policy was significantly degraded if it was being endorsed by a military officer with a history of activism. In addition to losing considerable credibility with a large portion of the country, the public's receptiveness to a perceived subject matter expert was curtailed. If information on foreign intervention can only be seen through partisan lenses, foreign policy attitudes will become polarized along partisan lines, with a multitude of negative consequences for coherent and wise policy.

Retired officers who are perceived as partisans risk the very credibility they leverage when speaking publicly. This is not to suggest these figures should remain out of expert debates on policy; to argue that several decades of hard-won subject matter expertise and experience should remain closeted benefits the American people none at all. But the effectiveness of that counsel is conditional on maintaining a non-partisan image for themselves and the military institution. As some of my own research suggests, failing to do incurs a high cost: an authoritative and credible voice in the information space.

More Partisan than Partisans

In order to explore what I argue is the second element of credibility decay, loss of a broad audience, I examined how different retired officers at different levels of activism or commentary draw varied ideological distributions. To this end, I collected information on the social media follower networks of nearly three dozen high-profile military elites in November 2017, ranging from the active service chiefs to retired officers in academia, commentary, and activism. Using political ideology scores assigned from Adam Bonica's Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections dataset, the result is an ideological distribution of the Twitter follower audiences from each, ranging from very liberal (-1.5) to very conservative (+1.5). For reference, the bold-faced names in Figure 1 indicate actual politicians whose principal pre-Congressional careers were in the military, including Sens. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Tom Cotton (R-AR). Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA), and the Congressional account for Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke (R-MT).

Figure 1: Ideological Distribution of Military Elite Follower Networks



The data reflect ideology scores of the followers for military elite Twitter accounts with at least 1,000 followers, subsetting to those followers who tracked at least two American politicians. Ideology score provided by Adam Bonica’s CF dataset. Twitter follower data collected October–November 2017, with exception of Kirby (April 2018) and Peters (July 2018). Ideology score re-scaled to between -1.5 (most liberal) to 1.5 (most conservative) with height of the distribution re-scaled to represent min-max. Bold names indicate members of Congress whose principal prior career was in the military. The italicized names indicate active service chiefs.

Do activist or politically visible retired officers lose a broad audience? The short answer is yes. Those with regular media presence on cable news channels, such as retired Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling (CNN), retired Col. Morris Davis (MSNBC), retired Gen. Jack Keane (Fox), and retired Lt. Col. Ralph Peters (Fox), are among the most one-sided in the sample. Though these networks have decidedly partisan audiences, to see those ideological skews manifest in the follower networks of these military figures is particularly telling. Peters made headlines earlier this year when he left Fox News over the

network's "propagandizing for the Trump administration." Further analysis of his follower network in the future will reveal if doing so lent him a new audience among administration critics or cost him one among Fox die-hards.

Retired officials who have waded into turbulent political waters exhibit these one-sided audiences as well. Retired Lt. Gen. William Boykin, whose unabashed anti-Islamic comments created considerable turmoil in both civilian and military circles, captures among the most partisan audiences in the sample. President Trump's first national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn cultivates a similar audience, not unexpectedly given his close identification with the administration's inner circle. Though less severe in skew, similarly one-sided audiences emerge under retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey (MSNBC), and retired Gen. Michael Hayden, who clashed with the administration over Hurricane Maria relief, Russia relations, and treatment of U.S. intelligence agencies, respectively.

While it is somewhat evident that the active service chiefs maintain broad audiences, politicizing forces still act on them. This is because the political floor has shifted considerably under the feet of the military, making some actions seem partisan by mere comparison. One example of this came in the social media response following the Charlottesville rally in 2017, in which the service chiefs issued near-simultaneous statements denouncing intolerance and racial extremism. This response was interpreted by many as an "unusually public move," likely because of the relative position of their sentiment to that of the White House, which was decidedly non-committal. The abruptness of the White House's new policy on transgender service members placed the chiefs in a similarly precarious situation following the previous administration's approval of their open service. Though in both cases senior leadership issued arguably uncontroversial statements, their sentiment relative to that being espoused by civilian leadership put them in the headlines.

But these voices, ones with more balanced audiences around the political center, can be some of the most influential. In this regard, it is important to note that though partisan activism might be damaging, honest subject matter expertise can be constructive to our discourse. Retired Adm. William McRaven's recent op-ed opposing the Trump administration's "McCarthy-era" revocation of former CIA director John Brennan's security clearance seized precisely on the legitimate need for "voices of criticism." A host of former intelligence professionals — including retired Gen. David Petraeus — quickly rallied around the rebuke. Their letter made specific mention of the fact that

though these intelligence professionals had chosen to “be more circumspect in [their] public pronouncements” on administration policy than Brennan, the circumstances demanded their public outcry. When officers with little record of partisan activism or media visibility speak on issues in their subject matter expertise, actual persuasion of public attitudes might be possible.

But for those closely aligned with a partisan establishment or media environments with strong partisan audiences, the opposite is likely true. What analysis of these audiences can tell us is that retired officers who engage in partisan activism, whether perceived or actual, may sacrifice a broad audience of Americans in favor of a narrow, ideologically coherent one. Taken together with results from the survey wherein individuals actually felt that co-partisan generals were in some cases *more* credible for engaging in politics, this creates an environment ripe for potential opportunism among those seeking a post-service career in that arena. Access to a public audience doesn’t require a long career of establishing qualifications and expertise; rather, simply aligning with a major partisan establishment can garner that following, even if it comes at the expense of a broadly authoritative voice.

The Future of Military Credibility

The debate over retired officers and their activity in the political arena has typically focused on the implications such behavior has on civil-military relations, democratic norms, and organizational attitudes within the military. Heidi Urban finds that service members themselves are far more tolerant of political activism by retired officers than their active duty counterparts. My own findings suggest that the public may also be tolerant of such activity — conditional on such sentiment being in line with their own ideology. This is compounded by the fact that even if servicemembers see a difference between active and retired officials when it comes to activism, the public likely does not. The implications of such a slowly-unfolding trend are manifold.

First, future appeals to military elites may be limited in their effectiveness. If there is a breakdown in the American political discourse, it is in large part due to a similar breakdown in mechanisms of persuasion. Political scientists have long argued that the public looks for credible voices to help them find a position on policy; these voices provide the mental signposts required to reach a reasoned opinion without having to become an expert themselves. However, this process may in many ways be backward: Rather than credible voices leading us to reasoned opinions, pre-existing opinions dictate who is “credible” by their conforming or deviating from it. Policymakers would do well to note what this means for opinion shaping. High profile appointments of

retired officers to positions in government or consideration of them for a partisan ticket are often motivated by a desire to draw credibility from an apolitical institution. What I argue here is that rather than make politicians seem more like the military, it serves only to make the military seem more like politicians.

Second, even if senior leaders in the active force redouble efforts to curtail partisanship among the ranks online or in public, they will continue to have little influence over a retired community that is arguably far more visible. While my own research shows that engaging in the partisan debate costs them credibility with roughly half of the public, this is the environment most suited for opportunism. If retired officers believe that engaging in activism after the end of their career can earn them a die-hard audience of followers, they are more susceptible to shaping a political “afterlife” while they are still in uniform, as many including retired Lt. Gen. David Barno have feared.

Instead, retired senior leaders should see these findings as some evidence that repeated entrance into the political debate is inherently self-defeating. While doing so can earn them a small, dedicated audience of potential ideologues, they do so at the cost of generalized credibility and access to a broad audience. Furthermore, they lose the ability to affect opinions among precisely those members of the public they need to: people who don’t already agree with them. Rather than oblige the service chiefs to pressure the retired community into silence, these results will hopefully convince that community that activism has real costs, for themselves and the institution.

In this respect, civil-military scholars and policymakers concerned about military politicization are not alarmists. The partisan polarization that has gripped so much of the public’s trust in institutions in government and private society has not left the military unharmed. Senior military leaders have continued to warn the active force and the public about these forces, even if they are largely outside the direct management of the organization. The intensity of the domestic political climate is likely to continue to draw the military into uncharted and uncertain waters. More importantly, the influence of retired activists will similarly continue to become fixtures of informational media. However, those same elites should heed this insight into the process of how the public views voices as “credible”. Those who want to cultivate broad audiences with credibility subvert those efforts by engaging in the partisan sphere — that way lies madness.

Michael A. Robinson is an active duty Army infantry officer with multiple combat deployments and currently serves as an assistant professor of international affairs at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University where his dissertation focused on elite credibility and how the public chooses credible sources of political information, with a particular focus on the military institution. The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of Defense, or any part of the U.S. government.

The belief has grown in the last generation that senior officers, when faced with policies or decisions from their civilian bosses that the officers believe to be unwise, immoral, unethical, or otherwise dangerous, should “resign,” that is, retire or ask for reassignment. The term “resignation” does not imply giving up their commissions and retirement benefits, but instead leaving their assignments or active duty, either protesting the policy/decision or simply walking away silently.

Many scholars and officers believe such an ethic would have a most deleterious effect on civil-military relations while others believe that officers have the right to disassociate themselves honorably from situations that violate their professional and personal ethics.

