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The Military and Society

Excerpt from " Washington's Farewell Address to the Army, 2 November 1783," National Archives, *Founders Online*, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-12012; Phil Klay, "The Warrior at the Mall," *New York Times*, April 14, 2018, p. SR1; Jennifer Steinhauer, "'A Slap in the Face': Black Veterans on Bases Named for Confederates," *New York Times*, June 11, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/11/us/politics/military-bases- confederate-names-trump.html?searchResultPosition=1; Webinar interview of General David Goldfein, Chief of Staff, USAF, by Professor Mara Karlin, Director of the Phillip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Program, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, July 21, 2020; Gene Demby, "When White Extremism Seeps Into the Mainstream," *NPR*, January 15, 2021.....9

Military Cooperation and Trust

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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 on civil-military relations for senior flag officers 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, 2022). *Not to be circulated, cited, or quoted without permission of the author.*

Six Myths about Civil-Military Relations in the United States

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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. Few Americans have heard the term "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.

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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 (the famous Winfield Scott and William Tecumseh Sherman) moved their headquarters out of Washington to escape their cabinet bosses, and the first Chief of Naval Operations was a Navy captain who 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 Donald Trump 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 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 peace and in war. 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]

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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 and doesn't even mention it in those words. In his memoirs, Harry Truman commented about firing Douglas MacArthur in 1951 for publicly opposing the limiting of the war in Korea to that peninsula: "If there is

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

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

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 overwhelming by Americans for a century even before independence from Britain; 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 strongly suggested to them. Yet inspite of inserting all sorts of devices in the document to restrain and control 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 armed forces 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 itself.

Now divided and shared powers, as we know from much of American 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 both branches exercise 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.

[4]John T. Rourke and Russell Farnen, "War, Presidents, and the Constitution," 18 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18(1998):513. See also 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 over the course of American history has been, in my judgment, at least four factors: first, reverence for the Constitution and the primacy of law, both of which undergird civic 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, volunteers, and beginning in the Civil War, 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.

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[5]Bob 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.

[6]The 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. See also Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York, 2020), 609-614.

The second weakened pillar of support for civilian control of the military has been a permanent military of size, scope, cost, and influence 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, 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 little serious planning for mobilization beyond the callup of the reserves and National Guard. Outside of a giant national emergency, which the Pentagon does not foresee, 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 it, 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 three generations—have diluted 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 are 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.

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[7]Ole 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, 35–39, 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.

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

[9]Fletcher 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.

Yet, the absence of revolt has not prevented occasional defiance or instances of passive resistance, evasion, manipulation, or insubordination by the military establishment and, of course, by the politicians encouraging the military in those directions. From the beginning, beneath obedience, 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-in-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 he most knowledgeable modern president about the military, 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, the President 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]

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

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

[12]Richard 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.

From the military's revolt over open homosexual service in the early 1990s through Donald Rumsfeld's sour relationship with the services to the end of the Trump Administration, conflict has flared regularly, to include the struggle over strategy in the Afghanistan War from its beginning in 2001 to the drawdown that began in 2011.[13] 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 diminished in the decade from 2006 to 2017, it flared up almost on a regular if not predicable basis. 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."[14] Furthermore, the tension is more visible, partly because Congress and the press in an effort to discover the decision process and who said what to whom, are always trying to lure the military into expressing disagreement with executive branch bosses, forcing generals and admirals to choose their words very 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). 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 probed relentlessly 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.[15] 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.

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[13]A summary of the Obama decision in the fall of 2009 is Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan A History*, (New York, 2021), chapter 11. See also Obama, *Promised Land*, 216-218, 313-325, 345-346, 429-445, 576-580, 680-683, 685- One very senior civilian official in the Obama White House told me after leaving office that he believed that "the military had too much power."

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

[15]Woodward, *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.

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, 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."[16] MacArthur recognized immediately the truth of that, 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 have continued down to today. In the 1990s, a surprising number of four-star officers were 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. 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. There was in 2013 the clumsy retirement a few months early of the legendary Marine General and later Secretary of Defense James Mattis. During the first two years of the Trump Administration, the President, to his frustration and anger, was talked out of numerous policies and decisions he wished to undertake by the two retired Marine generals in his cabinet and White House, and by his active-duty army three-star general serving as National Security Adviser. During the last two years, having fired or driven most of them out, Mr. Trump relied on temporary or acting civilian officials throughout the government in an effort to work his will in the foreign and national security realms, still frustrated often by what he called "the deep state" of people trying to manipulate him or block what they believed to be his most dangerous, unworkable, or silly desires.[17]

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[16]Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York, 1964), 101.

[17]Kohn, "Erosion of Civilian Control;" Mark Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars: The Military's Undeclared War Against America's Presidents* (New York, 2017); Peter Bergen, *Trump and His Generals: The Cost of Chaos* (New York, 2019); Risa Brooks, "Through the Looking Glass: Trump-Era Civil-Military Relations in Comparative Perspective," Macubin Thomas Owens, "Maximum Toxicity: Civil-Military Relations in the Trump Era," James Joyner, "Trump's Generals: A Natural Experiment in Civil-Military Relations," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 15(Summer 2021):69-148.

In 2007 I asked a colleague who authored a book on the Secretaries of Defense, an office created in late 1940s, whether any secretary had begun his tenure trusting the military. He said no.[18] 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."[19]

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.'"[20] 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."[21] Former congressman Jim Marshall, the son and grandson of army generals and himself a decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam War, summed it up it this way: "Those of us who have experienced both sides of the civil-military relationship see a wide gulf of misunderstanding, dislike, and distrust. . . ."[22]

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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

[18]This 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.

[19]Woodward, *War Within*, 247.

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

[21]Ibid., 382.

[22]Foreword, *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).

military's view is, tell us where you want to go and leave the driving to us."[23] 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 objectives," Dempsey observed.[24] 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 their shoulder and responsibility for the lives of American children and grandchildren, can be daunting.

In a 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."[25] 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.[26]

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 defeating Southern

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[23]James 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 power of the comparison.

[24]"From the Chairman: An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey," 5.

[25]George 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.

[26]Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York, 2013), 288–89. More coverage of the review of the strategy for Afghanistan in the fall of 2009 (besides that in note 13 above) can be found in Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York, 2010), 144–352 and Gates, *Duty*, 352–385.

armies and restoring the Union 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, one of the smartest generals in American history, welcomed that person and treated him with candor and transparency.[27]

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 become before largely (though never exclusively) the domain of military commanders. 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.[28] 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 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.[29] 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 success, is political. In the last thirty-plus years, the military has risen to be the most trusted and respected institution in American society. This prestige and legitimacy puts considerable restraint on the civilians. They know it; they're jealous of it; and they fear it. During the

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

[28]Entries 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.

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

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 about advice on military intervention: "The answer is 500,000 troops and ten years. Now what's the question?" More than one official has admitted that Clinton feared those in uniform.[30]

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 certain to damage civil-military relations and erode military professionalism. Few senior officers think about such circumstances in the abstract, expecting that they'll know and react appropriately were such a situation to arise.

I asked retired 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 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."[31]

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

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[30]Kohn, "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).

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

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, implicitly if not explicitly, senior military people for appointments increasingly 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 burst into public view in 1951 when Douglas MacArthur used it as justification 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. Besides, as the 2017 armed forces officers guide explained, "The traditional deference to military management of military affairs is not absolute. Society, especially in a democratic political system, always reserves the right to intervene when it thinks that military values and practices should change to conform to public norms."[32]

To think 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. The ugly truth is that the only differentiation between civilian and military responsibility is what the civilians choose to accept or assign to the military. 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 the years; it is inherently situational.

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A *fourth myth* comes in *two versions*: first, that *the military is nonpartisan and apolitical*; second, that *the military is political and politicized***.** Both 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 l9th century, when the services expanded their roles in national defense, embracing new technologies and doctrines, their need for larger

[32]Richard M Swain and Albert C. Pierce, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC, 2017), 22.

forces and budgets from Congress, and thus public support, increased.[33] The large standing military establishment for the Cold War intensified both the need 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. In the late 1990s, 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 the American people and officers saw the military to some extent as just another bureaucracy practicing the politics of self-interest.[34]

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 because it is inherent in the conservatism of the military. When soldiers' lives and the fate of the nation are involved, a certain cautious skepticism and conservatism is not only natural but functional. The Vietnam War--the 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--accelerated the trend.

Contributing to the politicization of the military has been the growing salience of national security in American life that began with 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

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[33]Allan 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.

[34]Paul 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 .

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."[35] 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 with 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 thirty 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.[36] In 2020, over a hundred flag officers pleaded publicly, in incendiary and harsh words, for voters to Joseph Biden and re-elect Donald Trump. And the number has risen since to well over 200 signing on to a bold attach on liberal politics and politicians.[37]

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

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[35]*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).

[36]Email from an historian colleague, Sept. 2, 2015.

[37]"Open Letter from Flag Officers 4 America," August 2021, https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/fb7c7bd8-097d-4e2f-8f12-3442d151b57d/downloads/2021%20Open%20Letter%20from%20Retired%20Generals%20and%20Adm.pdf?ver=1629937193263 . As of that date, some 220 retired flag officers have signed the letter. https://flagofficers4america.com/ .

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 respond, "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 him, and why you're right and he was 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.[38] 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 more frequently "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

[38]James 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.

PhD dissertation in the 1980s. But I have wondered why that particular rank represented some dividing line for him to stop voting.[39]

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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.[40] 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 have showered more praise and gratitude, more often and in more venues, than any administration in memory.[41] 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.[42]

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[39]The best analysis of civilian behavior encouraging politicization of the military is Jim Golby, "Uncivil-Military Relations: Politicization of the Military in the Trump Era," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 15(Summer 2021):149-174, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-15_Issue-2/Golby2.pdf .

[40]Pew Research Center, "Public Trust in Government, 1958-2021," May 17, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/; Gallup, "Confidence in Institutions," [the military 1975-2021], https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx; Stephen Losey, "Americans' Trust and Confidence in the Military Is Decreasing, New Survey Finds," Military.Com, March 10, 2021, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/03/10/americans-trust-and-confidence-military-decreasing-new-survey-finds.html.

[41]In *Promised Land*, Obama expressed the same sympathy, admiration, and gratitude for the men and women in the military as he did when President.

[42]James 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

Yet beneath the surface, the evidence is much more ambiguous. To begin with, American 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.[43]

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, 104, http://www.businessinsider.com/poll-millenials-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.

[43]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;

Even the yellow ribbons that sprouted during the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War, and graced so many vehicles for years, seemed as much or 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 League were actually subsidized--paid for--by the Defense Department; between 2012 and 2015, the Pentagon spent over "$10 million in marketing and advertising contracts with professional sports teams . . . for what . . . senators called 'paid patriotism.'"[44]

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."[45]

Such a bargain has been true 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

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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-millenials-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."

[44] "Pro Football," *New York Times*, May 20, 2016, p. B14.

[45][S.L.A. Marshall], *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, 1950), 1-2. The first chapter is reprinted in the 2007 edition as an appendix [U.S. Department of Defense, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC, 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). A later edition (2017) does not appear to include the idea of such a "bargain." See Swain and Pierce, *Armed Forces Officer*.

their families who had served or died in the Civil War (for Union forces) were the largest government social program in American history until then.[46] The symbol for the promise originated in the 1944 GI bill, which did so much to help veterans with loans for homes, businesses, education. In the last twenty or so 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 evolved into near adulation after 9/11, at least rhetorically. A covenant appeared to be functional and necessary, and politically unassailable.[47]

Yet 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?[48]

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[46]See 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).

[47]A typical example of the benefits available is 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.

[48]See 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/floor-action/senate/251108-mccain-wants-answers-on-va-glitch .

Whatever the partisan and ideological divisions over the budgets for defense and veterans, the terrorist attack of 9/11 unchained many fiscal limitations. A new Republican administration pushed through huge tax cuts even while fighting a campaign in Afghanistan, mashing together over twenty federal agencies into a new federal department of homeland security, and undertaking another military campaign to overthrow the government of Iraq and occupy that country. To expand the armed services after the initial surge of patriotic enlistments, the Pentagon had to institute bonuses to encourage volunteering and retention, lower the minimum standards, and accept people up to their early 40s in age.

But whatever the consensus on national security funding, it began to fray in 2010. The Tea Party emerged in response to the spending required to mitigate the financial crisis and to fund the Affordable Care Act. The Tea Party allied with the deficit hawks among the Republicans whore-emerged as soon as the Democrats captured the White House. All government spending came under attack, fracturing longstanding Republican support for the military. The potential for the split had 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 health benefits predicted late in the 1990s that the all-volunteer military would be unsustainable, amid pressures revise the pay and benefits of uniformed personnel.[49]

The emergence of the Tea Party with the reawakening of budget hawks in the Republican Party led to "Sequestration" in the Budget Control Act of 2011. The federal budget was to be reduced over a trillion dollars in a decade. If in any year the percentage of the overall goal went unmet, then military and domestic spending (except for entitlements and war spending) would be reduced equally. Making the automatic reduction even more painful, the money could not be redirected to a different purpose than that of the prior year, thus reducing flexibility almost entirely.[50] Then in 2017 the Trump Administration and

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[49]See, 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, from 11:30 to 18:00 on the recording.

[50]Suzy Khimm, "The sequester, explained," *Washington Post*, September 14, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2012/09/14/the-sequester-explained/; Todd Harrison, "What has the Budget Control Act of 2011 Meant for Defense," *CSIS*, August 1, 2016, https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-has-budget-control-act-2011-meant-defense ; Brendan W. McGarry, "The Defense Budget and the Budget Control Act: Frequently Asked Questions," September 30, 2019, *Congressional Research Service*, https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R44039.pdf .

Republican control of Congress loosened the budget squeeze on military spending once again: even larger tax cuts and deficits passed into law.