There is no tradition of “resignation” in the US armed forces. Why? What are the implications for military profession and for civil-military relations should such a tradition develop?

The blog postings below outline some of the arguments on both sides. They are from 2014 but the debate antedates these writings and continues today.



SHADOW GOVERNMENT

Notes from the loyal opposition

Should Senior Military Officers Resign in Protest if Obama Disregards Their Advice?

BY PETER FEAVER

October 7, 2014

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/07/should-senior-military-officers-resign-in-protest-if-obama-disregards-their-advice/>

Should senior military officers resign if the president disregards their advice and orders them to execute assignments that, in their judgment, are ill-defined, inadequately resourced, or otherwise flawed?

There is a lively debate among commentators on American civil-military relations on this topic; given the related debate about Obama’s responsibility for America’s deteriorating global position, the commentary is not idle. I have already weighed in on some civil-military challenges confronting the administration, but the resignation idea deserves more attention than I have given it so far.

In the last couple of weeks, several prominent commentators have urged Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other senior military to resign in protest of President Obama’s poor leadership of the various wars in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. If they do

not resign, critics argue, the senior officers become complicit in a doomed strategy. The commentators differ on which Obama misstep is most damning. But the overall thrust is that the president has consistently ignored the good advice of senior military advisors and so, they argue, those advisors are well within their rights to resign rather than execute flawed policies they recommended against — so argues a former senior defense official in the Wall Street Journal, a retired Marine colonel here in Foreign Policy, and a conservative pundit in The American Thinker, among others. Even a Republican congressman from Colorado has joined in, urging military officers to resign.

The thinking behind this is what I call "McMasterism," after a particular reading (or misreading) of *Dereliction of Duty*, by Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster. I read McMaster's book as criticizing the American military leaders of the Vietnam War for not correcting the record when President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara misled the public about the nature of the general's advice. Others read him as merely criticizing the American military leaders for letting service parochialism color their military advice.

Several of the more outspoken calls for Dempsey to resign in protest explicitly invoke McMaster in defense of their position. They read his book as criticizing the senior leaders for not resigning in protest when President Johnson not only misreported their advice, but ignored it altogether. In other words, the "McMasterism" thesis is that the military should not merely advise but also insist on its advice and, if the president disregards that advice, the military then has the right to resign in protest, or, at a minimum, to blow the whistle on civilians and mount a vigorous public protest.

Advocating resignation and protest like this is bad counsel and would do much to undermine healthy civil-military relations if it ever became accepted practice among senior officers. There is, in fact, no tradition of resignation in protest within the U.S. military. It has happened, but far more rarely than advocates realize. To be sure, there are probably many quiet retirements that come early because the senior officer believes that he or she cannot continue to serve, given the direction of policy. But retiring and foregoing promotions is a far cry from resignation in protest. Even the most famous case of such a retirement — Air Force Chief of Staff Ron Fogleman's decision to step down — took a very different form from resignation in protest: Fogleman stepped down because he believed that his civilian bosses had lost confidence in his judgment and they deserved to have a chief in which they had greater confidence.

A resignation in protest or a threat to resign in protest subverts civilian control and is what I have called "shirking." It seeks to coerce civilians into aligning with military preferences, rather than having the military implement the strategies selected by the civilians. It would undermine military professionalism over the long haul, because it would drive civilian leaders to politicize the process of selecting senior military officers. Political leaders would promote generals and admirals based on whether they thought the officers would be sufficiently pliant, rather than on whether they thought the officers were the most capable men and women for the job. I realize the stakes of failed civilian policies can be quite high — indeed, the dramatic revelations in former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's memoir make this point vividly. Panetta argues that the rise of the Islamic State can be traced in large part to President Obama's mishandling of Iraq policy in the first term. Panetta's revelations largely confirm the criticisms heard for years, including some aired out here on Shadow Government. While the counterfactual

cannot be proven beyond all doubt, it is likely that if President Obama had heeded the advice he was receiving from his generals in the first term, he would face a better array of options and choices in his second term. But the political actors empowered by the Constitution to hold the president accountable for these missteps are the members of Congress and, ultimately, the voters — not the military.

Moreover, the military is not always correct, and so it is not wise policy for the commander-in-chief to simply do whatever the generals say. Indeed, senior military leaders disagree amongst themselves. The usual challenge of command is not deciding whether to listen to generals but, rather, deciding which generals best understand the strategic situation and provide the best counsel.

In the most famous instance of dissenting generals, the so-called "revolt of the generals" in 2006, the retired generals who spoke out against Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld did not in fact offer a better strategy. Their critiques were far out of date by the time they went public, while their recommendations were largely in synch with then-existing policy. They merely reinforced the conventional wisdom, as reflected in the Baker-Hamilton Commission. President George W. Bush wisely rejected that conventional wisdom when he adopted the surge and, because he did, the U.S. military was able to reverse the trajectory in Iraq.

A useful thought exercise for those advocating a more expansive use of military resignations in protest is to ask: Would I welcome a general or flag officer resigning in protest against a policy I myself have recommended as right? To those Republicans who would like to see generals stick it to President Obama: do you think it would have been healthy for national security if the military had resigned in protest under President Bush? And for those Democrats who wanted to see the military do more to subvert President Bush's policies: would you likewise endorse the "right" of the military to do that to Obama?

This does not mean the military lacks all recourse whatsoever. On the contrary, it has three courses of action available to a dissenting senior officer, all well-grounded in democratic civil-military norms.

First and most importantly, the military has both the right and the duty to speak up in private policymaking deliberations, offering its counsel on the likely risks and benefits of different courses of action. Especially when civilians do not want to hear such advice, the military has an obligation to speak up — but in private, to the policymakers themselves, and not to the policymakers through the media. Indeed, the chairman, the vice chairman, and all of the service chiefs have the explicit right to request a private meeting with the president to give their full and frank advice. Officers below that rank have ample opportunity in the interagency policymaking process to make their views heard.

Second, when asked to do so in sworn testimony in congressional hearings, all flag and general officers have not just the right but the obligation to offer their private military advice even if it differs from administration policy. In fact, all flag and general officers have already sworn under oath that they will do just that — it is the first question on the confirmation form for all senior officers, and the Senate will not confirm them to their promoted rank if they fail to promise to

provide such candid advice. The constitutional fix for bad military policy by the executive branch is better oversight from the congressional branch, and since Congress represents civilian control just as the executive branch does, its members have a right to hear military views.

Third, the military has the right — and, I would argue, the obligation — to clarify the public record when senior civilians misrepresent the content of their advice in public. This is a tricky right, I acknowledge, and should be used sparingly to correct egregious misrepresentations rather than every distortion, however slight. Senior military officers serve at the pleasure of the president, and any president is going to lose pleasure in a general who rushes to clarify every misstated jot and tittle. But when the president mischaracterizes military advice in important ways, the military can clarify the record, provided it does so through one of the two courses of action described above. Dempsey properly fulfilled this obligation a year ago when President Obama mischaracterized the general's advice about the costs and consequences of delaying possible air strikes against Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.

These protections are adequate to ensure that our political leaders are making policy with the benefit of the best military counsel available. These protections may not guarantee that the chosen policies will be optimal. But conducting business this way rather than through resignations of protest guarantees that we not inadvertently lose something even more precious than optimal policy: democratic civil-military relations.

On principled resignation: A response

By Lt. Gen. James M. Dubik, U.S. Army (Ret.)

October 14, 2014

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/14/on-principled-resignation-a-response/>

Justice in the conduct of war sometimes demands principled resignation of senior political and military leaders. In this, Colonel Anderson is right. But while the current situation calls for a straightforward, no-holds-barred discussion between the president and his military advisors, the criteria for resignation are not present — at least not yet.

When fighting war, soldiers and their leaders are not mere instruments, automatons, or programmed killing machines. Even in battle, they remain capable of making moral judgments, hence retaining responsibility for their decisions and actions. This is what separates legitimate killing from butchery, murder, and massacre. And this is why Americans expect their soldiers and leaders to protest commands that would require them to violate the rules of war. Senior political and military leaders who wage war also remain moral agents. How well they identify war aims; choose the military and non-military strategies, policies, and campaigns necessary to attain those aims; and use their bureaucracies to take action and adapt as a war unfolds determine the length of a war, the costs of a war, and ultimately the success or failure of a war. To say it plainly, the decisions and actions associated with waging war determine whether the lives used in fighting are used well or in vain.

Principled resignation must meet two important criteria.

One, the matter must be more than just "disagreement with the final decision" or "feeling one's advice is being ignored" or "not getting one's way." It must cross the threshold into illegality or immorality. Waging war becomes unjust when the lives of citizens in military service are being wasted. Part of war's hellishness lies in this: war necessarily uses lives, and sometimes honest mistakes of omission and commission results in lives lost in battle. But when lives are wasted in avoidable ways like promulgating manifestly inept policies and strategies, or conducting campaigns that have no reasonable chance of success because they are neither properly resourced nor connected to strategic aims worthy of the name — lives are not used, they are wasted. Senior political and military leaders are co-responsible for the lives of the citizens-now-soldiers they use in waging war. The purpose of the sometimes-heated dialogue among these senior leaders is to increase the probability of wise war-waging decisions and actions.