As of this writing, in late summer 2021, the swings between boom and bust in military spending of the last thirty years seems likely to continue. If the Democrats in Congress, even with their razor-thin majorities, succeed in passing gargantuan infrastructure laws, the armed services are unlikely to participate in the largesse. There may not be enough money to continually expand military pay while supporting spending for recruiting, retention, and veterans costs, for modernization of military equipment and weapons systems, for robust readiness, for new efforts in space and cyber—and to rebuild the country internally after two generations of reduced taxes and deteriorating infrastructure. Even if "deficits don't matter," to quote Vice President Dick Cheney early in the century.[51]

So if there is a covenant, it is an uncertain one grounded in political and military expedience. With veterans from the Vietnam War and earlier conflicts dying at over 1000 a day, the larger wars fading into the past, and now the potential for paralyzing budget limits on everything except social programs, the treatment of soldiers may well revert to some historical norm of neglect or at least inconsistency. One thing is clear: the single most enduring issue in civil-military relations, the one involving all three branches of the federal government, the economy, and the American people, is the budget for national security in general and the Pentagon and armed services in particular.

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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. 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.[52] War and military subjects are neglected 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."[53] Military officers, while far better informed, spend little time studying or thinking about their relationship with

[51]Dick Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York, 2011), 310-311.

[52]See the tables cited in note 7 above.

[53]Tami 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.

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 that I understood “that everybody in the military believes in civilian control,” but that “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.”[54] Since that conversation, over twenty 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 the examples explored in this essay 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.[55] 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 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, who has the respect of the American people and the prestige in American culture. 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 could 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.”[56]

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[54]This exchange, with retired army Lieutenant General Walter Ulmer, took place in 1999.

[55]I 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.

[56]Gen. Anthony Zinni, “The New World Disorder,” *International Society of Barristers Quarterly* 48 no. 3 (2014):49-50.

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. One of the best cabinet secretaries 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 any one 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.'"[57] We've now had nearly seventeen years of Democratic presidents with Clinton, Obama, and Biden. Of the eight Secretaries of Defense, three have been Republicans who occupied the office about half the time and one a retired general. What does that say about the situational nature of civilian leadership? Among other considerations, Republican appointees and a general 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.[58]

In closing, I 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 frame, and essentially determine, their relationship with their clients, patients, students, congregants, and the like. The military's client is the civilian political leadership. Other professions can refuse to advise or represent a client, but the military cannot. Like all professionals, the top generals and admirals can educate their leaders and shape to some degree the relationship, even if it is a less equal and more subordinate role than other professions encounter. 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?'"

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[57]Root 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.

[58]Gates, *Duty*, 430-31, 488-89.

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.

“He did not,” I replied immediately. “I interviewed him after he left. I’ll send you the galley proofs of the article that showed that he did not resign.”[59]

To civilian audiences, I close with a plea to take civil-military relations seriously. I ask them to paraphrase an old aphorism attributed to Mark Twain: “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 when ignoring it).” If the public and 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. Both of them did. Politicians should not manipulate the military or hide behind it, or use it for political purposes, as civilian leaders have often done.[60] In the end, it’s up to the American people to make their government work.

In 1787 a woman accosted Benjamin Franklin as he emerged from the constitutional convention in Philadelphia. "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?": "A republic,” Franklin replied, “if you can keep it.”[61]

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[59]Conversation 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.

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

[61]Quoted 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.

CHAPTER 1

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 counterattack 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 materiél 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 untrammeled 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 homegrown 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. Coexisting, 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 is 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 micromanaging 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 débacle, 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 influencial 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 austerely 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 Guttmann 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, Guttmann 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. Guttmann 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, Guttmann points out the stubborn pragmatism of American generals. Guttmann 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")[18] are, in fact, not merely functional but desirable. For Guttmann, Janowitz, and Moskos the good news was just the reverse: the military *resembles* America, shares its élite'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 Guttmann 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 *under*estimated 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 mot 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 débacles 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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In this recent article, we review the most significant issues we believe senior civilian and military leaders should know, and why. We'll focus on them in the CAPSTONE meeting. Are we clear? Does our thinking ring true in your experience? Do you disagree with anything we've written? Why? We look forward to the discussion.

STRATEGIC STUDIES QUARTERLY - FEATURE ARTICLE

Civil-Military Relations in the United States: What Senior Leaders Need to Know (and Usually Don't)

Peter D. Feaver
Richard H. Kohn

Abstract

Most flag and general military officers participate in civil-military relations (CMR) daily whether or not they realize it. Yet while these leaders recognize and support the principle of civilian control, they have thought little over time about how it works or the difficulties involved, much less the larger framework of civil-military relations. Likewise, civilian leaders in the national security establishment, whether career civil servants or political appointees, contribute—for good or for ill—to American civil-military relations. They seem to think about CMR even less. This article analyzes the two broad categories of interaction that compose CMR using several discrete topics within each area. The article highlights the paradox in CMR and the best practices that previous generations of leaders experienced and learned in navigating CMR issues successfully.

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Upon commissioning into the US armed forces, every military officer swears to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. Upon promotion, all officers repeat that oath, again committing their loyalty and, if necessary, their lives to a system of government that at its foundation is based on civilian control of the military. While those words do not appear in the Constitution, the structure of the government, the powers assigned to each branch, the limitations on those powers, and the many individual provisions, authorities, and responsibilities put the military—active duty and reserves—under the control of civilian officials atop the chain of command. Those civilian authorities are defined by laws duly passed under constitutional procedures. Thus, civilian control is the defining principle of the relationship but not the sum total of civil-military relations, as senior leaders quickly discover.

Civil-military relations is a broad subject encompassing diverse issues and innumerable topics. It includes the legal foundations for the use of force and the psychological processes that turn ordinary citizens into fighters. It also encompasses ethical conundrums regarding professional obligations in a hierarchy that asks individuals to risk their lives and how press statements by senior military officers affect public opinion.[1] Military leaders must understand the fundamentals of the civil-military relationship in order to fulfill their duty as custodians of the nation's defense and the military profession. They can develop a stronger understanding of this relationship by appreciating two broad sets of dealings. The first is civil-military interactions in making policy and executing strategy at the senior-most levels of government. The second is civil-military interactions across societies, from the individual and group to military and civilian institutions. Each of these sets of interactions contains discrete topics that all senior military leaders can expect to confront at some point in their professional careers. And each has a paradox that frames relations between the civilian and military spheres in the United States today.

Civil-Military Relations for Setting Policy and Strategy

Since the founding of the republic under the Constitution, the United States has enjoyed an enviable and unbroken record of civilian control of the military. When measured by the traditional extreme of civil-military relations—a coup-d'état—there has never been a successful coup or even a serious coup attempt in the US. Academics and pundits may debate whether the violence at the Capitol on 6 January 2021 met a definition of "attempted coup." However, in the terms that most concerned the Framers of the Constitution and that have dominated American civil-military relations ever since, those attacks—horrible as they were—in no way fit the definition of a coup. That is, military leaders were not using military units under their command to attempt to seize political power. There is much to criticize about whether the military prepared adequately or adapted quickly to the unfolding events. Certainly, a few veterans and reservists took part in the violence, much to their shame and dishonor. But it was not an attempted seizure of political power by the military. America's record of unbroken civilian control stands if measured by the absence of coups.

Nonetheless, since the United States has become a global superpower, almost every secretary of defense from James Forrestal to today (with the possible exception of President Trump's defense secretaries, as discussed below) has come into power with concerns that civil-military relations under his predecessor got out of balance, with the military gaining too

much influence. Hence, the paradox is this: the unbroken record of civilian control and the nearly unbroken record of worry about civilian control.

There are many reasons for this paradox, beginning with the simple fact that the military establishment in the superpower era has enjoyed remarkable power—in fiscal, political, and prestige terms—far in excess of what the Framers of the Constitution would have thought was proper or safe for the preservation of a free republic.[2] Such power may be necessary to meet the constellation of threats but poses a latent threat of its own. Political leaders naturally and rightly fret about this concern in an "ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" sort of way.[3] It is also true that the regular turnover of administrations, sometimes involving a change in the party in control, brings with it doubt about the reliability of current senior civil and uniformed officials.

We think the root of the paradox lies in the differing worlds, experiences, and priorities exacerbated by the contradictory expectations civilian and military leaders bring to the relationship. Since the participants from the two realms do not share expectations, each ends up disappointing and disturbing the other. Leaders are a bit like a newlywed couple, each spouse having some idea of what his or her own—and their partner's—role in the relationship would be. Unfortunately, if the spouses do not share the same role expectations, each is surprised to discover that the other keeps getting it "wrong" by behaving in unexpected ways.[4]

American military officers enter the relationship with a view of "proper" civil-military relations derived from the classic argument laid out by Samuel P. Huntington in the mid-1950s. His *Soldier and the State* proposes a relatively clean division of responsibility. Civilians should properly determine policy and grand strategy matters with advice from the military. The military should decide on issues largely centering on weapons, operations, and tactics according to the dictates of war, experience, and professional expertise.[5] In Huntington's view, the military voluntarily subordinates itself to civilian direction in exchange for civilians respecting this division of responsibility. Civilians decide the weighty matter of who to fight and when, how much military budgets will be, what weapons will be purchased, and what policies will govern the military. They then give the military autonomy on the implementation of how to fight and how to execute civilian decisions. As one experienced journalist explained to us, "Civilians tell us where they want to go but leave the driving to us." Huntington's real genius was in describing an approach that already aligned with a traditional military point of view. His argument is still taught in professional military educa-

tion as the "normal" theory of civil-military relations, leaving attentive officers to assume that this is the approved model.[6]

Nevertheless, few civilian leaders—including those assigned to senior national security posts—have spent much time, if any, thinking through civil-military relations either in theory or practice. Even those who have thought about it generally act in a way that aligns with a very different model. The rest simply act according to a logic internally consistent with the dictates of civilian politics.[7] Civilians know that there is no fixed division between what is "civilian" and what is "military." The dividing line is where civilian leaders say it is at any given time, and where they draw it can change. This line may fluctuate with the president's personal interests, the threat and political stakes, changes in technology, larger national security considerations, and even with what is going viral in social media that day. Frequently, the dividing line between a decision that civilians believe is theirs to make on strategy and operations can fall far into the domain that the military believes is best insulated from civilian encroachment. In such cases, the recurring lament of American military leaders is that civilians misunderstand or are misplaying their role. They especially call out those civilians involved in the national security policy process who are not in the formal chain of command as are the president and secretary of defense. Faced with civilian oversight from anyone other than the narrow chain of command, the military may think or say, "I believe in civilian control, but you are the wrong civilian." Or if the president or secretary of defense is in the scenario, the military may counter, "You are violating best practice by micromanaging us."[8] Of course, it is the president and secretary of defense's prerogative to micromanage if they deem it necessary. Moreover, while it would be inappropriate for any civilian other than those two to issue an actual order to the military, it is not inappropriate for other civilians to request information for and visibility into military matters if the president or secretary of defense has tasked them to oversee military affairs. The point stands: service members and civilians in the policy-making process often believe they are acting properly while the other is falling short in some way, and those beliefs derive from different standards and expectations of how relations ought to go in the ideal.

Likewise, civilian policy makers attempt to make decisions as late as possible in the interest of flexibility to preserve the president's political options. The priority for the military is to seek clarity and secure a decision as soon as possible to maximize the time for, and effectiveness of, the plans or strategy that follows. The priority for civilians, particularly those closest to the president, is not to tie the hands of the president by committing to

a course of action that cannot be adjusted, walked back, or abandoned if circumstances warrant. In response to adverse geopolitical surprises, civilians seek options while the military leans strongly toward one clearly defined choice. The military's failure or delay in providing alternative looks like foot-dragging. Civilians' failure to provide clear objectives looks like purposeful delay that could compromise strategy and operations, perhaps undermining the objectives, and lead to the unnecessary waste of lives and treasure. It can be a dialogue of the deaf, sometimes made even more frustrating by each side speaking in jargon, acronyms, and code incomprehensible to the other.

Such competing expectations make for a rocky relationship until civilian and military leaders understand one another. This helps explain why American civil-military relations in practice has so many episodes of friction and mistrust even when both sides strive for outcomes important to both, and even when the specter of allowing the military to dominate in some way is nowhere in view. What undermines compromise and cooperation—even the integrity of the process and the possibility of success—is distrust, perhaps fear, on both sides of being dragged by conditions or circumstances into a decision neither wanted and to a purpose incommensurate with the costs.

There is one crucial way the marriage analogy breaks down, for this is a decidedly unequal relationship not based on love and often unchosen by either partner. Democratic theory and historical practice recognize that military members are professionals with distinctive expertise that gives them an indispensable voice worth respecting in discussions of strategy. But they are the agents, not the principals. Military subordination to civilian authority is a defining feature of most governments, particularly republican ones, and democracy cannot survive for long without it. Civilian authority derives not from some superior wisdom but from the fact that civilian politicians are chosen and unchosen by the ultimate principal: the electorate. Civilians oversee national security decisions not because they are right but because the Constitution and laws give them the right, the authority, and the responsibility. And it is their right, even when they are wrong in the choices they make. They have a right to be wrong.[9]

Against this backdrop, as military and civilian learn to understand and relate to one another, they must work together to overcome numerous obstacles. We highlight three that have arisen in every post-1945 administration and a fourth that reflects the unusual tenure of President Donald Trump.

What is "Best Military Advice"?