Central to this first criteria is Colonel Anderson's claim that "without American combat troops...to physically clear the cities and towns that [ISIS has] occupied, we are in for a long and frustrating open-ended conflict that the American people will quickly tire of." At the very least, this claim is debatable. This much is clear: without adequate numbers of combat advisors that enhance the capacity of Kurds and Sunni tribes, link Iraqi troops to well-targeted air strikes, help the Iraqis reconstitute their units, and help them coordinate and sustain a nation-wide air/ground counteroffensive, such a counteroffensive is unlikely to succeed. Also clear is the requirement

for U.S. quick-reaction forces, medical-evacuation elements, and search and rescue forces to support the advisors who will be on the ground. But whether American ground combat troops are necessary to do the fighting is not clear at all. Also unclear is whether Americans will tire more of U.S. troops clearing cities and towns or of Americans helping Iraqis to do that. Regardless of who does the fighting, the counteroffensive will take long and frustrating years, U.S. assistance and commitment will be needed throughout, and some of that assistance will take the form of uniformed American troops.

The second necessary criterion is that principled resignation cannot threaten civil control of the military — one of the bedrocks of a democracy. Resignation must be a private affair over principle, not a public affair over primacy. "Going public" changes the character of the resignation from a matter of principle to a political matter. Private resignation, like voiced objection, provides a legitimate way to help our government know when what it is doing isn't working or is wrong. Both objection and resignation help ensure our democracy is not robbed of the ability to recognize and restore deteriorating quality in its decisions and actions. Both contribute to better governmental performance.

Meeting both criteria is difficult. It should be. Principled resignation should be a morally anguishing matter. Perhaps it is time for the closed-door meeting Colonel Anderson describes, but the situation is not yet ripe for resignation by a senior military leader over a matter of principle.

General Dubik is a retired infantryman, paratrooper, and ranger. He held positions of command in Haiti, Bosnia, and Iraq. His last job on active duty was to accelerate the growth and capacity of the Iraqi military and police during the surge of 2007-8. He recently was awarded a Ph.D. in philosophy from Johns Hopkins University and is a senior fellow at the Institute for the Study of War.



Military Resignation in Protest Is Still a Bad Idea

BY PETER FEAVER

October 24, 2014

The debate over whether it is proper for senior military officers to resign in protest continues to bubble along. I made my case for a highly restrictive norm, one that would leave almost no room for resignation in protest. I was rebutting those who were urging a norm that would greatly expand the practice. Now, partly in response to my own post, two other distinguished commentators have weighed in with what might be considered a middle ground option. I have great respect for both of these commentators and so I take their arguments seriously but, in the end, I think they muddy the waters. If anything, the case they make for a middle ground makes me even more convinced of the need for the bright line I propose in my original article.

But first, a point that bears even greater emphasis than I gave it initially: the military has a legal, ethical, and professional obligation to resist illegal orders. It is not merely acceptable for the military to resist illegal orders, it is obligatory that they do so. If the President of the United States ordered General Dempsey to do something illegal, then Dempsey should resist the order up to the point of resigning in public protest. Every expert I know who writes or comments on this topic would agree with that. All of the debate is about orders that are legal but otherwise problematic.

Now the obligation to resist illegal orders itself comes with some additional clear constraints. It is not up to the individual officer to adjudicate the legality of the order. While it is appropriate for the military to have a presumption in favor of the legality of orders that come from the president through the chain of command, there is a large military legal community that is professionally empowered to help military officers determine that such orders are, in fact, legal. Moreover, these military lawyers operate within the larger civilian legal framework that is itself hierarchical, and in which the military is clearly subordinate. So if the military determines that an order might be illegal but the competent superior civilian legal authorities have determined that it is legal then, for the purposes of applying this norm, the order is legal. The military should obey it. The point is made clear by considering one of the most infamous orders in American military history: the order to round up and intern Japanese-Americans during World War II. Whatever your views on the wisdom or ethicality of that order, from the point of view of American civil-military relations there can be no reasonable debate about whether the order was legal under the United States Constitution. The Supreme Court unambiguously made it so. You are free to regret that decision today, but it would have been a gross violation of democratic civil-military norms for Gen. George Marshall to say to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, "I know the Supreme Court disagrees with me, but I think that order is illegal and so I refuse to implement it." The military is simply not competent to make that judgment. There is a name for military officers determined to rescue their country from their own constitution: dictator.

Another point that bears re-emphasis is that the policymaking process should provide ample room for the military to present a contrarian view to civilian leaders — to dissent from proposed courses of action. In my hypothetical, it would have been entirely appropriate for Gen. Marshall to recommend against interning Japanese-Americans.

Likewise, senior military officers have some latitude to quietly retire, if they believe that a policy trajectory is legal but problematic. This option is also circumscribed by caveats that require case-by-case adjudication. "Retiring" with a letter to the editor denouncing the president as a warmonger just ahead of an anticipated order to deploy to the combat zone is different from quietly transitioning to civilian life because you doubt that women can be effectively integrated into Special Operations units and do not want to be obliged to try to make that work. The former violates the norm, the latter does not.

I also outlined other forms of recourse available to the military, including testimony to Congress and correcting the public record if their own views have been misstated. So those like me who hold what might be considered a fairly absolutist position against resignation in protest nevertheless give the military ample opportunity to "dissent," including dissent in public. For that reason, I do not see why there is a need to expand the wiggle room for the military still further, as some of my colleagues try to do.

Consider this argument by Gen. James Dubik (Ret.), one of the most thoughtful people in the business (also, as an aside, one of the funniest people in the business — he has stories about his early job as a zookeeper that leave me literally falling out of my chair laughing). Dubik's piece is mainly devoted to rebutting those who are urging Dempsey to resign now. Dubik argues, rightly, that the current policy challenges come nowhere close to meeting the standards for resignation in protest. Moreover, he rightly says that the military should not resign just because they disagree with the final policy or feel that their advice is being ignored. And he wisely limits resignation to a private matter. But then, I fear, he muddies the waters by admixing "illegality" and "immorality."

He writes: Waging war becomes unjust when the lives of citizens in military service are being wasted. Part of war's hellishness lies in this: war necessarily uses lives, and sometimes honest mistakes of omission and commission results in lives lost in battle. But when lives are wasted in avoidable ways like promulgating manifestly inept policies and strategies, or conducting campaigns that have no reasonable chance of success because they are neither properly resourced nor connected to strategic aims worthy of the name — lives are not used, they are wasted. Senior political and military leaders are co-responsible for the lives of the citizens-now-soldiers they use in waging war.

That sounds good in theory, but is almost impossible to apply in practice. More to the point, it is a loophole so wide that it risks allowing back in all of the bad forms of resignation in protest Dubik is seeking to rule out of bounds. Every military officer who resigns in protest is going to claim that he is doing so on these terms, not because they merely "disagree" with the policy or are "frustrated" that their advice is ignored. Every controversial decision I can think of can be recast in these terms: canceling the F-22 will needlessly cost us lives, invading North Africa in 1942 will needlessly cost us lives, conducting the 2003 Iraq invasion force without such-and-such civil affairs unit will needlessly cost us lives, conducting the 2007 Iraq surge will needlessly

cost us lives, and so on. At the end of the day, in our system, the military is competent to advise on all of these questions, but the rightness of the decision hinges both on irreducible unknowables and trade-offs across different forms of risk. In a democracy, choices that have those qualities are the proper responsibility of the civilian leadership to make, for good or for ill.

Or consider this contribution from Don Snider, one of the leading thinkers of military professional norms and another man I deeply respect. Snider invokes the work of two other thought-leaders and friends, Martin Cook and James Burk. (If all of these cross-cutting encomia strikes you as excessively clubby, I accept the critique. All of us working on this issue have been arguing amongst ourselves for years and have developed the mutual respect that comes from civil debate.) Snider, Cook, and Burk seek to make sure the military develops the capacity of high professions to become truly expert, and not mere robotic implementers of civilian directives. To reach this level of expertise, they argue, the military needs a certain amount of autonomy. I agree and would further assert that the U.S. military, one of the most professionalized and expert militaries in the world, readily enjoys that level of autonomy. Now it is the case that in some settings and on certain issues, civilians might restrict that autonomy a bit more than in others — for instance, President Obama is doubtless scrutinizing and circumscribing military operations in Syria more than he is in Iraq more than he is in Afghanistan more than he is in the United Kingdom more than he is in Texas. That is entirely proper. The dividing line between what can rightly be "left up to the military" and what needs to be decided by the civilian shifts with circumstances and it is the civilian's prerogative as to where to draw it. Moreover, the military might prefer even more autonomy across the board. But in even the most restrictive areas I know about, the degree of civilian imposition does not come close to eroding military professionalism. The forms of imposition might be unwise — I think some of President Obama's restrictions have been unwise — but they are not of the sort that threatens military professionalism, which is the threshold Snider, Cook, and Burk are establishing for the military to publicly rebuke civilians.

Snider's error, I believe, is to fail to distinguish clearly enough between dissent and resignation in protest. He says that a professional military has to be able to offer dissent, and I agree. The military can dissent in the form of presenting unwelcome advice during the policymaking process. And the military can dissent in the form of explaining to Congress how and why that advice differs from the course of action the President ultimately took. But the current debate concerns resignation in protest over decisions that are unambiguously legal yet arguably unwise. It is hard to see how the military can do that without undermining the democratic foundations that military professionalism is supposed to protect.

And, finally, nothing I or any of these other experts say should be construed as seeking to insulate our civilian leaders from critique. When the President is pursuing unwise policies, the President's boss — all of us — should be vigorous in offering our dissent. We just should not seek to enlist the military in that public effort. They have more important things to be doing.

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The naming of Jim Mattis as Secretary of Defense, Michael Flynn as National Security Adviser (and H.R. McMaster as his replacement), and John Kelly first as Secretary of Homeland Security and then White House Chief of Staff raised serious questions about civilian control of the military. Indeed Congress had to waive the seven-year waiting period for a retired officer to be SecDef, which it did after due consideration but little disagreement. Now that Secretary Mattis has left office, civil-military relations scholars have begun to assess his tenure. Are there problems with have senior flag officers serve in such high political office? What might they be, both for civil-military relations and the role of the military in American society?

WAR ON THE ROCKS

IN THE WAKE OF CHAOS: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS UNDER SECRETARY JIM MATTIS

JIM GOLBY FEBRUARY 4, 2019



Was Jim Mattis exercising civilian control, or was he under civilian control?

This question is difficult to answer not only because Mattis was just the second retired general to serve as secretary of defense, but also because of the way he conducted himself during his time in office and the degraded state of civil-military relations when he left the Pentagon. Jim Mattis may have become a civilian political appointee, but he never stopped being a marine.

Although Mattis was the co-editor of an excellent book on American civil-military relations (to which I contributed a co-authored chapter), the former general's tenure was filled with civil-military controversy. He stepped into the E-ring of the Pentagon at a time of immense political polarization, with two ongoing wars and a host of global military deployments, amidst a widening of the civil-military gaps, after decades of weakening civil-military norms, to serve a president with an unconventional public communication style and no experience dealing with the military and a policy agenda that clashes with the Washington consensus. It was always too much to ask for civil-military relations to improve under these conditions. In fact, it was far more likely that civil-military tensions would increase.

Under these difficult conditions, Mattis avoided a true civil-military catastrophe and oversaw a period of two years without a major national security crisis. In doing so, however, he chose to prioritize his influence and longevity rather than healthy civil-military relations. This decision may have been understandable or even necessary, and at least some of Mattis's civil-military missteps were sins of omission rather than commission, but they nevertheless will have real and lasting consequences for American civil-military relations. In particular, Mattis's approach further: (1) blurred the lines of authority between civilian and military, as well as between active-duty and retired military; (2) enabled the rapid erosion of civil-military norms; and (3) widened gaps between the military and American society as well as between the military brass and elected political leaders.

It is possible — some would even argue likely — that America is better off overall than it would have been under any of the other nominees considered at the time, but the decision to appoint a retired general — and Mattis in particular — had an impact on the proper functioning of American civil-military relations that will persist even now that he is gone. In the end, however, Mattis passed his most important civil-military test: by serving honorably and resigning without fanfare, he reminded us that no military officer, whether active or retired, can save the republic. Healthy civil-military relations require other civilians — not the military — to hold elected leaders accountable.

General Confusion

Simply by accepting the nomination to become secretary of defense, Mattis contributed to the ongoing blurring of lines between active-duty and retired military officers in American public life. Mattis's behavior in the job reinforced this perception. Unlike Army Gen. George Marshall, who was an expert administrator and logistician with limited command time and extensive Washington experience — including 20 months as secretary of state — before becoming secretary of defense, Mattis was a commander and combat leader. Moreover, unlike Dwight Eisenhower, Brent Scowcroft, and Colin Powell, or other generals who made the transition to senior civilian posts before him, Mattis was never generally seen as a Washington insider or civilian political leader. In fact, it is not clear how Mattis would have approached the job differently if he still had been wearing the uniform. What is clear, however, is that few Americans — including the president — made the distinction between “Secretary” Mattis and “General” Mattis.

Even before Mattis became secretary of defense, the number of retired generals and admirals involved in American politics — and their role in presidential campaigns — had been growing for decades. By explicitly drawing on these retired officers' military credentials, candidates and causes attempted to co-opt the public's high esteem for the military to advance their own political prospects or partisan agendas. In doing so, they also created the subtle impression that the military itself, and not just a particular retired officer or group of officers, supported their party or their candidacy.

Mattis's elevation to secretary of defense represented an extension of this trend. Although Mattis himself never engaged in this type of politicking during campaigns and, often — at least privately inside the Pentagon — even emphasized that it was “secretary, not general,” in public he did not draw a clear line between his role as a political appointee and the responsibilities of those still on active duty. Was it realistic for him to correct this breach of civil-military etiquette every time it occurred? Perhaps not, especially because the president so often referred to him as “general” in public, but even a wry Mattis-ism, such as, “people keep calling me general, but I got promoted to secretary” might have mitigated or at least called attention to this harmful trend. But Mattis rarely, if ever, made this distinction in public.

Compounding the blurring of the lines between active-duty and retired officers, Mattis also oversaw a growing power imbalance between civilian and military authorities inside the Pentagon. As Mara Karlin and I argued last year, the power of the Joint Staff relative to that of civilian officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy already was growing during the Obama administration. During Mattis's tenure as secretary of defense, however, this trend accelerated. From my vantage point as a military officer serving as a special adviser on the National Security Staff for Vice President Joe Biden, and, later, for Vice President Mike Pence, I witnessed the assertiveness of uniformed officers on the Joint Staff grow in interagency meetings after the administration changed. After departing the White House, I wrote about some of these concerns for *The Strategy Bridge*.

At least some of this shift likely was due to the difficulty of vetting civilian political appointees during the early days of the Trump administration. Mattis initially pursued several Democrats, including Michele Flournoy, for top Pentagon posts, but he ran into opposition from the White House because they didn't find many of his early picks ideologically acceptable. Rather than accepting these constraints and identifying candidates the White House would find tolerable to fill these posts more quickly, Mattis instead decided to double-down on some nonpartisan nominees, extending the time it took him to fill key civilian political positions in the Pentagon. With many of these civilian posts empty early in the administration, experienced military officers on the Joint Staff — who didn't change out during the transition — stepped in to fill the void.

In addition to problems filling civilian posts, however, a large part of this power imbalance simply was due to Mattis's choice to delegate responsibilities to uniformed military leaders, rather than empowering the civilian officials that remained in the Pentagon. He also could have emphasized better cooperation between the Joint Staff and senior civil servants as a way to

mitigate personnel shortfalls until he had time to fully staff his slate of political appointees. Instead, Mattis delegated authority to officers he trusted on the Joint Staff and allowed, or perhaps even encouraged, the balance of power to shift. This delegation became so severe that Luke Strange recently argued that the “unequal dialogue” may now be biased in favor of military, rather than civilian, leaders.

In its November 2018 report, the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission was even more pointed, arguing that the lack of civilian voices involved in defense and national security decision-making was “undermining the concept of civilian control.” The commission took particular aim at efforts to centralize global force management under the chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

The implementation of the *National Defense Strategy* must feature empowered civilians fulfilling their statutory responsibilities, particularly regarding issues of force management. Put bluntly, allocating priority — and allocating forces — across theaters of warfare is not solely a military matter. It is an inherently political-military task, decision authority for which is the proper competency and responsibility of America’s civilian leaders. Unless global force management is nested under higher-order guidance from civilians, an effort to centralize defense direction under the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff may succeed operationally but produce profound strategic problems. It is critical that DOD — and Congress — reverse the unhealthy trend in which decision-making is drifting away from civilian leaders on issues of national importance.

Prior to Mattis’s confirmation, Alice Hunt Friend and Erin Simpson suggested that close personal relationships with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the director of the Joint Staff, as well as service parochialism, could play a role in how Mattis chose to manage the Pentagon. While it is unclear whether these factors caused him to delegate authority to trusted fellow marines with whom he had risen through the ranks, it is certain that the growth in the power of the Joint Staff will make it more difficult for the next secretary of defense, as well as for the White House and Congress, to rebalance the civil-military relationship between policymakers and uniformed leaders in the Pentagon.