Recent chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when pressed to describe their roles, have often responded that one was "to provide best military advice."[10] Viewed in the most positive way, the leaders are trying to indicate that their assignment is to give advice in the policy-making process that conveys their professional judgment about the military dimensions of the problem and that reflects good staff work. It is decidedly not "telling the boss what he or she wants to hear based on political calculations and irrespective of hard military realities." But "best military advice" rarely works in an optimal way. It is misleading as a mantra and, most problematically, often poorly received by civilian superiors when framed that way.[11]

To civilian ears, "best military advice" can sound like a threat. Civilians do not trust the benign connotation, for when do professionals ever render less than their best opinion or judgment? Instead, it comes across as a thinly veiled attempt to box in the decision makers because "best" implies a singularity. Pick it or else. Or else? Sometimes the "else" is explicit and sometimes just implicit. For instance, the consequences might be militarily dangerous or the domestic political costs significant, but the phrase can in any case feel uncomfortably like a threat. If this single recommendation is rejected and it leaks, that advice becomes the basis for criticism of the decision maker. Perhaps there are occasions when professional military opinion embraces only one alternative, but in practice senior civilian leaders quickly learn, as did Abraham Lincoln, that their challenge is not deciding *whether* to listen to the generals but deciding *which* generals to listen to.[12] When in 2006 President George W. Bush had some distinguished military professionals advising in favor of the surge and others advising against it, which was the "best military advice?"[13]

Civilian leaders need their military advisors to inject technical military considerations and military judgment into decision making to offer perspectives that they, as civilians, may lack. Is it a good idea to station a carrier battle group off the coast indefinitely to shape the environment for effective diplomacy as a civilian might recommend? The president should not have to rule on that question until hearing the logistical challenges and second- and third-order effects for future naval operations that such an indefinite show of force might entail. Or perhaps he or she needs to be briefed on the historical experience of similar decisions in that place or under similar circumstances.

Military expertise is indispensable. But fully considered military advice in the form of plans and options can only be developed with an awareness of the larger political context in which the president is operating. The

military has the right and the responsibility to present options, even politically unpalatable ones and even when it knows that such advice will be unwelcome in the Pentagon, Congress, or the Oval Office. Correspondingly, civilian decision makers have a right to review alternatives that better reflect their larger purposes, if only to see clearly why one or another course of action is inappropriate. This is true regardless of whether the military is sure a particular course of action is a bad idea. Inherent in the "right to be wrong" is the right to hear viable options that align with what the president thinks is preferable—if only to see how difficult and problematic that course might be.

Military advisors who try to short-circuit the process by hiding or omitting certain options or information undermine best practices in civil-military policy making. Worse yet, attempting to substitute their preferences for those of their civilian superiors—and slapping the label "best military advice" on such efforts—will not spin that inconvenient truth away. Worst of all, appearing to box in their bosses will forfeit the trust on which effective relations depends when they inevitably seek other military counsel in search of more options. Properly done, military advice entails speaking up, not speaking out. Speaking up is telling the bosses what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. If senior military leaders have a contrary opinion, it is their professional obligation to ensure civilian leaders know before a decision is cast in stone. But speaking up in private within the chain of command is very different from speaking out, which involves going to the press or to influential people with such access. The latter would surely be interpreted as pressuring a president to accede to military preferences. Seasoned military leaders learn to work with their civilian counterparts in an iterative process that is responsive, candid, and flexible, eventually yielding assessments that might differ markedly from where either side in the dialogue began.[14]

At the end of the process, best practice yields a decision followed by full and faithful execution. This may be a decision not to decide, to await events, or to otherwise maintain maximum flexibility for the deciding official. Or the decision may involve a course of action riskier than the military thinks wise. Provided the military was consulted, that decision will have been made with full awareness of its perspective. Even if not, provided that the decision is legal, only one outcome is acceptable: obedience.

Why No Norm of Resignation?

Every American military leader we have engaged on this subject—and we have engaged thousands—understands that the military must resist,

even disobey, illegal orders. Likewise, it must obey legal orders, even those it dislikes. Every military leader is trained in how to use the extensive institutional apparatus of military, DOD, and Department of Justice lawyers and other advisers to determine what to do when the legality of an order is questionable. What produces a rich and often contentious discussion is how military leaders should respond to legal orders they judge to be profoundly unethical, immoral, or unwise. In such a situation, can a military leader ask for reassignment or retirement—done either silently or with public protest—rather than obey?

The first step toward an answer requires dispelling a myth. Too many senior officers—to include several chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—have said or written that the duty to disobey illegal orders extends to immoral and unethical orders. As retired Air Force deputy judge advocate general Maj Gen Charles Dunlap carefully explained, the Uniform Code of Military Justice makes no allowance for disobeying "immoral" or "unethical" orders; the choice is legal versus illegal.[15] Military professionalism unequivocally requires everyone in uniform to behave in both a legal and ethical fashion. Still, this dictum does not permit senior officers to resist legal orders based on their own personal standard or definition of what is moral and ethical since that is highly subjective and varies by individual. The only criterion that allows for disobedience is illegality. The matter is simply put. Military members who resist following an illegal order will be protected and exonerated. Alternatively, service members who resist following a legal order that somehow offends a subjective ethical or moral standard can be punished and condemned. It is the job of the voters to punish and remove elected leaders for unwise behavior.

At this point, thoughtful senior military leaders usually object that they are not mere automatons who reflexively translate orders into actions. Are there not more options beyond the simple obey/disobey binary? Yes, but the details matter. For starters, it is essential that the military has first exhaustively fulfilled its obligations in advance of a decision. The advisory process is a time for raising awkward questions, offering sensible objections, and clarifying what makes a course of action unwise (or possibly unethical and immoral). The imperative of military obedience does not require the immediate execution of the slightest whim expressed by any responsible civilian.

The policy-making process is a dialogue—though an unequal one—not a monologue. Officers who think they have options to consider after an order has been given must first demonstrate that they have not shirked the responsibility to advise in full candor. It takes a certain kind of courage to

speak up forcefully even within the confidential policy-making process when the president or secretary of defense has signaled the direction. Yet best practices in civil-military relations require that courage. Best practices also require that the military understands when it has adequately made its case and thus the point where the obligation to advise has been fulfilled—and the point beyond which further pressing of the matter impedes civil-military relations. Many subordinates expect their uniformed superiors to press military perspectives on the civilians, believing in a norm that the military should go beyond "advising" to "advocating" and even "insisting" on certain courses of action.[16] In some cases, they misread H. R. McMaster's influential book *Dereliction of Duty*, assuming that the Vietnam failure at its root was the unwillingness of the Joint Chiefs to stand up to the civilians and, indeed, to resign in the face of civilians who ignored military advice on strategy in the conflict.[17]

The Joint Chiefs obviously did not resign in the Vietnam War, and such resignations at the topmost military ranks are essentially nonexistent. Many senior officers retire before reaching the topmost position for various reasons. Those in the most sensitive assignments, however, know that a sudden or unexplained departure would be interpreted as some sort of dispute with civilian policy, decisions, or leadership that likely heightened civil-military conflict. Some senior military officers submit their retirement papers when they are fed up with the direction the service or a policy appears to be heading. But this is not resignation. Some submit their retirement papers, usually misidentified as resignation papers, as a substitute for getting fired. Neither is that resignation. Submitting retirement papers gives agency to the superior, who can reject them and insist the officer continue to serve. Resignation removes that agency and thereby subverts the superior's authority.[18]

The closest example of a possible resignation as a protest in the last three decades is Air Force chief of staff Ron Fogleman's departure before completing his four-year term. In reality, treating this as resignation stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of what happened and why. Fogleman requested an early retirement when he believed that the senior Pentagon civilian leadership had lost confidence in his judgment. He also went silently in the hopes of preventing his leaving being interpreted as a clash with the secretary of defense over blocking the promotion of the general in charge in Saudi Arabia during the lethal Khobar Towers terrorist attack. Nonetheless, Fogleman's effort backfired. His silence led many to believe his was a "resignation in protest," a misinterpretation that persists today.[19]

In the American system, there is no norm of resignation because it undermines civilian control.[20] For the top two dozen or so flag officers—the service chiefs, combatant commanders, and commanders of forces in active combat—resignation either in silence or with protest would be a huge news story and trigger a political crisis for the president or secretary of defense. Even the threat of resignation would constitute an attempt to impose military preferences on civilian authorities. Going beyond the role of advising and executing a decision properly ordered by civilian authority directly contradicts civilian control, and the consequences for civil-military relations would reverberate far into the future. Civilians would choose the most senior officers based on their pliability rather than on experience, expertise, ability, character, and other criteria necessary for high command and responsibility. Political leaders already have some incentive to vet appointments for compatibility with administration priorities or policies—in effect, politicizing the high command. There is some tantalizing evidence suggesting this might happen on the margins.[21] Nevertheless, the motivations for this sort of corruption in senior officer selection would be far greater if a norm of resignation in protest took hold. Fearing the political consequences of resignation, presidents, secretaries of defense, and service secretaries would trust senior officers less, weakening the candor necessary for intense discussions of critical matters. To forestall the possibility of resignation, consultation with senior officers could become perfunctory window dressing to prevent criticism or political attacks. The threat of resignation could also cause civilian leaders to bend to the will of the military to forestall a politically costly resignation. Either way, resignation with protest as a common practice would soil the advisory process and diminish healthy civil-military relations. As long as the military retains its high standing with the public and high partisanship continues to characterize American politics, the precedent would weaken and perhaps poison civil-military relations to the detriment of effective candor, cooperation, policy, and decision-making. Indeed, there is a strong norm *against* resignation for good reason, but there is growing evidence that attitudes are changing about whether resignation is appropriate.[22] Senior military leaders need to internalize the norm against resignation and reflect on how it shapes and constrains their role in the policy-making process.

Congress and the Challenge of Civil-Military Relations

Even without resignation as an option, the military is not entirely without recourse when faced with clearly dysfunctional policies or deficient orders from civilian superiors. Thanks to a key design feature of the Ameri-

can system embedded in the Constitution, Congress is also the "civilian" in civilian control. The legislative branch has constitutional powers as direct as deciding the design of military policies and forces and as indirect as having the power of the purse and the authority to approve military promotions and assignments. In practice, the president's commander-in-chief powers and executive functions are vast, particularly during wartime. Clearly, the executive branch enjoys primacy in civilian control of the military. It has the responsibility of command and large staffs for planning and managing strategy and complicated joint and combined operations. But the military is also subordinate to the legislative branch, and woe befalls senior military leaders who fail to appreciate this fact.

To be sure, this division and power sharing often put military officers in contentious situations. In theory, the president and Congress work together to authorize, appropriate, and execute military policy. In practice, in the absence of a clearly existential war or military crisis, the president and Congress debate all sorts of military questions, sometimes making the armed services innocent victims of larger partisan struggles. Politically deft military agents have learned over several generations how to balance the president against Congress and vice versa, thus confusing and often warping healthy civil-military relations. Ultimately, these tactics produce less effective military policies and decisions.

Because of Congress's constitutional role in making defense policy, it has a legitimate call on military advice and opinion and has levers it can pull to compel a reluctant military to provide advice. Congress must vote to confirm every military officer's rank, and at the topmost levels that vote is on a by-name, by-assignment basis. Before confirmation, congressional committees require top officers to promise, under oath, that they will give Congress their personal, professional opinion on national security matters if asked during the legislative process. Because of the constitutional separation of powers, Congress cannot force senior military officers to reveal what they told the president during the confidential advisory process. Still, Congress can compel officers to reveal their personal, professional opinions on the matter.

This is the constitutionally mandated path of "resistance" for a military officer to register legitimate concerns about a policy or decision. However, it is a delicate situation that can ruin civil-military relations inside the executive branch if done without careful thought and wording. One caveat is that such candor is rarely applauded by the White House, DOD, or armed services, which are more likely to view it as insubordination. In fact, resistance can be tantamount to insubordination if marshalled to cham-

pion military perspectives over decisions already made or under consideration. Achieving the right balance is a tightrope the military must walk. Staying balanced means that senior leaders honor their obligation to obey and implement legal orders from the commander in chief, even if they deem them unwise. In parallel, they must meet their constitutional duty to apprise Congress of their personal reservations if directly asked. Throughout the process, senior military leaders must do so without undermining the morale of their forces, which will bear the brunt of any policy decision. The more senior the military officer and the more significant the responsibilities, the more likely that officer will face the tightrope dilemma—perhaps multiple times in a career.

Another difficulty in dealing with Congress is parochialism. It is the belief that the military pursues the national interest and that Congress is concerned with only personal or narrowly partisan matters. A military officer looks at a member of Congress and is tempted to think, "All he or she cares about is getting reelected, keeping bases and jobs in their states or districts, and championing the military for political advantage. We are the ones thinking about national security, and they are thinking about the next election." This is a sentiment we have heard countless times from senior military leaders. Such attitudes can be self-defeating, for the officer who displays that mindset in a congressional hearing or other interaction may experience unhappy repercussions. Those holding this view are also somewhat lacking in self-awareness. Military officers can harbor parochial views, sometimes unwittingly, that lie rooted in service culture, their current assignment, or limited career experience. Thus, national security necessitates consideration of many factors, precisely the sort that will be on the minds of the voters and of those who answer to the voters. Senior military officers do not have to answer directly to the electorate and can indulge parochial concerns, wrapping them in the patina of "the national interest," viewing (and believing sincerely) that what is good for their service, command, or function is good for the country. That said, precisely because many members of Congress lack the experience and perhaps even the wherewithal to truly grasp national security affairs in all their variety and complexity, it is important that they be well staffed and well supported in wielding their power. A capable member of Congress can do much good, but a misinformed member can do extraordinary harm. Successful civil-military relations require the military to work closely, cooperatively, and transparently with congressional authorities every bit as carefully as they do in the executive branch.

Military officers who have spent most of their professional lives rising in their service or in joint duties naturally focus on civil-military relations in the top-down hierarchy of the executive branch. Most military facilities feature a pyramid that depicts photos of the chain of command beginning with the commander in chief. Accurate civil-military relations require one more photograph alongside the president: the US Capitol dome.

The Distinctive Features of Trumpian Civil-Military Relations

The foregoing discussion reflects timeless concerns that can be traced through every administration in the era of American superpower status and many to a much earlier time. Every administration experiences civil-military friction; what distinguishes success from failure is not *avoiding* friction but learning how to manage it. Nevertheless, President Trump's single term in office added distinctive twists that made relations especially difficult. Two deserve special, if brief, mention.