Taking the Norms out of Normal

Although Secretary Mattis personally modeled norms of nonpartisanship even in the face of great pressure to pick a side in America’s domestic political struggles, civil-military norms eroded on his watch and he did little, at least in public, to police civil-military breaches. It is worth noting that Bob Gates sometimes failed to do the same during his tenure as secretary of defense, and he admitted in his memoir that it was harder than he appreciated to speak out on difficult issues in the heat of the moment. Nevertheless, Kori Schake has argued that Mattis’s greatest such failing came early in his tenure, when he allowed the president to “sign his travel ban in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon ... and detrimentally associated our military with the ban,” which had little obvious connection to military policy. Perhaps Mattis discussed this breach with the White House, but numerous other infringements occurred as well, some

obvious and some not, but all detrimental to healthy civil-military relations. When President Donald Trump announced his ban on transgender servicemembers via tweet, for example, he stated, “After consulting with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States government will not accept or allow ... Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. military.” As Dominic Holden and Vera Bergengruen have reported, however, subsequent Freedom of Information Act requests demonstrated that the Joint Chiefs were caught off guard by the announcement. Gen. Joe Dunford told the service chiefs, “When asked, I will state that I was not consulted,” and Reince Preibus, then White House chief of staff, wrote that it “would’ve been better if we had a decision memo, looped Mattis in.” Nevertheless, Mattis allowed this public mischaracterization of military advice to stand for months without correction.

There is no doubt that Mattis faced an extremely difficult tradeoff and immense political pressure to remain silent. He likely decided that it simply was not worth it to publicly address every violation of a civil-military norm. Mattis also received little support from members of Congress, especially on the Republican side, who should have been the first line of defense in upholding these important traditions, leaving him isolated and at risk on this issue. If he had spoken up at the time, it is possible that he would have faced retaliation or undermined his influence with the president and his senior staff. Moreover, speaking out on this topic could even have led to his firing and triggered an unintended, but major, civil-military crisis of its own. As a result, Mattis may have been correct to save his political capital for only the issues he viewed as truly vital, though we will not know for sure until we have a better understanding of what influence he had behind closed doors. Mattis may also have decided that it was better to remain resolutely nonpartisan himself as he attempted to exercise influence quietly through his personal engagements. And it is notable that the president’s controversial visits with troops in Iraq and Germany, which made news when the president signed “Make America Great Again” hats that several servicemembers had brought to the event, came only as Mattis was on his way out the door.

In either case, however, it also is unequivocally true that the frequency and intensity of civil-military breaches increased during Mattis’s tenure, even if he did not cause this change. As Tom Nichols has argued, President Trump’s approach to civil-military relations is unlike anything we have seen in living memory. But while many of these violations originated in the White House, others did not — such as when critics of the president suggested that the military in general, or Mattis in particular, as the “last adult in the room,” should attempt to constrain the authority of the elected president, if only temporarily. While we might pardon Mattis for not raising his concerns about politicization of the military in public every time they arose for fear of losing influence on important national security issues, it is much harder to understand why Mattis did not mention military politicization or the increasingly frequent use of troops as political props as concerns in his letter of resignation.

Mattis’s personal silence also became policy, as he directed the Pentagon to become less transparent, significantly decreased the frequency of press briefings, and limited public engagement by senior military leaders. As Loren DeJonge Schulman and Alice Hunt Friend

showed, Mattis also took steps that decreased transparency surrounding ongoing military deployments. These policies made democratic oversight and accountability more difficult. Recently, I argued that more frequent public engagement by senior military leaders — as long as it is done carefully — could enhance public discussions about national security decision-making because it would introduce relevant military information into public debates about national security policy. Perhaps more importantly, however, it would also expose military perspectives to criticism, accountability, questioning, and oversight. In this way, Mattis’s approach to public engagement — and his limitations on senior officers — actually made it more difficult for Congress to carry out its constitutional responsibilities to oversee the military and check executive power, and for the press to inform democratic decision-making and public debate. This problem became so stark that the then-chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. John McCain, complained about Mattis’s lack of transparency, stating that he had a “better working relationship, back and forth, with Ash Carter,” Mattis’s predecessor. Transparency and public engagement make accountability and effective oversight possible, but Mattis did his best to keep himself and the department out of the spotlight. These habits will be hard for both the military and the Department of Defense to break, even now that he has left the building.

The Missing Civil-Military Dash

Mattis also failed to embrace his role as the “dash” in civil-military relations, shirking his responsibilities to connect the military with American society or to explain defense and national security policies to the American public. According to Bob Woodward’s book *Fear*, Mattis’s disdain for Sunday talk shows was so intense that, after numerous requests to appear, he finally told Sean Spicer (then the Trump administration’s press secretary, and a Naval reservist), “Sean, I’ve killed people for a living. If you call me again, I’m going to fucking send you to Afghanistan. Are we clear?” Whether he killed people for a living or not, Mattis’s reluctance to appear on talk shows — the sort of media appearances that had been normal for most secretaries of defense — meant that there was no one explaining to the American people why servicemembers were continuing to kill people or die in their name. That decision was a disservice to both the American public and to those doing the killing and dying. While it may be clever to declare that the American military does not “do stunts,” that quip alone was not a sufficient explanation — to either the American public or to those in uniform — of the administration’s political decision to send thousands of troops to the southern border. As secretary of defense, Mattis had a responsibility to explain, and not just to implement, administration policies related to national security.

Anyone who had read Mattis’s comments in his co-authored book on civil-military relations would understand that he saw a civil-military divide as somewhat necessary, if not inevitable. While it is not entirely surprising that he did not try to minimize the civil-military gap, there is little evidence that he even saw it as his role to bridge it. In fact, he seemed far more comfortable staying on the military side of the gap than trying to find common ground between civilians and the military. During an impromptu conversation with soldiers deployed in Jordan that was caught on video and went viral on social media, for example, Mattis stated,

“You are a great example for our country. It’s got some problems, problems we don’t have in the military. Hold the line until our country gets back to understanding and respecting and showing it, being friendly to one another.”

Whether he intended to or not, Mattis hinted at a claim of moral superiority among those in uniform when compared to civilian society. While Mattis’s comments were off-the-cuff and different in nature, they were in stark contrast to comments by Secretary Bob Gates at West Point only a few years earlier. But when you think about it, it is rather peculiar to suggest that attributes such as integrity, respect, and courage are not valued in the United States of America writ large. If you spent enough time getting around this country, especially in successful organizations or close-knit communities, you would find the seven Army values are considered pretty important and being practiced across our great country and by Americans across the world. Yet Mattis rarely chose to emphasize those things that bind us together as Americans, instead focusing on differences between those who wear the uniform and those who don’t. Perhaps this is because Mattis spent his entire adult life in uniform and wasn’t as familiar with civilian life as Gates was, which may be another reason why a retired general might not be the best fit to serve as secretary of defense.

Mattis’s comments on women in the military also probably widened the civil-military gap and likely will have an effect on recruiting for years to come. When asked his thoughts about women serving in infantry units at the Virginia Military Institute, Mattis stated that the “jury’s still out” on whether they can serve effectively in combat units. Not only did these comments fail to respect those women who already have served in combat roles and those currently serving in the infantry, but they also sent a signal to both young men and women about the culture of the U.S. military. In fact, data Mattis collected for his book on civil-military relations shows that both men and women are less likely to want to join the military, or encourage others to join, if they do not believe women have equal opportunities to serve in combat units. Finally, although Mattis often referred to Washington, D.C. as a “strategy-free zone,” it is not clear that the policies of his Defense Department were more closely linked to political objectives than previous administrations’ had been, or that he facilitated a strong relationship between senior military leaders in the Pentagon and civilian leaders in the White House and Congress. Strategy that is not connected to political objectives is at best ineffective strategy, and — at worst — no strategy at all. Mattis’s own *National Defense Strategy*, for example, argued that allies significantly reduce the U.S. defense burden, in stark contrast to the president’s *National Security Strategy*, which emphasized that allies fail to meet their fair share of the burden. The *National Defense Strategy* seems even more out of step when compared to the president’s actual statements, policy decisions, and tweets. Although Mattis was a more-than-able defense diplomat who reassured allies around the globe, the striking thing about his reassurances was often that they seemed so starkly at odds with the president’s actual policies. Moreover, they fed the narrative that Mattis was trying to constrain President Trump.

While a full assessment of Mattis’s record won’t be possible until we know more about what really went on behind closed doors, there are at least some indications that Mattis’s Pentagon was not responsive to White House demands for options and that the Pentagon attempted to

“box the president in” during policy reviews focused on Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran. These tactics would be nothing new, but they nevertheless would be concerning. Although some level of divergence between departmental preferences and White House policy is a normal part of bureaucratic control, this gap grew untenable over time and Mattis’s statements increasingly seemed to almost contradict those of the President. In the end, it appears these policy divisions led Mattis to resign.

Mattis Held the Line, but How Long Will it Hold?

In the waning years of the Roman republic, the people disregarded a law requiring ten years to pass before they could re-elect an individual to the position of consul, breaking a longstanding civil-military norm and re-appointing Gaius Marius for six straight terms. Marius was a competent military commander and reformer, and had become the most successful general of his era and the most popular man in Rome. Seeking to benefit from Marius’s personal popularity and the allegiance of his soldiers, a powerful senator named Saturninus formed an alliance with Marius, ensuring his re-nomination.

For several years, this uneasy alliance persisted despite Saturninus’s increasing attempts to co-opt Marius — and Marius’s veterans — to support his political causes. In late 100 B.C., Saturninus began to press for measures to give colonial lands to Marius’s veterans and to lower the price of state-distributed wheat. When opposition arose in response to one of the bill’s provisions, Saturninus called on a small contingent of Marius’s army to join him in the Forum. With the backing of these veterans, Saturninus imposed his measures by the threat of force. Riots continued, until the Senate turned to Marius himself — who still was consul — to restore the stability of the state. Marius then turned on both his erstwhile political ally and his veterans. He cut off their water supply and forced the contingent to surrender. Disgusted with their rash actions, Marius relinquished the opportunity to seize power and instead sided with the Senate in putting down the revolt. Although accounts of Marius’s ambitions differ, it ultimately was his virtue and professional identity as a servant of Rome that saved his city from even greater disorder.

At the same time, however, long-term damage to the republic had already been set in motion. Saturninus’s political opponents began to recruit their own generals to counter the threat of military force, and the generals, many less virtuous than Marius, began to seek their own power and glory. Once political leaders decided to use the military to back their own political causes, the military itself fractured and polarized, and with the rise of Sulla, Rome began its descent into a series of civil wars.

Although there are significant differences between Marius and Mattis, the history rhymes enough to heed its lessons. Like Marius, Mattis was not a perfect man but they served their nations well, often at great personal cost. Both men were at least partially complicit in the erosion of civil-military norms that had the potential to bring grave consequences to both their societies. Yet, like Marius, Mattis chose not to pursue his own ambitions. He noted his serious policy differences for the record, but he chose to leave on his own terms and departed with

little pomp or fanfare after two years of honorable service in extremely trying times. Mattis could have chosen a more boisterous departure, complete with a press conference and media tour, questioning the president's legitimacy, judgment, or fitness to serve. If he had done so, the secretary who never quite stopped being a general almost certainly would have sparked a true civil-military crisis.

There certainly were those who would have liked him to do so, and indeed there was reason to think he may have had support. Upon his departure, Mattis was the most popular political figure in America, with strong bipartisan support (+40 percentage point approval among Republicans and +35 percentage point approval among Democrats). He also had the nearly unanimous approval of those in uniform. Instead, he told the president that he deserved a secretary of defense who is more aligned with his views and simply walked away.

Through his quiet but principled departure, Mattis reaffirmed his belief in America — his belief that the republic would endure and that there would be another election; that regardless of the outcome of that election, it is more appropriate for civilians, not the military, to determine the fate of the nation. As we already are seeing in the early days of 2019, elections have consequences.

The most important question today is not what happened during Mattis's watch, but rather how Americans will respond after it. Some veterans are calling for Americans to disregard the civil-military norms that have served us well. Other pundits are arguing that their party must recruit military, rather than civilian, candidates for high office to be more credible and win elections. But answering military politicization with counter-politicization is a path to ruin. And there is no guarantee that future generals or admirals will be as virtuous as either Marius or Mattis, when push comes to shove.

Mattis didn't cause our civil-military problems, but they did get worse on his watch. By stepping down of his own accord, however, he reaffirmed that no military officer, whether active or retired, whether general or secretary, can save a republic on his own. Although some tried to thrust that responsibility upon him, Mattis never viewed himself as a savior. He may not have been perfect, but we could have done far worse. When the republic called, Jim Mattis answered. And both as a general and as a secretary, he was always faithful.

Jim Golby is an active-duty Army strategist currently serving in Europe. Jim previously served as a special adviser to the Vice President of the United States, special assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, assistant professor in the Department of Social Sciences at West Point, and as a company commander and scout platoon leader in combat in Iraq. He has a Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University. You can find him on Twitter: @jimgolby. These views are those of the author and do not represent the positions of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Army, or the U.S. Mission to NATO.



ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM: Mattis Was the Best Secretary of Defense Trump Could Have Had

In grading him, we must adjust for the difficulty of the assignment.

BY PETER FEAVER

Peter D. Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy and Bass Fellow at Duke University, and director of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies and the Duke Program in American Grand Strategy. He is co-editor of Elephants in the Room

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U.S. President Donald Trump and then-Defense Secretary James Mattis attend a cabinet meeting in the White House on March 8, 2018. (Michael Reynolds-Pool/Getty Images).

If you ever wondered what civil-military specialists who like and respect each other bicker about at the bar, you are about to find out.

Did James Mattis, who served as U.S. secretary of defense from January 2017 through December 2018, leave a positive or a negative legacy for civil-military relations?

Jim Golby, one of the finest of the next generation of experts in this area, raises this important question in a thoughtful essay for *War on the Rocks*. The essay tabulates a list of pros and cons but ultimately comes down with a negative verdict: “Mattis didn’t cause our civil-military problems, but they did get worse on his watch.” Golby praises Mattis for preventing worse things from happening and concedes that it is “possible” that “America is better off overall than it would have been under any of the other nominees considered.” But that is not good enough, in Golby’s view.

Golby is something of civil-military phenomenon himself. He is an active-duty lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army who holds a doctorate in political science from Stanford University, where he wrote a fine dissertation on contemporary U.S. civil-military relations. Even though he is a relatively junior officer, he has served near the pinnacle of political-military policymaking as an advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and also to both former Vice President Joe Biden and Vice President Mike Pence on the National Security Council staff. (Full disclosure: He and I have co-authored several empirical studies of public opinion and the military, including a chapter in a book co-edited by Mattis before he joined the Trump administration, and we are working on another major project right now.)

Golby’s assessment of Mattis is careful, heavily qualified, and measured—a must-read for students of civil-military relations. But in the end, I think it goes too far in its critique and obscures the fundamental judgment: that Mattis may have been the best secretary of defense the Trump administration could have had.

Mattis was not perfect. No secretary of defense is. Even in normal administrations, this is a difficult job. One book on the subject made the point clearly in the title: Charles A. Stevenson’s *SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense*. It is easy to identify slip-ups, dubious decisions, and adverse developments during the tenures of even the most successful people to hold the position. And there is not usually any harm in identifying these as a way of educating future leaders.

For instance, I have pointed out ways in which Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the most heralded secretary of defense of the post-9/11 era, could have handled certain matters better. In an interview with NPR, Gates complained about generals who spoke out too much, but in his memoir he repeatedly described standing silently by while something bad was happening in a meeting. I argued that we cannot ask generals to keep quiet about policy matters in public unless the senior civilians themselves speak up on those matters in private. Gates, a very good secretary of defense, could have been even better with a tweak here and there. This is a very useful teaching point for senior civilian and military leaders who are wrestling with internalizing best practices in civil-military relations.

However, there is a reasonable counterpoint to my critique—and it is relevant to Golby’s critique as well. It is easy for me to say that Gates should have spoken up more in those private meetings, but what if he had and it had gone poorly, and his capacity to be effective in other matters was gravely compromised?

One of those silent moments, according to Gates, came when then-President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton mentioned that they had let partisan calculations of how best to position themselves for the 2008 election determine their public opposition to the Iraq surge. This was a shocking revelation, yet Gates reports he heard it and said nothing. I would have preferred that he had used the opportunity to point out how pernicious such a stance had been for American civil-military relations and for the national interest. But I have been in enough meetings with a president to know that it would have been a very costly thing for Gates to do in the moment. It would have angered both Obama and Clinton and put a great strain on the partnership they were forging. I think Gates had enough political capital that he should have risked it, but I understand why he did not.

Some of Golby’s criticism of Mattis fits this same pattern. Golby faults Mattis for not critiquing President Donald Trump more forcefully when Trump transgressed civil-military norms: for instance, when Trump held a highly partisan signing ceremony in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon, or when the president tweeted out a policy change on transgender military members without having consulted with the service chiefs. Golby is careful to note that we do not know whether Mattis raised these and countless other matters privately with Trump, which would have been the most proper course of action. We only know that he did not do so publicly, which would have been a highly unusual rebuke even in normal times. Golby also notes that had Mattis gone public he would have likely received no support from the political base Trump listens to—which would have left the defense isolated and exposed—and that raising the issue would likely not have changed Trump’s behavior, while at the same time increasing considerably the risk that Trump would have fired or marginalized Mattis even sooner. At the end of a tortuous paragraph in which Golby makes all of these allowances, which have the logical effect of exonerating Mattis—or at the very least, of granting Mattis the benefit of a generous grading curve—Golby concludes with a rather tepid lament: Mattis should have called out the president on this point in a parting shot in his resignation letter.

Likewise, Golby faults Mattis for not embracing the traditional role of the secretary of defense as a key communicator and explainer to the American people about defense policy. Golby argues that the secretary of defense should have been the “dash” in “civil-military,” reaching out across the divide and bridging the gap with greater transparency about policy. Instead, Mattis laid quite low, refusing to do the traditional press shows and having very little press availability. As a consequence, Golby writes, “there was no one explaining to the American people why servicemembers were continuing to kill people or die in their name.”