First, Trump relied to an unusual degree on recently retired or not-yet-retired military officers to fill positions customarily reserved for civilian political appointees. Every administration has made this type of selection, and it is possible to find a precedent for every individual appointment. Nevertheless, the collective and cumulative effect was quite unusual—particularly in the combination of offices so staffed. At one point, President Trump had a recently retired four-star Marine as secretary of defense (one who required a congressional waiver to hold that post), an active-duty three-star Army general as national security advisor, and another recently retired four-star Marine as White House chief of staff—the most politically sensitive and powerful nonelected post in the White House. The secretary of defense position was especially crucial since that post is supposed to embody the key "civilian" below the president in civilian control. While the president is the commander in chief, the presidency has vast functions and responsibilities. The president is thinking about many things all the time while the secretary of defense is the chief civilian thinking about national security. All three of these top offices were also staffed by many deputies and advisors who were themselves current or recently retired military officers. Everyone's first name was "General," and President Trump regularly referred to each as such. As a result, it was a near certainty that the *primary* military advisor to the president—whom the president looked to for a trusted military opinion—was not the person legally identified as the *principal* military advisor, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

If the military voice was likely too prominent during early stages of the Trump presidency, there were concerns that the military voice lost too

much of its access in the later stages as Trump tired of "his generals" and they left the administration one by one. In his last weeks in office, Trump did away with regular order altogether, firing his secretary of defense and running military affairs from the White House through a chain of command and policy process populated almost entirely by "acting" and "acting in the capacity of" loyalists, some senior retired military and most unconfirmable in their positions. Trump ended with possibly the weakest civilian team ever to serve as the "civilian" in contemporary civil-military relations. After beginning his administration with boasts about how much the military loved him and he loved the military, Trump ended his term with some of the most fractious relations in recent decades.[23]

Second, Trump's unusual governing style made a mockery of "best practices" in the military advisory role. Two, largely separate, policy-making processes developed during his tenure. One operated on issues that did not interest the president and on which he never engaged. That process was routine and, on occasion, produced almost textbook examples of how the policy-making process should proceed. For instance, the Trump administration produced a serious *National Security Strategy* (NSS) in record time. The NSS was closely integrated with the *2018 National Defense Strategy*, which largely drove lower-level budgetary decisions. Yet there is little evidence that Trump himself took the NSS seriously or believed in its "allies are important" core message. The NSS proved to be a decent guide to issues the president himself did not personally engage on and to be utterly irrelevant to matters the president cared about, followed, intervened in, and rendered an opinion on.

This brings us to the other parallel policy-making process: the twitterverse where the president weighed in, often as a commentator and critic of his own administration. Repeatedly, national security policy would be developed according to a regular interagency process only to be undone by a contradictory and often shocking presidential tweet. "A tweet is not an order" never had to be said before the Trump era but had to be said repeatedly during it. While a tweet was not an order, it was an unprecedented window into the commander in chief's "intent," and so the policy process was repeatedly whipsawed to align with a new eruption. More likely than not, those posts could be traced to some punditry on Fox TV, a longtime Trump hobbyhorse, a comment by or recommendation of a friend, or some political maneuver versus a problem of sufficient importance to warrant an intervention from the top.

The military learned to adjust to these twists without a full-blown crisis, but civil-military relations at the policy-making level were strained close to

the breaking point on numerous occasions. President Joseph Biden's promise to return to normalcy—which in civil-military terms meant a return to a normal process with all its friction—was nowhere more welcome than in the Pentagon. Even there, Biden began with norm-breaking of his own. He chose as his secretary of defense former Army general Lloyd Austin, who required a special vote from Congress to waive the legal prohibition on appointing a recently retired professional officer sooner than seven years past retirement. This had been done only twice before in the 69 years the office existed—to confirm Gen George C. Marshall to the position in 1950 and Gen James Mattis in 2017. In both cases, the move was something of a vote of no confidence in the civilian team, to include most notably the presidents themselves. This time, it was likely that Austin's successful confirmation reflected more the crisis of concern about political divisions in the republic after the 6 January attacks on the Capitol by supporters of President Trump than any doubts about Biden's role as civilian commander in chief. But it is undeniable that Austin went to considerable lengths to pledge his commitment to civilian control. He laid out specific steps he would take to shore up the role of civilians in the making of policy precisely to address the types of concerns we outlined above.[24]

Civil-Military Interaction across Society

The other category of issues in American civil-military relations that senior leaders must understand involves interactions with civilian society more broadly, from the individual to entire institutions and from the episodic to the continual. Here again there is a paradox. On the one hand, the US public expresses high levels of trust and confidence in the military. Indeed, the military is the major governmental institution enjoying the highest level of public support, and this has been true since the late 1980s. On the other hand, the public has shown historically low levels of social connection with the military, most notably a low propensity to volunteer to serve in uniform. Thus, while the public highly regards the military, it is distanced from it, as if saying "thanks for your service, but we are glad we don't have to join you." In recent years this large set of intersections and interactions has been labeled a "civil-military gap" or in popular parlance the "1 percent and 99 percent," referring to the tiny portion of the public that serves in uniform either in the active or reserve forces. There are three hardy perennials in this category that every recent administration has encountered at some point, but also some distinctive features peculiar to the Trump era.

Seeds of Alienation

The largest concern is a fear that civilian society and the military will become so alienated from each other the result will be a military incapable or unwilling to serve society. Though they had different diagnoses and prescriptions, this was the common concern animating the two great founders of American civil-military relations scholarship, Huntington and Morris Janowitz.[25] Huntington saw civilian society and the military as distant from each other, especially at the level of norms and values, and urged civilian society to embrace more of the military's thinking, norms, values, and worldview. Janowitz saw the same disconnect and advised the military to develop a new conception of its role and its professionalism to better align with civilian society. Both saw a natural gap as a problem because they doubted that two groups, so dependent on each other but so antithetical in perspectives, could maintain sufficient respect to sustain effective national security policies.

Concerns about the gap escalated with the end of the draft in the early 1970s and have remained high as the all-volunteer force reached maturity in the post–Cold War era. There were brief rally-round-the-flag moments during the invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, but those quickly gave way to doubts about public connections to the military when "the 1 percent went to war and 99 percent went to the mall," a common aphorism heard in the national security community.[26] The extensive polling data over the past several decades support several basic conclusions.[27] The public holds the military in high regard but seems to be happily unknowing about most military policies and activities. Military officers are not so divorced in attitudes and opinions from the general public, but there often is a wide gulf of opinion and values between the officer corps and civilian national security elites and elected officials. Both tend to caricature the other and not always in positive terms. Public ignorance about the military extends to the norms of civil-military relations, which have only the most tenuous support from the general public and, in some cases, the military as well.

At the same time, the public expresses high confidence in the military but expects it to adjust to shifting civilian values. These include such areas as the role of women in combat, the policing of sexual harassment and assault, or opening the ranks fully to gay, lesbian, and now transgender personnel. This is reminiscent of how the military adjusted to racial integration and legal rights for members more congruent with civilian judicial procedures. The military fully accepts the principle of civilian control but also worries about societal dysfunctions. It notes that only a quarter of the

civilian populace at best could even meet the minimum physical, moral, and mental qualifications for admission to the ranks. Increasingly, the military seems to be drawing its recruits from the ever-dwindling pool of families that have prior service connections. Mutual admiration could give way to mutual alienation. As one retired JCS chairman told us, what happens to a force that has been told for decades it represents the best of America? Will it not at some point reach the conclusion that it is indeed better than the rest of America? And from that point, how big of a leap is it to conclude that the inferior civilian society should conform to the superior military values? As one of us has written, "the role of the military is to defend society, not to define it."[28]

When fewer and fewer Americans have a personal connection to the military, the burden of representing the military to civilian society—and bridging the gap—increasingly falls upon the prominent senior general and flag officers and the men and women they lead. Society cannot rely on the media or Hollywood to portray either side accurately or explain one to the other. Senior leaders need to understand that for the rest of their professional lives, and well into retirement, they are bridging—or widening—that gap, intentionally or unintentionally.

Politics and Politicization

Over the past several decades, concerns about the civil-military gap have focused on one worry: a growing partisan politicization of the military. This politicization takes several forms. One is the military taking on something of a partisan identity, with disproportionate numbers openly espousing partisan views and much of the body politic viewing the military as "captured" by one of the parties. Another is dragging in, or merely welcoming in, military voices to play a partisan role during political campaigns. A third is the retired military voice growing in prominence in public policy debates, including those that range far from the traditional bailiwick of foreign and defense policy questions.

The military has always been considered a conservative institution, one that aligned more easily with traditional values than with progressive liberalism. This view shaped the Founders' approach to building military institutions in the new republic, and it was the starting point for the major theoretical works on American civil-military relations.[29] When the professional military was small and on the periphery of American political life—or when it was large but populated by a draft that pulled from nearly all sectors of American society—the ideological profile of the military was of secondary concern. In the era of the all-volunteer force, those concerns

grew. Here was a large—in fungible fiscal terms, a dominating spending institution—almost entirely composed of people who chose to be in the institution, recruited others to follow them, and selected their own leadership except at the very top. In the process, the military started to shed its long-standing image as apolitical—an institution outside of party politics—and increasingly looked partisan. As political polarization intensified in the body politic, the military increasingly looked like a Republican institution.[30] Experts debated the extent of the Republican identity, noting it was less pronounced in the enlisted ranks with more diversity in ethnicity, race, gender, and geographic location of origin—but not the direction of the skew.[31] Perhaps inevitably, as partisan polarization has increasingly characterized political life, so too does it seem to shape public perception of the armed forces. Some experts suggest that Republicans and possibly Democrats view the military through a tribal lens—Republicans as an "us" and Democrats as a "them"—that distorted perceptions accordingly.[32] The drift has been gradual and may be driven as much by division in the larger civilian society as by changes in the makeup or behavior of the military itself. Regardless of the cause, it poses a challenge for healthy civil-military relations during an era when the military consumes a large fraction of the discretionary federal budget and is so visible in civic life.

Notwithstanding a new partisan appearance, the military remains one of the few institutions held in high regard across the political spectrum. Consequently, politicians have increasingly used the military to further partisan political ends. Thus, every four years, we have the unseemly spectacle of political candidates—especially those seeking the presidency—recruiting endorsements from senior retired military officers to persuade Americans to vote accordingly. Regulations forbid the active duty military to express an open preference, so candidates look for the next best thing: retired senior officers whose first names remain "General" or "Admiral" after they stop wearing the uniform. The higher the rank, the more recently retired, and the more famous, the better.[33] Every chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the past 20 years has expressed dismay in private or public about this practice because it falsely implies a preference for the active duty military, making the job of serving the commander in chief and working with Congress, regardless of party, more difficult. But the practice continues and in 2016 reached a new, tawdry level with senior retired officers going well beyond anodyne endorsements. At the national party nominating conventions, their rhetoric crossed over into the most vitriolic of ad hominem attacks of the sort considered inappropriate for the candidates themselves to level.[34] Campaigns cannot be expected to exercise self-restraint in this area.

Hence, the military will escape the political muck only if retired officers resist the temptation to trade on their institutions' reputation for lack of partisanship to commit a brazenly political act. If they wish to join the political fray, they should do so openly as political candidates themselves and not pretend to speak as apolitical observers.[35]

Senior officers on active duty also worry about another form of politicization: the prominent role given retired military veterans as pundits in ongoing policy debates, usually as talking heads on television or purveyors of "gotcha" quotes in news stories. This occurrence has a long pedigree in American civil-military relations. President Dwight Eisenhower worried aloud in his farewell address about a "military-industrial complex" that distorted policy debates by throwing the power of mutual interests behind a certain course of action.[36] These concerns have increased in an age when the news cycle never ends and "everything became war and the military became everything."[37] In our view, this form of politicization is less worrisome if only because the military perspective on policy *is* a legitimate concern and in practice, every veteran voice on one side of a policy issue is usually counterbalanced by an equal and opposite veteran voice on the other. If anything, this dynamic only reinforces the fundamental civilian challenge in policy making: not *whether* to heed military advice but *which* military opinion to heed. Yet the public second-guessing by former senior officers who may have lost situational awareness of the full picture is especially grating to the current military advisors. Senior military leaders need to think in advance how they want to wield their remaining influence once they join the ranks of the retired.

Budgets and the Myth of a "Civil-Military Contract"

The gap gives rise to an enduring myth of American civil-military relations that American society has an implicit contract with the military: a promise to adequately resource and support these men and women in exchange for the risk of their lives on behalf of the nation. Generations of military leaders have mentioned such a contract in countless speeches, but the sad truth is that American society did not act as if there was one—at least not regarding the professional armed forces—for almost all of American history. There is hardly anything more "American" than underfunding the military in peacetime. The prevailing pattern in American military history up through the Korean War was to shirk readiness in peacetime, discover the full extent of this deficiency just before or during the early stages of an armed conflict, and repair the damage by ramping up the military capacity to achieve a victory only to hastily demobilize and return

to peacetime levels of readiness—then repeat the cycle. Indeed, for most of its history up until the Cold War, the United States practiced a national security policy of relatively small peacetime professional forces and mobilization/demobilization for wars.

To the extent there was any societal contract with the military, it was a narrowly drawn one with its citizen soldiers, especially its draftees, symbolized by its system of pensions after the War for Independence and the Civil War, the Veterans Administration after World War I, and the GI Bill after World War II. Over the course of the Cold War, when the military was peopled by draftees and volunteers, and since the onset of the all-volunteer force in the early 1970s, the contract became more robust as the distinction between temporary citizen soldiers and the professional military waned. Even then, some of the promises for health care and other benefits did not seem to fit the idea of "the contract" as expressed by military leaders.

Today, the notion of a societal contract with the military may face a new test. In the five decades since the introduction of the all-volunteer armed forces, thanks to a dramatic expansion in defense spending along with increased pay and benefits, two generations of officers have come of age without personal experience with the previous norm of a chronically underfunded military. Now, all the signs seem to augur a new era of major budget challenges. Intensifying great power conflict and competition imply a new, expensive arms race just as the consequences of previous budget choices create grave fiscal pressure for cutbacks. These cannot be waived away with a glib reference to a societal contract with those who promise to defend us. The current generation of service members may see a leveling or decline in defense spending—while personnel costs for both active duty and veterans strain both budgets—and an unwillingness to sustain a military establishment that competes with expanding domestic spending and continues to add to a swollen national debt.