This is a fair critique in normal times, and I certainly faulted Obama for not doing more outreach to bolster public support for the killing and dying he had authorized. But Golby could do more to see the matter from Mattis’s point of view. Why was Mattis so reticent? Later in

that section, Golby criticizes Mattis for hinting at a claim of moral superiority, looking down on civilian society. Mattis may have such a sense and, if so, that is indeed lamentable. But I do not think that is why Mattis avoided the press. It is far more likely that Mattis laid low so as to avoid getting crosswise with his boss. Trump was quick to take offense at underlings who were insufficiently fawning in their press availabilities. It would have been far worse for civil-military relations for Mattis to satisfy the president with such displays of sycophancy. If Mattis had joined the weekly gyre of explaining flip-flopping policy tweets, he might have developed low credibility akin to that of Trump's press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Avoiding that friction and preserving his credibility, at the expense of somewhat less transparency, is a reasonable trade-off given the time and circumstances in which Mattis served.

Golby is correct that Mattis was in a very difficult spot as a recently retired military officer whose first name was "General," yet who also was supposed to personify the civilian in civilian control of the military. It would have been better if everyone understood clearly that he was a civilian political appointee and he had shed the uniform once and for all. It was a useful teaching point on Mattis's first day in office when he did not return Gen. Joseph Dunford's welcoming salute on the steps of the Pentagon, thus dramatizing his transformation from officer to civilian. I suspect he winced when Trump insisted on calling him "general." But it would have been pedantic to correct the president in the moment, and it likely would have backfired. Having a retired four-star general personify civilian control blurred the civil-military lines in ways that all of us, including those of us who supported Mattis's unusual appointment, acknowledge was unfortunate. But I do not see what Mattis could have done that would have changed this dynamic in fundamental and positive ways, given who his boss was. That has to be the pragmatic standard against which he is measured.

Golby may be on stronger ground when he faults Mattis for not doing more to restore the imbalance in power within the Department of Defense between the uniformed military and civilians. This imbalance grew to troubling levels under the Obama administration and got worse in the power vacuum that emerged early in the Trump administration. Some of this must be laid at doors above Mattis's paygrade. The Trump campaign bears much of the blame for failing to build a cadre of qualified talent and then for failing to have a competent transition. To be fair, perhaps the so-called #NeverTrumpers, myself included, who signed letters of protest against candidate Trump also share some of the blame, because we made it harder for the Trump team to assemble talent.

Perhaps Mattis could have done more with the hand he was dealt. Arguably, he squandered precious political capital in a series of Pyrrhic victories and defeats trying to make senior appointments that were doomed given the partisan climate in Washington. And when he finally did have his civilian team in place, perhaps he could have done more to empower them, compared to their military counterparts. He did do more than he gets credit for in the public commentary, however. For instance, he added the undersecretary for policy to the so-called "big four" meeting of the secretary of defense, deputy secretary of defense, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—a powerful signal in a rank-conscious hierarchy. He also brought country desk officers and other personnel from the Office

of the Secretary of Defense into meetings with foreign dignitaries, thus empowering them. And he brought White House and Office of the Secretary of Defense staff, more than Joint Staff representatives, on the plane with him on foreign trips to further endow them with the most powerful currency in the bureaucracy: access to the principal. But these measures may not have been enough to compensate for the severe imbalance he inherited and for the blinding optics of a “team of Marines” at the top—the close, decades-long personal relationship that bound together Mattis, Dunford, former White House chief of staff John Kelly, and senior Joint Staff officer Kenneth McKenzie—in a town where appearances can dominate reality.

This problem of empowering the civilian side is likely to get worse before it gets better. The next secretary of defense will have an even harder time boosting morale in the Office of the Secretary of Defense than Mattis had. And the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is likely to have more access to Trump than Dunford has had, thus advantaging the uniformed side ahead of the civilians to an even greater extent.

Golby credits Mattis with a major achievement: **On Mattis’s watch, there was no grave national security or civil-military crisis.**

Most outside observers, myself included, feared that Trump’s erratic behavior would trigger myriad crises along multiple dimensions. That still could happen, of course, but it is worth listing the kinds of blunders that were in play but did not happen: arbitrary withdrawal from NATO, arbitrary abandonment of South Korea, a war on the Korean Peninsula triggered by the premature withdrawal of U.S. civilian personnel, regular Army troops instructed to shoot refugees trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, war with Iran, total withdrawal from Afghanistan without a political deal, families of Islamic State combatants tortured, Syrian oil fields seized and nationalized as U.S. property, and so on.

Here is where civil-military norms and best practices come crashing in to the reality of our current president. If it is generally accepted that presidents have a “right to be wrong,” was Mattis himself undermining the president and thereby also civil-military relations by acting as a restraint—not letting him commit his wrongs? Golby does not grasp this nettle firmly, but he does rightly warn that it is bad for the country to look to generals to be “adults in the room.” He also explicitly calls out Mattis for not being responsive to White House demands for military options to deal with foreign-policy problems and for trying to box the president in during policy reviews.

I agree with Golby that the Department of Defense should be responsive to the White House for options and should not try to box presidents in. I would note that there are few well-documented cases of Mattis (or anyone else in the Department of Defense) actively working to undermine Trump’s policies after a decision had been formally and properly delivered through official channels (though I concede that we are likely to find examples once the historical record is fully available, since we can find them in previous administrations). There is plenty of evidence of the Defense Department raising concerns about decisions before they were made. And there is plenty of evidence of the department dragging its heels in response to stray tweets

and offhand remarks. In this respect, the difficulty that the Trump team has experienced in turning presidential whims into policy wins is more normal than not.

And this normalcy may raise an even more intriguing argument that Golby does not make explicitly in his piece but that I have heard from other experts: What if Mattis's real fault was in successfully tempering Trump's worst excesses just enough to make the president seem far more normal than he is and, as a result, enabling longer-term changes to the country and the Republican Party that will hurt the country (and civil-military relations) for the long run? What if future generals believe it is acceptable or even expected that they should be the "adults in the room" and minimize the damage of transgressive policies? Would the United States have been better off with a civilian secretary of defense who flamed out early in his tenure in a blaze of righteous indignant protest, denouncing what they considered to be the president's deficiencies? I do not think that would have best served U.S. national interests, and I believe that any salutary benefit in terms of reinforcing civil-military norms would have been quickly eclipsed by the spiral of partisan action and reaction such a dramatic move would have catalyzed.

This is at the heart of the questions that Mattis had to wrestle with every day but that Golby's critique only glancingly addresses: What is best civil-military practice in an administration in which the president sees his political task as the defilement of taboos and professional norms? What makes the U.S. Constitution functional on a day-to-day basis are the institutions and norms that set limits to the "invitation to struggle" hard-wired into the republic. How best to preserve the ones associated with civil-military relations for successive generations when the electorate chose a president who promised he would not be shackled by those very constraints? For that matter, how much should public servants weigh their own effectiveness against the likely consequences of their own departures?

In sum, how normatively should we treat Mattis and his behavior for future instruction on best practices? Perhaps the things you need to do to keep your plane aloft when the cockpit is on fire are not the things you would teach pilots to do during regular flight operations. Here I suspect Golby and I would come to a hearty agreement: The last two years should not become the new normal in U.S. civil-military relations. The next administration will have repair work to do. (The Trump administration inherited deferred maintenance in the civil-military arena that it has been unable to attend to, so the job has only gotten tougher.) Mattis made a number of compromises and trade-offs that future secretaries of defense should not have to make. But in grading him, we must adjust for the difficulty of the assignment. Otherwise, I fear we are guaranteeing that only people much less capable than Mattis will be willing to serve the country in these demanding posts.

There is little likelihood that Trump could have appointed someone who would have faced key civil-military challenges better than Mattis did. There is a decent risk that things will get worse in the coming years. Mattis, for all his imperfections, was the best thing that happened to civil-military relations in the Trump administration.

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The literature on Civil-Military Relations often leaves professional officers and political leaders in a state of uncertainty. Scholars, observers, and practitioners often disagree. What are the essential issues that cause tension, disagreement, and misunderstanding? How should each behave in the interaction, and treat the other? What might the future bring in this relationship, so crucial to the nation's security and overall well-being?

Civil-Military Behaviors that Build Trust

Richard H. Kohn

(Adapted from Kohn, "Building Trust: Civil-Military Behaviors for Effective National Security," *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, ed. by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009], 2264-289, 379-389.)