The Distinctive Features of Trumpian Civil-Military Relations

None of the foregoing would surprise the generation that founded the United States. Yet the Trump tenure put its own stamp on these problems. Trump enthusiastically embraced and indeed encouraged the politicization of the military, accentuating and exaggerating it at almost every opportunity.[38] Whereas previous presidents at least paid lip service to the idea of an apolitical military, Trump talked openly about the military as part of his political base. At the outset, he openly referred to military leaders as "my generals," only to turn on them and publicly castigate them when their advice contradicted his desires or they left his employ.[39]

In response to critiques from prominent retired senior military officers, Trump openly denounced the senior ranks as war-hungry careerists eager to increase weapon sales while insisting that the lower ranks remained personally loyal to him.[40]

Likewise, Trump repeatedly sought to use the military in settings that crossed the boundary into the nakedly political. During his first few weeks in office, he surprised the Defense Department by turning a standard meet-and-greet visit to the Pentagon into a signing ceremony for his controversial ban on refugees from Muslim majority countries.[41] He repeatedly sought to get the military to provide him a flashy parade through Washington, DC, large enough to rival the Bastille Day parade President Emanuel Macron hosted for Trump in France, despite no American precedent for such parades on American national holidays.[42] In the run-up to the 2018 midterm elections when he could not get Congress to fund the building of a wall along the border with Mexico, he declared a national emergency, shifted military appropriations to the wall, and directed military personnel to patrol the border.[43] In each of these instances, the military dragged its feet but, acceding to civilian control, mostly went along with the controversial actions. The breaking point came in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in spring 2020. As localities struggled with protests, a few including violence and some even in the vicinity of the White House, President Trump ordered the National Guard to patrol the streets of Washington. He flirted with mobilizing active duty units for a more dramatic show of force, subsequently arranging for the JCS chairman and defense secretary to join him on a photo-op walk across Lafayette Park after peaceful protestors there had been forcibly dispersed. The photo op, clearly political, crossed an ethical line, causing JCS chairman Gen Mark Milley and Defense Secretary Mark Esper (a West Point graduate and retired Army Reserve officer) to apologize publicly for appearing in a political event—probably the first-ever public apology from a chairman for something so obviously partisan.[44] Esper paid for his public disagreement with Trump by being summarily fired after Trump lost the presidential election.[45]

After this rupture came the extraordinary events of 6 January. A mob inflamed by President Trump's false claims that he was a victim of massive electoral fraud battled the police, broke into the Capitol building, and tried to thwart the process of confirming Biden's electoral college victory. Some mob participants may even have sought to kill political leaders they thought stood in the way of a second Trump term. Security forces may have been slow to respond to the unfolding chaos out of fear that they

would get caught once again in a political cross fire, but after a delay they sided decisively with the constitutional order and ensured that the transfer of presidential power could occur without further interruption. Nevertheless, the prominence of some veterans among the most violent of would-be insurrectionists raised concerns about the presence of extremists in the military—and renewed calls for the military to recommit to the traditional apolitical norm.[46] The Biden administration team has made it clear that it will prioritize restoring old norms and redlines on politicization, but undoing the damage to the perception of the military as an apolitical institution may take years of scrupulous behavior by civilian and military alike.

Conclusion: What Can Be Done

Every senior military and civilian leader will face at least a few of the challenges addressed above, and most will encounter them all at some point in a career or in retirement. Each challenge is made more manageable if civilian and military leaders develop relationships characterized by trust and candor. Trust is the universal solvent in civil-military relations. It is the benefit of the doubt earned over patterns of responsible conduct where each party speaks fully and straightforwardly with the other, genuinely seeks mutual understanding, and partners in cooperation for shared objectives.

Trust is intentionally built through deliberate action. Because of the two paradoxes of American civil-military relations, it cannot merely be assumed. Trust is developed step by step through frequent interactions and conversations, formal and informal, in the workplace and at social events. It constitutes a reservoir that must be filled in advance, only to be drawn down in a crisis and quickly replenished. When trust is most needed, it is too late to build it.

Although the military is clearly the subordinate in this relationship, it must be the initiator and not wait for superiors to take the first step. In our experience, senior military leaders spend remarkably little time—and senior civilian leaders even less—reflecting on the dynamics that shape American civil-military relations.

As with other professional occupations (e.g., lawyers, doctors, teachers, and the clergy), it is up to the experts, not their bosses or clients, to mold the relationship and influence the interactions as much as they can to provide the most functional and effective outcomes. It is up to the professionals to think through the ethical guidelines; learn, rehearse, and promote best practices; and apply them in an ongoing fashion even from a subordinate position. All military officers lead their subordinates but must also help their superiors to be successful commanders and leaders. Sometimes it

falls to the subordinate to prepare the superior to lead with maximum effectiveness. This might be thought of as "leading from the middle"—a challenging, daunting assignment but hardly impossible. Generations of senior military leaders, stretching back to George Washington, figured out how to do it well with civilians of disparate abilities. It would be productive if civilian leaders joined enthusiastically in studying civil-military relations. More importantly, however, military leaders must commit to taking on the responsibility to know and study civil-military relations. They must prepare their peers and subordinates to assume stewardship of healthy civil-military relations for the good of our future. SSQ

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Notes

1. Broad treatments of CMR and civilian control can be found in Risa A. Brooks, "Integrating the Civil–Military Relations Subfield," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2019): 379–98, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060518-025407; Peter D. Feaver, "Civil-Military Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (June 1999): 211–41, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.211; Richard H. Kohn, "Civil-Military Relations: Civilian Control of the Military," in *The Oxford Companion to American Military History,* eds. John Whiteclay Chambers II and Fred Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 122–25; and updated version for Richard H. Kohn, ed., *Civil-Military Relations in the United States* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

2. Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783–1802* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); and Richard H. Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security: The Intent of the Framers," in *The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789–1989*, ed. Richard H. Kohn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 61–94.

3. Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces and Society* 23, no. 2 (January 1996): 149–78, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9602300203.

4. To be sure, there are many ways in which relations between the military and civilians in the policy-making area do *not* resemble a newly married couple, beginning with the issue of military subordination to the civilian, as explained later in the text. In addition, there are rarely honeymoons and may be little in the way of deep admiration, let alone love, expressed across the divides. But the analogy works to convey the crucial insights regarding the potential for miscommunication and disappointment arising out of

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7. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002); and Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

8. Rosa Brooks introduced this quip as an exchange between civilian staff, one at the White House and one in the Department of Defense, but in the years since we have heard numerous senior military officers invoke some version of this to explain why they oppose civilian meddling in the particular while also endorsing civilian control in the abstract. See Rosa Brooks, "Thought Cloud: The Real Problem with the Civilian-Military Gap," *Foreign Policy*, 2 August 2012, https://foreignpolicy.com/.

9. Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

10. "Gen. Dunford's Remarks and Q&A at the Center for Strategic and International Studies," Joint Chiefs of Staff, 29 March 2016, https://www.jcs.mil/; Helene Cooper, "How Mark Milley, a General Who Mixes Bluntness and Banter, Became Trump's Top Military Adviser," *New York Times*, 29 September 2019, updated 9 July 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/ ; and "Gen. Dempsey's Remarks at the Center for a New American Security," Joint Chiefs of Staff, 21 November 2014, https://www.jcs.mil/.

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for Your Service: Civilian and Veteran Attitudes after Fifteen Years of War," in *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military*, eds. Kori Schake and Jim Mattis (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2016), 97–142.

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21. James Golby et al., "Duty, Honor . . . Party? Ideology, Institutions, and the Use of Military Force" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2011).

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23. Phil Stewart, Idrees Ali, and Steve Holland, "How Trump Fell Out of Love with His Generals, and Why the Feeling Is Mutual," Reuters, 23 September 2020, https://www.reuters.com/.

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25. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique."

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37. Rosa Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

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45. Helene Cooper et al., "Trump Fires Mark Esper, Defense Secretary Who Opposed Use of Troops on U.S. Streets," *New York Times*, 9 November 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/.

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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 involvment 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?

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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.

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

Defense One

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 advise 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.

Although the use of the military as political props and the embrace of military heroes and "the troops" by presidents and other politicians go far back in American history, the last three decades have seen increasing explicit interventions by senior retired officers in political controversies and presidential elections. Scholars, commentators, and many senior military leaders believe this has reached dangerous levels. This essay provides a convenient summary of the most recent evidence and proposes some solutions. Do you find the dangers real? Is there any way to restrain political leaders from using the uniformed military for partisan purposes? Or senior retired officers from endorsing political candidates, using the reputation of the military for non-partisanship to commit political acts?

GENERALS SHOULDN'T BE WELCOME AT THESE PARTIES: STOPPING RETIRED FLAG OFFICER ENDORSEMENTS

HEIDI URBEN

Both the Democratic and Republican presidential nominating conventions that are just weeks away promise to be unlike any convention in recent memory …due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Democratic convention, which was already pushed from July to August, will still occur in Milwaukee, but with most convention delegates participating remotely. Meanwhile, after the Republican party hastily shifted its convention from Charlotte, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida due to COVID-19 restrictions, President Donald Trump abruptly cancelled convention activities, citing ongoing concerns about the spike in COVID-19 cases in Florida. While there is considerable uncertainty on how both conventions will unfold, the pandemic is unlikely to interfere with one tradition: Both candidates will still produce long lists of retired generals and admirals who endorse their candidacies, just as Hillary Clinton and Trump did in 2016.

Endorsements by retired general and flag officers have been a common feature of presidential campaigns since 1988, but many onlookers felt a particular line had been crossed in 2016, with both Lt. Gen. (Ret) Michael Flynn and Gen. (Ret) John Allen drawing the rebuke of former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. (Ret) Martin Dempsey for their over-the-top convention

performances. Flynn's frenzied chants of "lock her up" directed against Clinton are what most probably remember from the convention, but Peter Feaver, who nonetheless condemned Flynn's theatrics, lamented Allen's explicit call for active duty military to join the partisan political fray as the real nadir.

There has been no shortage of commentary raising concern about the effect such endorsements have on the profession or advocating for greater restraint among retired generals and admirals, including calls for greater peer pressure among other retired flag officers to dissuade their colleagues from endorsements. The normative case for why retired flag officer endorsements in particular are bad business for the profession is clear: When retired generals and admirals lend their stars to a partisan cause, they allow themselves to be "exploited for their titles." These overt acts of partisanship threaten to erode the trust and confidence with which the American public regards the military and could further incentivize presidents to select senior military leaders based on their politics, not their professional excellence. And suggestions that the American public can distinguish between active duty and retired generals are simply unfounded, as evidenced by a poll Jim Golby and Feaver ran in June 2019 that will be featured in their forthcoming book, in which only 31 percent of Americans could correctly identify Secretary Jim Mattis's military status as retired.

While calls for an end to flag officer endorsements have largely fallen on deaf ears, there has never been a more important time in the All-Volunteer Force era for the military to fully recommit itself to the norm of nonpartisanship, as the past few years have exposed shortcomings in the military's adherence to the nonpartisan ethic and raised questions about to what extent the military has already been politicized. Past survey research I conducted from December 2015 to January 2016 found a willingness, even among active duty members, to publicly criticize elected leaders and the president on social media. More recently, Ronald R. Krebs and Robert Ralston have written persuasively on the lack of understanding of critical civil-military relations norms among the American public today, and Risa Brooks has raised valid concerns about increased instances of civilians politicizing the military. The use of active duty troops to quell domestic protests, punctuated by the regrettable incident in Lafayette Square in June, only reignited a debate on the perils of politicizing the military.

It is precisely because concerns over politicizing the military have been in the news so much that our current uniformed leaders should lead a renewed commitment to upholding and maintaining the norm of nonpartisanship — to include unambiguously extending it into retirement for retired flag officers. In

routine presidential election years, it may have sufficed for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to pen an op-ed in *Joint Force Quarterly* about the importance of members of the active duty military keeping their politics private, but there is nothing about 2020 that is routine. Norms do not take hold in an institution overnight, but require constant teaching, reinforcement, and observable adherence if they are to be preserved. All of our serving general and flag officers, not just the Chairman, should communicate to their active duty troops the harm that can be done to the military's credibility as a nonpartisan institution when retired generals make partisan endorsements and give the appearance they still speak for the military. And when endorsements do emerge in the coming weeks, our most senior uniformed leaders should not hesitate from publicly condemning them as hurtful to the institution to the service of which these flag officers all ostensibly committed their professional lives.

My own survey research has found that most officers serving in the military today are fairly sanguine about the political outspokenness of retired flag officers — raising concerns about whether the tide of retired flag officer endorsements can truly ever be turned. From 2017 to 2020, I was part of a team that surveyed over 1,200 officers attending the National Defense University and Army War College and cadets enrolled at the U.S. Military Academy. The survey focused on a host of contemporary civil-military relations issues, including the role that retired officers, especially flag officers, play in politics. Only 24 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that it is appropriate for retired general and flag officers to publicly express their political views, compared to 53 percent who agreed. Additionally, only 30 percent of those we surveyed agreed that retired officers — not just generals and admirals — should not publicly criticize senior civilian political leaders, compared to 47 percent who disagreed. Notably, these figures did not vary based on the rank, ideology, or partisanship of the respondents, but rather there was remarkable consistency across demographic variables.

Lastly, 43 percent of those surveyed agreed with the idea that more retired four stars should be encouraged to serve as political appointees, while only 17 percent disagreed and 39 percent were unsure. This likely is in response to the Trump administration's proclivity to appoint so many retired generals to key policy positions or the sentiment held by some that those retired generals critically served as the only "adults in the room." While openly serving in a presidential administration in a political role is different from using one's rank as the impetus behind a partisan endorsement, the survey response still indicates comfort among those serving today with retired flag officers filling

outsized political roles. It also reflects a growing trend where the public and politicians increasingly turn to the well-trusted, well-respected military for things outside the military's traditional realm of expertise. While that is a separate civil-military relations issue to unpack, this still underscores why the retired flag officer endorsement issue is so important: Partisan endorsements cash in on the military's position of trust.

These observations are not new. In 2009, I conducted a large-scale, random sample survey of more than 4,000 Army officers in the ranks of lieutenant through colonel, and found even less opposition to retired officers' political outspokenness. Back then, only 11 percent of active duty army officers felt it was inappropriate for retired generals to publicly express their political views and just 20 percent thought retired officers, regardless of rank, should not publicly criticize civilian leaders. If there is a silver lining to all this, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of active duty officers who are uncomfortable with retired officers publicly airing their politics.

If candidates in both parties continue to actively recruit endorsements from retired flag officers — and there has been nothing to suggest they will suddenly stop, even if such endorsements end up having little effect on public opinion — the only way to curb these endorsements is for retired flag officers to just say no. And even if, as Maj. Gen. (Ret) Charlie Dunlap noted in a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies podcast, the fraction of retired flag officers who make such endorsements is small, plenty have still been willing to oblige. In a way, the calls from two former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, both Dempsey and Adm. (Ret) Michael Mullen, to extend the norm of nonpartisanship into retirement, are outliers that have been roundly ignored by those retired flag officers eager to lend their stars to the next presidential hopeful's campaign. Notably, the most recent Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. (Ret) Joseph Dunford, purposefully refrained from weighing in on the issue of retired officers speaking out on political issues, continuing to give credence to the idea this is an uncertain norm at best. Taken together, it is understandable why many interested civil-military relations observers might simply conclude that reversing the trend of partisan political endorsements by retired flag officers looks bleak.

An important side note: The call to eliminate partisan endorsements by retired flag officers does not mean senior military leaders should not speak out on critical issues relating to their expertise. Mullen and Dempsey by no means have been silent in retirement, and both quickly condemned Trump's use of the military to quell peaceful protests, but their criticism sprang from their views on the proper use of military force and concerns that the military would

be politicized in the eyes of the American public. Outspokenness in defense of preserving the military's norms is a far cry from a partisan endorsement, and the military and civilians alike should be able to distinguish between the two.

There is some hope the military can reverse the troubling trend of endorsements, although not necessarily for this generation of retired flag officers. First, as I indicated earlier, I have found slight increases in the percentage of active duty officers who are uncomfortable with retired generals making public political pronouncements over the past decade. This could be in response to the 2016 campaign and both parties' nominating conventions that year, although the exact reasons behind the modest shift are not entirely clear. Moreover, in that same survey research, I found nearly a quarter of respondents were ambivalent on the role that retired flag officers should play in politics, suggesting a portion of the officer corps is open to influence. It may be too late to convince our current cohort of retired flag officers of how damning their partisan endorsements are for the institution and maintaining the American public's trust and confidence. A more comprehensive campaign oriented on those currently serving — from which the next generation of generals and admirals will be chosen — may prove to be a wiser, albeit long-term, investment. Nearly two decades ago, Richard Kohn famously wrote that four stars, like "princes of the church," never truly retire, but forever represent the institution. This election season and beyond, let's hope members of the uniformed military head back to church, recommitting fully to the nonpartisan ethic and holding their princes to the same standard.

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The 2020 presidential election exacerbated partisan divisions and poisoned political discourse even beyond what they had been in recent years, with the hyperbole and misstatements of fact infecting the retired military community just as they have civilian society. The letter by 124 retired flag officers in 2021 struck many civil-relations observers as a significant new level of partisanship and public political intervention. Is this different from endorsements of presidential candidates? How? Why is such behavior dangerous for civil-military relations?

https://www.politico.com/news/2021/05/11/retired-brass-biden-election-487374

POLITICO

DEFENSE

'Disturbing and reckless': Retired brass spread election lie in attack on Biden, Democrats

The open letter from 124 retired officers alarmed current and former military members.

By **BRYAN BENDER**
05/11/2021 09:28 PM EDT

A day after 124 retired generals and admirals released a letter spreading the lie that President Joe Biden stole the election, current and former military officers are speaking out, calling the missive a dangerous new sign of the military being dragged into the trenches of partisan warfare.

The open letter on Monday from a group calling itself Flag Officers 4 America advanced the false conspiracy theory that the presidential vote was rigged in Biden's favor and warned that the nation is “in deep peril” from “a full-blown assault on our Constitutional rights.”

“Under a Democrat Congress and the Current Administration,” they wrote, “our Country has taken a hard left turn toward Socialism and a Marxist form of tyrannical government which must be countered now by electing congressional and presidential candidates who will always act to defend our Constitutional Republic.”

The broadside also raises questions about “the mental and physical condition of the Commander in Chief” and sounds the alarm about a host of hot-button issues, such as the border wall. It goes on to accuse congressional leaders of “using the U.S. military as political pawns with thousands of troops deployed around the U.S. Capitol Building.”

The group's website claims that “we are in a fight for our survival as a Constitutional Republic like no other time since our founding in 1776.”

As news of the letter spread, it set off a round of recriminations among current and former military members. One serving Navy officer, who did not want to be identified publicly, called it “disturbing and reckless.”

Jim Golby, an expert in civil-military relations, called it a “shameful effort to use their rank and the military's reputation for such a gross and blatant partisan attack,” while a retired Air Force colonel who teaches cadets at the Air Force Academy, Marybeth Ulrich, labeled it “anti-democratic.”

“I think it hurts the military and by extension it hurts the country,” said retired Adm. Mike Mullen, a former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, describing it as replete with “right-wing Republican talking points.”

The talking points in the letter fall generally in line with die-hard loyalists in Trump's orbit, who question the results of the election despite the fact that the courts and Trump's own Justice Department said there was no reason to declare him the winner.

Several experts said it reminded them of the current crisis in civil-military relations in France, where dozens of retired generals were recently sanctioned after warning in an open letter in a right-wing magazine of civil war for the “protection of our civilisational values.”

That letter was followed up by an anonymous one from current officers calling French politicians cowards for not dealing with the Muslim population, sparking calls for a purge of the ranks. The controversy has undermined public confidence in the French military and recalled the bitter feuds between the brass and elected officials during the early years of the Cold War.

The American letter was striking for several reasons. It is not unusual for retired officers to take sides in electoral politics and endorse candidates. But its fiery, even angry, language and conspiracy-mongering struck multiple long-time observers as particularly out of bounds and dangerous. Coming outside the campaign season was also seen as rare if not unprecedented.

Notable signatories included retired Army Brig. Gen. Don Bolduc, who is running for the U.S. Senate in New Hampshire; retired Army Lt. Gen. William Boykin, who stirred controversy for some of his anti-Muslim views and is now executive vice president of the Family Research Council; and retired Vice Adm. John Poindexter, who was the deputy national security adviser for President Ronald Reagan and was convicted in the Iran-Contra Affair.

The letter, mostly signed by ex-military leaders who have been out of uniform for decades, was organized by retired Army Maj. Gen. Joe Arbuckle, a Vietnam veteran who retired in 2000.

Arbuckle, in response to questions from POLITICO, acknowledged in an email that the partisan nature of the effort is not normal but defended it as necessary, given what's at stake.

“Retired generals and admirals normally do not engage in political actions,” he said, “but the situation facing our nation today is dire and we must speak out in order to be faithful to our oath to support and defend the Constitution of the U.S. against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

“We are facing threats greater than at any other time since our country was founded,” Arbuckle added. “Aside from China, many of these threats flow directly from policy positions and actions of our own government. It is critical that the threats to our national security be brought to the attention of the American people and that is the main purpose of the letter. To remain silent would be a dereliction of duty.”

But the missive alarmed fellow officers in the halls of the Pentagon and far-flung bases due to its strident tone and for using the stature of the nation's generals and admirals to spread misinformation.

It also sent shock waves through the community of experts who train military officers on the long tradition of the U.S. military staying above the political fray.

That includes while in uniform, when they are prohibited from engaging in partisan politicking, and after they retire, when they have commonly kept their political views private in deference to that tradition and to safeguard the democratic principle of civilian control of the military.

The Pentagon declined through a spokesperson to comment on the letter. But others clearly took notice.

“That was way worse than I was expecting,” said Ulrich, a retired Air Force colonel who teaches civil-military relations at the Army War College and Air Force Academy. “They are perpetuating the big lie about the election. I think it is outrageous. Some of it is very anti-democratic behavior.”

She said she plans to use the letter in her classes to demonstrate to young military officers the extent to which the military's apolitical tradition has eroded in recent years and why that is dangerous.

“They are absolutely violating the norm to be apolitical,” she added. “They are being used for partisan purposes. They are going against their constitutional oath.”

Both parties have increasingly relied on the endorsements of retired military leaders to lend credibility to their campaigns and support for their national security views. Both Biden and Trump boasted of a long list of former military brass who were supporting their presidential bids, including some who served as official campaign advisers.

In some specific cases, highly regarded retired officers have staked out singular political positions, such as when retired Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal mounted a campaign against assault weapons or when retired Navy Adm. William McRaven accused Trump in 2019 of endangering the republic with his leadership.

The growing practice has raised concerns about blurring the civil-military divide and injecting politics into the armed forces.

The politicization of the military is also seen by some experts as a possible contributing factor to an erosion of the military's standing among the public, as found in a recent survey by the Ronald Reagan Institute.

But the new attack on Biden and the Democrats is seen as in a class of its own.

“I've seen a lot of these letters, but this one really is something,” said Golby, a senior fellow at the Clements Center for National Security at The University of Texas at Austin and an expert on civil-military relations. “We've seen isolated statements from retired generals and admirals like McChrystal or McRaven, but this statement is the first full-blown partisan attack from a large group of retired officers that is not explicitly tied to an election or specific issue.”

“The tone is shocking,” he added, “especially because it targets the entire Democratic party, implies the election was illegitimate and contains a number of verifiable lies.”

Mullen also said the timing was unusual. “Normally those kinds of things occur in an election,” he said. “It's out of cycle.”

“The only positive sign,” added Golby, “is that most of the retired officers who signed this letter have been out of the military for almost two decades, and that no recent retirees joined this shameful effort to use their rank and the military's reputation for such a gross and blatant partisan attack.”

Mullen also pointed out that no retired four-stars signed it and only a handful of three-stars. “It's not very senior,” he said. “In our world it's not very significant in terms of people.”

But others were less sanguine. Peter Feaver, a scholar in civil-military relations at Duke University who served on the National Security Council under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, called the letter “an appalling breach of military professionalism and the norms on which democratic civil-military relations depends.”

“For the first few decades after World War II, the French military had some of the worst civil-military relations of any of the advanced industrial democracies,” added Feaver, a retired naval officer. “They had a genuine coup attempt in 1961. Every military that coups or threatens to coup constructs a narrative in which the military is acting to save the country from something worse than military rule. Clearly the authors are attempting to write that narrative.”

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.

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 live 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.

SHADOW GOVERNMENT Notes from the loyal opposition

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 live 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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Civil-Military Relations in the Trump and (Toward) the Biden Administrations

The Trump Administration provoked a great deal of controversy over civil-military relations, raising all sorts of issues senior military officers and civilian officials, and the American public, should ponder. This review, by a professor of security studies and department head at Marine Corps University, covers the arguments as of the spring of 2021 comprehensively. What are your views of the pros and cons of having senior military officers, active or retired, in high political positions, of Mr. Trump's statements and behavior in office, and of the way senior military officers on active duty, and retired, reacted, and handled the stresses and the issues?

Trump's Generals: A Natural Experiment in Civil-Military Relations

James Joyner

Abstract

President Donald Trump's filling of numerous top policy positions with active and retired officers he called "my generals" generated fears of militarization of foreign policy, loss of civilian control of the military, and politicization of the military—yet also hope that they might restrain his worst impulses. Because the generals were all gone by the halfway mark of his administration, we have a natural experiment that allows us to compare a Trump presidency with and without retired generals serving as "adults in the room." None of the dire predictions turned out to be quite true. While Trump repeatedly flirted with civil-military crises, they were not significantly amplified or deterred by the presence of retired generals in key roles. Further, the pattern continued in the second half of the administration when "true" civilians filled these billets. Whether longer-term damage was done, however, remains unresolved.

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The presidency of Donald Trump served as a natural experiment, testing many of the long-debated precepts of the civil-military relations (CMR) literature. His postelection interviewing of more than a half dozen recently retired four-star officers for senior posts in his administration unleashed a torrent of columns pointing to the dangers of further militarization of US foreign policy and damage to the military as a nonpartisan institution. At the same time, many argued that these men were uniquely qualified to rein in Trump's worst proclivities. With Trump's tenure over, we can begin to evaluate these claims. Additionally, the period of "Trump's generals" ended almost precisely halfway through his administration, with the resignations of James Mattis as secretary of defense (SecDef) and John Kelly as White House chief of staff (WHCOS)—effective 1 and 2 January 2019, respectively.

Therefore, we can compare a Trump presidency with and without retired generals serving as "adults in the room."

This article compares predictions of a CMR crisis at the outset of the administration with the results. Specifically, it compares the following: concerns for militarization of foreign policy, loss of civilian control, politicization of the military, and hopes for restraining Trump's worst instincts. We see that, while Trump repeatedly flirted with them, civil-military problems were not significantly amplified or deterred by the presence of retired generals in key roles. Further, a similar pattern continued in the second half of the administration when "true" civilians filled these billets. Whether longer-term damage was done, however, remains unresolved.

Predicting a Civil-Military Relations Crisis

The CMR debate started almost immediately after Trump's 2016 election, when it became clear that an unusually large number of senior officers were candidates to join the administration. While the views on Mattis were mixed, the reaction against the prospect of so many retired senior officers set off alarm bells. By late November, Lt Gen Michael Flynn, USA, retired, was already announced as the national security advisor (NSA) designate.[1] Mattis was favored for defense secretary, though Gen Jack Keane, USA, retired, was reportedly being strongly considered. General Kelly, USMC, retired, was the frontrunner for secretary of homeland security; Gen David Petraeus, USA, retired, was being considered for both secretary of state and director of national intelligence (DNI); and active duty admiral Mike Rogers was also under consideration for DNI. US Army retired general Stanley McChrystal's name was also being floated, despite his announcing over the summer that he "would decline consideration for any role" in a Trump administration.[2] The possibility of so many senior military leaders serving in key political roles caused civil-military scholars to suggest potential problems.