For Senior Military:

1. Do everything possible to **gain trust with the civilians**: no games, no leaking, no attempts at manipulation, no denying information, no slow rolling, no end runs to Congress or up the chain, but total openness. Many, and probably most, civilians come into office without necessarily trusting the military, knowing that they have personal views, ideologies, ambitions, institutional loyalties, and institutional perspectives and agendas. There has been so much controversy, friction, and politicization in the last decades that they'd have to be Rip Van Winkles to think otherwise. Some, perhaps many, both fear and are jealous of senior military leaders: for their accomplishments, achievements, bravery, rank, status, and legitimacy in American society.
2. Insist on the right to give the military perspective, without varnish. But do not be purposefully frightening so as to manipulate outcomes--but straight, thoughtful professional advice. At the same time, do not speak out: that is, **speak up but not out**. Keep it confidential and don't let subordinates or staffs leak the advice or let it become public unless it arises appropriately in testimony before Congress. If the civilians want your advice known, let them make it known.
3. **Do what's right from a moral and professional perspective, and don't let the civilians force anything otherwise**. Help them. If they are making mistakes, warn them but then leave it at that. They have the right and the authority to make mistakes, and if they insist, then the military leadership should not prevent it by behaviors that undermine civilian control, which is foundational in American government. Military leaders have neither the experience, perspective, or functional responsibility to judge fully implications and outcomes. The integrity of our system of government overrides any conceivable national security problem short of the survival of the Republic—again, a judgment beyond the military profession.
4. **Anticipate the civilians in military policy** in terms of changing, reforming, adjusting, and thinking through national security problems, innovation, alternative thinking, etc. Evolution, transformation—however labeled—is ongoing and managing it is a chief professional duty. The standard is what's best for national defense, best for the country, broadly conceived—not necessarily what benefits one's service, or command, or the military in general. If some change or policy is in one's best professional judgment deleterious, say so when appropriate but leave it at that.

5. **Resist pressures.** Five come to mind but indeed there may be more.

A. First, **Careerism.** The pressure to conform, to stay silent, to go along, to do what'll advance one's career, while universal, is one of the most deadly behaviors for effective civil-military relations. Do not remain silent. Do not suppress open discussion and debate in one's unit, command, or service in order to avoid angering civilian superiors. National defense requires that the military communicate honestly inside its institutions the proper courses of action, in the studying of warfare and current and past operations, in projections about the need for weapons, in doctrine and strategy and tactics, and in a large variety of professional issues and concerns. One cannot keep faith with subordinates or the American people by avoiding proper professional behavior. The military profession respects most, and requires, physical courage. All professions require and respect moral courage.

B. Second, what could be called **Institutionalism:** doing what's best for one's service, command, unit, etc. when the larger national interest suggests otherwise. Few things arouse more suspicion and engender more distrust from civilian leaders, Congress, and the American people. This lowers the reputation and credibility of the military.

C. **Politicization.** Don't be driven by personal ideology or belief about what are the best policy outcomes in offering advice or any other behavior. An officer's political leanings or affiliation should never come up or become known. To function as the neutral servant of the state, the military must be seen to be not non-partisan, but un-partisan—simply above and beyond partisan politics. George C. Marshall wrote: "I have never voted, my father was a democrat, my mother was a republican, and I am an Episcopalian." Any discussion of partisan politics is out of bounds because it politicizes. If you vote, keep it private as a personal matter. There is a reason that in the old Navy, three subjects were out of bounds for discussion in the wardroom: sex, religion, and politics. All of them can cause dissension or can erode the neutrality and objectivity of an officer and the military as an institution. A distinguished senior general was once called by the White House personnel office, considering him for a job requiring Senate confirmation, to inquire of his party affiliation. The General told his aide, "tell them it's none of their business." Ten days later they called again; same response. Actually, the General should have told them, "as an officer in the American armed forces, I have no party affiliation."

D. **Manipulation.** Do not carry the water for the civilians on political as opposed to professional issues. Defending the necessity of a war, promoting a particular policy or decision, explaining how the war is going from anything other than a strictly military viewpoint is not the military's role, but merely politicizes the military, and if the issues are at all contested, reduces the military's credibility as the neutral servant of the state and its legitimacy in national life, both with the public and opposition political leaders, with attendant harm to civil military respect and trust. A recent Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on more than one occasion told public audiences that terrorism was the most dangerous threat the country faced since the Civil War. Not only did this lack believability as a historical interpretation, but it politicized the Chairman and injected him into partisan political debate.

E. **Resignation.** Personal and professional honor do not require request for reassignment or retirement when one's service, command, unit, department, or

government pursues something with which you disagree. The military's role is to advise and then execute lawful orders. One individual's definition of what is morally or professionally ethical is not necessarily the same as another's, or society's. Even those officers at the top of the chain of command—much less those below—are in virtually all cases unaware of all the larger national and international considerations involved, which is the realm of the politicians, elected and appointed. If officers at various levels measure all policies, decisions, orders, and operations in which they are involved by their own moral and ethical systems, and act thereon, the military would be in chaos.

Resignation—the act, the threat, even the hint—is a threat to the civilians to use the prestige and moral legitimacy and standing of the military in American society to oppose a policy or decision. It inherently violates civilian control. Nothing except lying does more to undermine civil-military trust. A senior officer whom the President permits to retire or reassigns can abandon their troops and the country if he or she feels the absolute necessity, in a most extraordinary situation. If so, however, the leaving must be done in silence in order to keep faith with the oath to the Constitution, that is, to preserve, defend, and protect it—because pervasive in that document is civilian control.

6. Finally, there are **professional obligations that extend into retirement** for the most senior military officers that connect directly to civil-military relations. The most important dictates against using one's status as a respected military leader to summon the reputation of the American military for disinterested patriotism, impartial service, and political neutrality, to commit political acts that in fact undermine civil-military relations and contribute to the politicization of their profession. Officers do not hang up their profession norms and values with their uniform, any more than lawyers or doctors do when they retire, or for that matter any other professional. When college professors retire, they do not suddenly promote or condone plagiarism. To endorse presidential candidates or to attack an administration in which they served at a senior level when it is still in office violates an old, and well-established professional tradition; it uses the legitimacy of the military and its reputation for impartiality for what is or inevitably becomes a partisan purpose. It tells officers still on active duty that it's OK to be partisan; it suggests to the American people that the military is just another interest group with its own agenda, rather than the neutral servant of the state; it warns politicians not to trust officers, and to choose the senior military leadership more for political and ideological loyalty and compatibility than for professional accomplishment, experience, candor, strength and steadfastness of character, courage, and capacity for highest responsibility. And it suggests that senior military officers cannot be trusted in the civil-military dialogue to keep confidences, not to abuse candid interchange, or not to undermine their bosses politically—in other words, it corrupts the civil-military relationship for those who still must work with civilians in the most intimate circumstances of policy and decision-making to defend the country.

For Senior Civilians:

1. **Get to know the military:** the people, the profession, the institutions, the culture and its needs, assumptions, perspectives, and behaviors in order to permit proper and informed decisions on the myriad of issues that decide peace and war. Read, travel, interact, and listen. Delegate but do not make the mistake of thinking that military issues, weapons, processes, behaviors, systems, strategies, operations, or even tactics are so esoteric or technical that they cannot be understood, and that civilian authority must be surrendered to uniformed personnel. Responsibility in the end will not be delegated with the authority. Ask many questions, continually, until there are answers that can be understood, and that make sense.

2. **Treat military people and their institutions with genuine respect**, and if that proves personally difficult or is insincere, serve elsewhere in government, or not at all. See to the needs of the troops insofar as at all possible, for it is one of the prime norms of military service that leaders take care of their people--their physical and emotional needs--before they take care of their own, down to the lowest enlisted ranks and most recent recruits.
3. **Support and defend the military** against unwarranted and unfair criticism and attacks, represent their needs and viewpoints elsewhere in government even if you are pursuing policies, or making or executing decisions that they do not like, such as cuts in forces or resources. Throwing them under the bus strains their loyalty and candor in spite of their professional obligations. It is not the job of civilians in the executive branch to criticize the military personally or institutionally. Political leadership includes political cover; if you want the military to stay out of politics, then you have to assume the responsibility.
4. At the same time, **work to de-politicize national defense**: don't use it for partisan advantage just as one attempts to avoid others from using it for partisan purposes against the Administration. Partner with the Congress in every way possible to avoid the *ménage à trois*.
5. **Hold the military accountable** for its actions, within the normal, legitimate processes of the services and the Department of Defense. Do not be afraid to relieve or replace officers who do not perform their duties satisfactorily, as long as this is accomplished after due consideration, and in a fair and appropriate manner. Officers who need to be relieved do not need to be dishonored or disgraced, after a lifetime of service that qualified them and earned them high rank, for mistakes or malfeasance. The firing is enough of a penalty.
6. Likewise **do not hide behind the military** for your own, or your colleagues, mistakes or when bad things happen. Be personally accountable and responsible; one gains enormous credibility and respect for taking the political heat, and for protecting the military and not trying to shift the blame to them and leave them exposed because of civilian decisions or unexpected developments that they were not necessarily responsible for anticipating. If civilian control means civilians have the ultimate authority, they also have the ultimate responsibility and accountability.
7. **Exercise authority gracefully and forcefully** but not abusively, or peremptorily, or at the expense of anyone's personal or professional dignity. Military people want and respect forceful leadership. They want decisions, guidance, instructions, goals (in as explicit and comprehensive form as possible), and above all, in a timely fashion so that time, money, and most importantly lives are not wasted because of indecision or uncertainty. If they cannot have that, be certain to explain exactly why not. The military wants and needs as ordered and as predictable a world as possible in order to deal with the chaos and unpredictability of war; make every effort to meet deadlines and keep to schedules so that they do not succumb to the feeling that dealing with you is . . . war.