Concerns of Militarization of Foreign Policy

Many CMR scholars feared that placing retired officers in key national security roles would further shift the policy-making balance of power to the Pentagon, either because they shared the same worldview as serving officers or because they lacked a sufficient breadth of experience to appreciate nonmilitary instruments.

Gen Anthony Zinni, USMC, retired, was concerned that "we could end up being long on military strategy, much needed after the last two Admin-

istrations, but short of foreign policy expertise." I argued, "Recently separated officers are likely to reinforce the advice given the president by the Joint Chiefs rather than offer a political perspective."[3] Phillip Carter and Loren DeJonge Schulman warned, "This risk is particularly acute now, after 15 years of war, when the military has achieved such policy and budget primacy, and military tools are often looked to as options of first, rather than last, resort."[4] Thomas Pickering echoed this sentiment, adding, "If they have all the money and resources and tools, that does reduce the influence and capacity of the civilian-dominated agency."[5]

Carol Giacomo took a slightly different tack and argued that "the concern is not so much that military leaders might drag the country into more wars. It is that the Pentagon, with its nearly $600 billion budget, already exercises vast sway in national security policymaking and dwarfs the State Department in resources."[6]

But, as with the other CMR concerns, many were skeptical. Richard Fontaine pushed back at the notion that retired officers were especially likely to urge the use of force, observing, "In my experience, veterans have been less likely than the civilians to advocate for military intervention abroad." He suggested that it was the latter who "pushed hardest to launch the 2003 Iraq invasion."[7] Maj Gen Charles Dunlap, USAF, retired, went further, contending that because they know the costs, "retired generals don't clamor for war; they are typically the voices urging that all other avenues be exhausted before turning to force."[8]

Additionally, many disagreed that modern four-stars fail to understand the complexities of the larger policy picture. For example, Caroline Bechtel observed, "Combatant commanders oversee all assets in their respective areas of operation, coordinating all military, diplomatic, intelligence, and even development assets in their commands. Thus, they must have an intimate understanding of the command's political context, often playing a regional political or diplomatic role themselves."[9]

Concerns over Civilian Control

The most debated CMR issue was whether these retired generals would further shift the balance of power toward the military brass and away from civilian policy makers, exacerbating a growing public sense that military affairs are best left to the military. Even many who supported a waiver for Mattis believed it would be dangerous for the exception to become the norm. A related concern was whether a lifetime in uniform left retired officers unprepared for the challenges of navigating an inherently political process. Robert Burns noted, "Trump has turned to retired officers so pub-

licly and in such large numbers that it raises questions about the proper balance of military and civilian advice in a White House led by a commander in chief with no defense or foreign policy experience."[10]

By far the most controversy over civilian control was engendered by the potential and then actual nomination of Mattis, only three years retired from the Marine Corps, as SecDef. When Congress created that position in 1947, it specified that its occupant must be "appointed from civilian life by the President" with the proviso that "a person who has within ten years been on active duty as a commissioned officer in a Regular component of the armed services shall not be eligible for appointment."[11] In addition to concerns that the senior generals and admirals of World War II enjoyed more political prestige than virtually any civilian, Congress believed that this cooling-off period would "help ensure that no one military service dominated the newly established Defense Department; ensure that the new Secretary of Defense was truly the President's (rather than a service's) representative; and, again, preserve the principle of civilian control of the military at a time when the United States was departing from its century-and-a-half long tradition of a small standing military."[12]

Just over three years later, owing to the twin crises of the "revolt of the admirals" against the second SecDef, Louis Johnson, and the debacle at the outset of America's entry into the Korean War, President Harry Truman requested a waiver. Writing Congress, he urged, "I am a firm believer in the general principle that our national defense establishment should be headed by a civilian. However, in view of the present critical circumstances and General [George] Marshall's unusual qualifications, I believe that the national interest will be served best by making an exception in this case."[13] While controversial, the request was honored but accompanied by a statement expressing "the sense of the Congress that after General Marshall leaves the office of Secretary of Defense, no additional appointments of military men to that office shall be approved."[14]

That intention was honored for 67 years until Trump's nomination of Mattis. Given the lack of a crisis comparable to 1950 and that Mattis was a battlefield commander rather than a staff officer who had served two years as secretary of state after retirement, the choice generated considerable controversy. Numerous Democrats on the Senate and House Armed Services Committees came out early against a waiver. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) issued the obligatory caveat "General Mattis deserves deep gratitude and respect for his commendable military service" before declaring, "Our American democracy was built around the concept of civilian control of the military." She urged her colleagues to resist granting a waiver

to "protect this core foundation on which our country was built, and which has served us well."[15] Her colleague Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) concurred, declaring, "Civilian control over the Department of Defense is a bedrock principle. The standard is a high one." He added, "General Mattis has the burden of meeting it, which he has not yet done. I would vote to waive it only under the most unique and exigent circumstances."[16] Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) was "deeply fearful" that the precedent of civilian control of the military could wither by granting the waiver, and Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA 9th District), the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, proclaimed, "Civil control of the military is not something to be casually cast aside."[17]

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Kathleen Hicks noted that the prohibition applied to this particular office and no other is because it is "the one nonelected civilian position in the operational chain of command."[18] While supporting an exception for Mattis, she cautioned against routinely appointing retired generals to SecDef or other senior posts in the defense bureaucracy. Doing so would undermine the nation's "interest in developing knowledge and expertise about the armed forces among those who have not served" because "motivating civilians to invest in careers in the defense sector requires having positions of meaning to which they can aspire."[19]

Peter Feaver and Lawrence Korb shared Hicks's position. Feaver argued that those who retire as a four-star officer "never become fully civilian" because they retain "some of the influence of serving military officers" and "represent the military profession in the eyes of the public in a way that much more junior veterans do not."[20] Korb said that having Mattis, a man who had spent four decades in uniform, as SecDef would rob the Pentagon of needed perspective and that major social changes in the military, from ending segregation to allowing women in combat, had always been pushed by civilians.[21]

Still, some noted CMR scholars defended the selection. Despite his reservations, Feaver argued that it was reasonable to make an exception in Mattis's case for many reasons but especially "because so many other logical candidates signed letters opposing [Trump] during the campaign, effectively taking themselves out of the running for consideration for a post like this."[22] Similarly, Hicks supported a waiver not only because of Mattis's superb command of the issues and avowed support for the tenets of civilian control but because she assessed "the state of U.S. civil-military relations to be strong enough to withstand any risk such a once-in-two-generations exception, on its own, could pose."[23]

Some dismissed the need for the rule altogether. Mackubin Owens contended that "Mattis as secretary of defense is no more a threat to civilian control than Dwight Eisenhower as president." He noted that during Mattis's tenure as commander of CENTCOM, "none of the symptoms of unhealthy civil-military relations, such as those that characterized the tenure of Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense, manifested themselves." For instance, "there were no leaks to the press over policy disagreements and no reports of 'slow rolling' or 'foot dragging' in Mattis's implementation of the president's policy," despite tensions that would ultimately result in Mattis's premature relief.[24]

Kori Schake argued that Mattis would be "a superb Secretary of Defense" and pointed to survey research finding that "the public does not share experts' concerns about retired military officers endorsing political candidates or speaking at political conventions, because the public has outsourced its expertise to the military itself."[25] Similarly, Rosa Brooks contended that "in America today, the notion of civilian control of the military has become unmoored from its original purpose." Instead, it has "become a rule of aesthetics, not ethics, and its invocation is a soothing ritual that makes us feel better, without accomplishing anything of value."[26]

Within the larger debate, there was also one over sheer professional competence. Some argued that a lifetime in uniform does little to prepare people for the inherently political tasks of running massive organizations, while others argued that retired generals are in fact uniquely suited for those tasks.

Joan Johnson-Freese wondered "whether [retired generals] are bringing the right job skills and cultural dispositions to their positions." She added, "Nobody argues that retired ambassadors, because they have demonstrated career achievement should, on retirement, be hired by the military, given a few stars and perhaps act as a Service Chief or the Joint Chief of Staff [*sic*]."[27] Charlie Stevenson observed, "There is a concern that someone who has been a general all their adult [life] doesn't really understand civilian life." Specifically, "the secretary of defense has to deal with domestic businesses, has to recruit people from the civilian job sector. If he is just used to commanding[,] he might not be used to commanding civilian society."[28]

Erin Simpson expressed personal admiration for Mattis but opposed his nomination on the grounds that "warfighters rarely make good bureaucrats. The Pentagon is one of the world's largest bureaucracies, and Mattis has shown little patience for management and administration." Moreover, "Budgets, white papers, and service rivalries, not to mention the

interagency meetings and White House meddling—these tasks are not what you go to Jim Mattis for."[29]

Gen John Allen, USMC, retired, offered a mixed view of a potential Petraeus selection. Echoing Harry Truman's assessment of a possible Dwight Eisenhower presidency, Allen observed, "The State Department bureaucracy is not really efficient—it doesn't snap and pop the way bureaucracies do in the military."[30] Further, "It doesn't work in a hierarchical way. . . . He's going to recognize that he's never going to get a diplomat to tell him something in 10 words that can be said in 14 minutes."[31] Despite his worries about the difficulty of transitioning from the military hierarchy to a civilian agency, Allen was intrigued by the idea. "We're in a damn dangerous world now," he stated. "For Trump to reach out to some of the finest military minds we've ever had—who have led very large, globally-oriented organizations—I don't think that's a bad thing."[32]

There were plenty of other defenders of placing retired four-stars in these roles. Bing West argued, "Our country is fighting a long war. It's common sense to seek the experience of those who have proven they know how to fight."[33] Peter Roberts was even more enthusiastic, gushing, "Mattis, Petraeus, Keane, Kelly and McChrystal radically altered the way that the US dealt with challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan, turning failing campaigns into a semblance of victory." He added, "It is this type of leader, capable of making decisions and implementing unpleasant policies in high-pressure environments, that marks out generals and admirals as extremely useful government partners."[34]

Dunlap, the author of a seminal 1992 article on the dangers of militarizing domestic politics, also expressed support. He viewed Mattis as "gifted with the kind of authentic charisma that few people of any generation enjoy . . . [,] engender[ing] a confidence in his leadership that I've never seen equaled."[35] Further, Dunlap challenged the very premise of the critiques, contending that "it would have never occurred to the Founding Fathers to oppose a retired officer holding a political office of any sort. Quite the opposite, as most had such service themselves and those who did not regretted their failure to serve." He endorsed the public perception that "retired generals, by and large, have a considerable set of leadership and organizational skills, not to mention a work ethic, which would be valued by any large organization, including the government."[36]

Concerns of Politicization of the Military

A related fear was that placing retired generals in these roles would encourage active duty officers to shade their military advice to policy mak-

ers, whether to curry favor to remain viable for postretirement appointments or because policy makers would more thoroughly vet the brass for political alignment.

While allowing that Mattis was her preferred option among the names being floated and was "not especially worried about how Mattis the man will handle the job," Alice Hunt Friend was nonetheless "worried about how the military as an institution will respond and what comes after Mattis." She was concerned not only about service parochialism that led to the cooling off period being included in the law but also about the military becoming "associated with one party over the other, robbing the profession of its historic political impartiality." Relatedly, "active-duty officers may begin to view political appointments as natural addenda to their careers—rather than the rarity it is now—encouraging partisan ambitions prior to retirement."[37] Hicks was in agreement. Just as routinely appointing senior retired officers would discourage civilians from pursuing careers in defense, "it would risk furthering incentives for active-duty officers to politicize their speech and/or actions and for civilians to seek to ascertain the political viewpoints of officers as part of the recruitment and hiring process for political positions."[38]

Still, others were skeptical. Brooks noted that "today's US military has elaborate internal checks and balances and a deeply ingrained respect for democracy and the rule of law. It's difficult to imagine any active-duty general or group of officers, no matter how popular, persuading the troops to ignore or overturn the results of an election or a properly passed law." She added, "That's even truer for retired military officers. Technically, they are civilians. They can still give orders if they want to, but even the lowliest private is free to tell a retired general to take a hike, subject only to the constraints of courtesy."[39]

Hope of Restraining Trump

Regardless of their views of the wisdom of having a recently retired general run the Pentagon or a plethora of former senior generals in high posts, many were optimistic that these individuals would be able to rein in an improbable president who had demonstrated during the campaign a lack of discipline and impatience with the norms of foreign policy making. Opinions ranged from relief that Trump would pick from this group rather than make more extreme choices to a belief that it was about time to turn policy making over to the most trusted leaders in the land.

Brooks declared that "a cabinet stocked with retired military officers is the least of my worries" compared to the alternatives, observing, "anyone

who thinks Rudy Giuliani would make a better secretary of state than David Petraeus needs to have their head examined."[40] While I was among those concerned about putting a general in charge of the Pentagon, at the same time, "I breathed a sigh of relief when General James Mattis was announced as Donald Trump's choice for defense secretary" given the likely alternatives, noting that Flynn was "already in place as national security adviser" and that "names like Rudy Giuliani, John Bolton and Newt Gingrich" were "being floated for key foreign policy posts."[41]

Lt Gen David Barno, USA, retired, and Sen. John McCain were similarly inclined. Barno observed that "most of these officers are relatively non-partisan, publicly endorsed no candidate during the campaign, and have lifelong records of public service leading large, complex organizations." He predicted that "they could bring a wealth of sober judgment and experience to a Trump foreign policy team in need of both."[42] A month into the administration, McCain, a frequent Trump critic, declared, "I could not imagine a better, more capable national security team than the one we have right now" when McMaster replaced Flynn.[43]

However, Simpson was unpersuaded, observing, "His Mattis-inspired about-face on waterboarding notwithstanding, I'm not convinced the president-elect will be able to manage a coterie of competing advisors, much less listen to them."[44]

Assessing the CMR Concerns

The next sections attempt to assess the above predictions in light of what actually transpired in the four years of Trump. Doing so is difficult, partly because the concerns and hopes are intertwined. Most notably, the very notion of retired generals restraining the elected commander in chief may well undermine the norms of civilian control and risk damaging the military's reputation for nonpartisan service. Still, while the separation is artificial, the predictions provide an organizing principle for the discussion.

Was US Foreign Policy Further Militarized?

A quick survey shows that Trump did have an unusual number of general officers, retired and otherwise, in key policy-making positions. The table below provides a snapshot of general and flag officers, retired or active, broken down by administration and post, in the period since the passage of the National Security Act of 1947, which began the modern era.

Table. General officers in key policy-making positions since 1947

President	Secretary of State	Secretary of Defense	NSC	WHCOS	DCI/DNI	DHS
Harry Truman	George Marshall (21 Jan 1947–20 Jan 1949	George Marshall (21 Sept 1950–12 Sept 1951)			Sidney Souers (23 Jan 1946–10 June 1946) Hoyt Vandenberg (10 June 1946–1 May 1947) Roscoe Hillenkoetter (1 May 1947–7 Oct 1950) Walter Smith (7 Oct 1950–20 Jan 1953)	
Dwight Eisenhower					Walter Smith (20 Jan 1953–9 Feb 1953)	
John Kennedy						
Lyndon Johnson					William Raborn (28 Apr 1965–30 June 1966)	
Richard Nixon				Alexander Haig (4 May 1973–9 Aug 1974)		
Gerald Ford			Brent Scowcroft (3 Nov 1975–20 Jan 1977)	Alexander Haig (9 Aug 1974–21 Sept 1974)		
Jimmy Carter					Stansfield Turner (9 Mar 1977–20 Jan 1981)	
Ronald Reagan	Alexander Haig (22 Jan 1981–5 July 1982)		John Poindexter (4 Dec 1985–25 Nov 1986) Colin Powell (23 Nov 1987–20 Jan 1989)			
George H. W. Bush			Brent Scowcroft (20 Jan 1989–20 Jan 1993)			
Bill Clinton						
George W. Bush	Colin Powell (20 Jan 2001–26 Jan 2005)				Mike McConnell (13 Feb 2007–27 Jan 2009)	
Barack Obama			James Jones (20 Jan 2009–8 Oct 2010)		Dennis Blair (29 Jan 2009–28 May 2010) James Clapper (5 Aug 2010–20 Jan 2017)	
Donald Trump		James Mattis (20 Jan 2017–1 Jan 2019)	Michael Flynn (20 Jan 2017–13 Feb 2017) H. R. McMaster (20 Feb 2017–9 Apr 2018)	John Kelly (31 July 2017–2 Jan 2019)		John Kelly (20 Jan 2017–31 July 2017)

The table includes only the most prominent roles: secretary of state, secretary of defense, national security advisor, White House chief of staff, director of central intelligence (DCI)/DNI, and secretary of homeland security. It excludes those who served only in an acting capacity. These criteria ignore retired officers like Gen Barry McCaffrey, USA, who served as President Bill Clinton's "drug czar"; Gen Eric Shinseki, USA, who served as veterans affairs secretary under President Barack Obama; and Anthony Zinni, who served as a special envoy on the Qatar crisis for Trump. Doing so keeps the focus on those in the most powerful posts. It also allows a reasonable consistency in comparison since most have existed since either the very beginning (state secretary, defense secretary, chief of staff, DCI) or very early (national security advisor) in the period in question. The sole exception is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), created in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. I have taken the liberty of consolidating the DCI and DNI positions, given that they perform the same ostensible function notwithstanding some key organizational differences.

Simply looking at the information in the table shows several things. First, senior officers have frequently served as DCI/DNI. For nearly three decades, ending with Stansfield Turner's tenure under the Carter administration, active duty three- and four-star officers were common in that billet. Moreover, three retired officers have served as DNI in its short history. Excluding the DCI/DNI slot, five administrations (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, and Clinton) had no general or flag officers (GOFO) in key posts, and three (Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Clinton) had none at all.[45] We went more than two decades with no GOFOs in a key billet between Marshall's tenure as SecDef and Haig's turn as White House chief of staff. Marshall (State and Defense), Haig (WHCOS and State), Powell (NSA and State), and Kelly (DHS and WHCOS) are the only GOFOs to fill multiple billets. Additionally, Scowcroft was NSA for two different presidents nonconsecutively.

So Trump was indeed unusual in beginning his term with three retired four-star generals in key national security posts; no other president had more than two. More unusually, none of them served as intelligence director. Did this lead to a militarization of policy?[46]

It certainly seemed so at the outset. Seven months into Trump's tenure, a *Washington Post* report began, "High-ranking military officials have become an increasingly ubiquitous presence in American political life during Donald Trump's presidency, repeatedly winning arguments inside the West Wing, publicly contradicting the president and even balking at implementing one of his most controversial policies."[47] It assessed that "gen-

erals manage Trump's hour-by-hour interactions and whisper in his ear—and those whispers, as with the decision this week to expand U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, often become policy."[48]

Friend and Hicks argued that "if Trump gives merely episodic presidential attention to defense matters, the military receives little strategic direction from the commander in chief." They added, "By largely delegating national security decisions to the Pentagon, while allowing the diplomacy, development, and trade elements of our toolkit to atrophy, the United States severely underplays its hand as a global power."[49] Anne Applebaum observed,

> A U.S. foreign policy run by military technocrats will have the same deep flaws as the governments run by economic technocrats that are sometimes installed in countries engulfed by economic crisis. A foreign policy, like an economic policy, can succeed only if it has political backing. Difficult decisions will be accepted by the public only if they have political legitimacy. Military decisions in particular should be part of a carefully thought-out strategy, one that has been cleared by Congress, debated in public and discussed not only in the Pentagon but also in the State Department and the other institutions, staffed by experts, that we have created for this purpose.[50]

While there were some early indications—such as the dropping of the so-called Mother of All Bombs on ISIS targets in Afghanistan weeks into his administration—that Trump's deference to theater commanders would lead to no-holds-barred military action at the expense of diplomacy, it is difficult to construct an argument that foreign policy became more militarized during his tenure.[51] Indeed, depending on one's definition, Trump is the first US president in quite some time not to send troops into a significant new conflict[52] and withdrew forces from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Somalia at a faster rate than his uniformed military advisors and civilian cabinet alike had counseled.[53] Indeed, the Syria decision was ostensibly the final straw for Mattis, prompting his resignation.[54]

At the same time, the State Department's influence and capacity declined under Trump, with its senior workforce intentionally gutted,[55] a hiring freeze, and the serious curtailment of hiring top-drawer entry-level talent through the Presidential Management Fellows program and similar avenues.[56] Furthermore, despite high hopes from some that he would curtail Trump's excesses, Rex Tillerson proved to be an abject disaster in his short tenure as secretary, alienating the president and his staff.[57]

Still, even though Pompeo's tenure was arguably even worse in terms of policy outcomes, he was ultimately the most powerful foreign policy ap-

pointee in the administration.[58] After serving as Trump's first CIA director, he spent nearly three years at Foggy Bottom, steering an aggressive foreign policy at odds with the elite consensus pushed by his predecessor and Mattis. Meanwhile, Mattis, Kelly, and McMaster were advocates for a much more traditional foreign policy. So too was Tillerson, even if he undermined it drastically by his misguided attempts at streamlining his department. They were, as will be discussed later, simply incapable of reining in a president with decidedly different instincts.

The evidence for generals in key posts leading to a militarized foreign policy in the administration is thin. Arguably, though, the fact that Pompeo—a West Point graduate who left the military after his first tour—succeeded at getting his preferred policy options enacted while they were not is evidence for the claim that former generals lack the necessary political skills. Then again, it may simply be that his preferences were either more aligned with Trump's or were more malleable than were those of the generals.

Was Civilian Control Diminished?

The ongoing trend of power shifting from the civilians in the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the brass accelerated during the Trump administration. It is, however, difficult to pin this on the choice of Mattis to lead the Pentagon.

Reacting to several instances in the first six months of the administration where Trump seemed to leave the decisions on significant military matters to Mattis and commanders in the field, Friend and Hicks declared it "an abrogation of our tradition of civilian control over the military." They argued that doing so endangered the "military's political neutrality and commitment to technical expertise free of partisan interests."[59] Months later, Andrew J. Bacevich claimed that Trump had "largely ceded decision-making on the conduct of America's wars to the very generals he derided while running for office."[60]

Further, there were an unusual number of incidences where uniformed leaders actively resisted tweeted "orders" from or issued statements directly contravening the commander in chief. In the early months, these included resistance from Mattis and the Joint Chiefs over Trump's directive to ban transgender individuals from military service and pushback against his statements seemingly siding with white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Here, having a recently retired Marine general clearly clouded the issue. It would be perfectly normal for a "regular" civilian SecDef to resist the president who appointed him on matters of policy pursuant to the best

military advice of the brass. But because Trump continued to call him "General Mattis" and continued to cultivate his "Mad Dog" persona, the distinction was blurred.

Carter noted that it "is significant and telling that the highest-ranking military officers—such as Gen Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the four chiefs of the armed services—did not file affidavits in support of the government in the transgender cases."[61] He defended these actions, contending that "military leaders have struck a posture that's not disloyal but still allows the ship of state to correct its course when steered in the wrong direction by an errant president." He added, "Call it *respectful disobedience* or *selective engagement* or *lawful resistance* or some other euphemism—but it's clear that military leaders have found a formula for saluting their commander in chief while keeping his worst excesses at bay."[62]

Here, having retired generals in prominent civilian roles arguably played a factor. As Carter put it, the uniformed leaders were "probably aided by a secretary of defense and White House chief of staff who have literally worn their shoes. Jim Mattis and John Kelly may not be able to moderate the president's worst statements or most egregious tweets, but they almost certainly provide cover for senior military leaders behind closed doors, where they can explain to the president why the generals are behaving a certain way."[63] Beyond that, while impossible to assess at this juncture, it's more than reasonable to assume that Mattis's relationship with Dunford, who had been his subordinate in the Marines, contributed to this impulse.[64]

Lara Seligman reported in late 2018 that "frustrated by lack of influence and disheartened by U.S. President Donald Trump's rhetoric, Department of Defense civilians are heading for the door, leaving key positions unfilled in a Pentagon increasingly run by active-duty or retired military officers." Moreover, "interviews with a dozen current and former Department of Defense civilians reveal an increasingly hollow and demoralized workforce, with staffers feeling they no longer have a seat at the table."[65] According to one anonymous former official, civilian oversight of the military "was already weakening in the last administration, and I think it basically fell off a cliff."[66]

Writing the day after Mattis resigned in protest over his inability to restrain Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from Syria,[67] Schake praised the "quiet integrity" with which Mattis had done his job in the face of "gale-force political winds." She stated, "The president of the United States has transgressed civil-military norms frequently—treating speeches to troops as campaign rallies, using military titles for civilian appointees to

give the appearance of military support for him personally and for his policies."[68] In particular, she found it "shocking" when Trump signed his travel ban in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon early in the administration, which she saw as a "trap" he had sprung on Mattis and other senior leaders.[69] Tom Nichols likewise blamed Trump for the state of affairs, declaring that "the president has taken a dangerous path, excoriating retired military leaders who criticize him and lavishing praise and make-believe pay raises on the active-duty military voters who he believes support him."[70]

Jim Golby was less forgiving. He cut to the chase by observing, correctly in my view, "Jim Mattis may have become a civilian political appointee, but he never stopped being a marine." Acknowledging that Trump often placed him in impossible situations, he gave the former secretary credit for having "avoided a true civil-military catastrophe" and going "two years without a major national security crisis." In the end, though, he assessed that Mattis's tenure "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."[71] While seemingly damning, none of these trends was reversed in the second half of the Trump administration when civilians were at the helm of the Pentagon.

Writing in September 2019, nine months after Mattis vacated the post but just two months into Mark Esper's formal tenure as secretary, Schulman, Friend, and Mara Karlin welcomed the return of a Senate-confirmed civilian to the role after months of acting officials and lauded statements by Esper that he would seek to fill civilian posts that had been long vacant.[72] Indeed, this was a clear failing under Mattis, although not one entirely of his making. His staffing was dominated by the likes of Craig Faller, an active duty rear admiral who was his senior military advisor, and Kevin Sweeney, a retired two-star admiral who was his chief of staff, both of whom had worked for him at CENTCOM.[73] But while this staffing issue was partly a function of leaders naturally wanting to surround themselves with trusted advisors, it was mostly a function of one of the problems that led Trump to select so many generals for his cabinet. Many Republican foreign policy professionals had disqualified themselves from serving by signing Never Trump letters or otherwise declaring the now-president unfit for office.[74] Additionally, Mattis was reportedly rebuffed when he tried to make Michèle Flournoy, who had served as under secretary of defense for policy under the Obama administration, his deputy secretary.[75]

Regardless, Schulman, Friend, and Karlin asserted, "Civilian control is a process, not simply a person. And out of sight of most Americans, civilians are losing control over key processes that manage war plans, deployment decisions, and the programs that determine what kind of military the U.S. builds for the future." Further, "over the last several years, formal engagements for civilian review of war plans have been cut back, with significantly less secretary-level oversight."[76] They especially lamented the chairman having assumed the roles as the "global integrator" of war plans, which they argued "can impute to the military the kind of strategic, diplomatic, and political context that civilians traditionally provide."[77] While they are by no means alone in this concern (indeed, I share it), this development didn't happen on Mattis's relatively brief watch and predates Trump's tenure.[78] It was what was left from the failed Goldwater-Nichols 2.0 initiative that survived into the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act signed into law in the last days of the Obama administration.[79]

Still, Dunford, who had pushed for this new role, was the first to exercise this power. Again, while it is impossible to know for sure, it is perfectly reasonable to wonder whether he would have received more pushback from a secretary who had come up as a Pentagon civilian and with whom he did not have a long-standing personal friendship. In any case, Dunford is now the template for the global integrator role, and it will be more difficult for new defense secretary Lloyd Austin to claw back the power if he is so inclined.

Regardless, the tensions over civilian control continued once Mattis departed. Indeed, they arguably intensified. In the wake of a series of standoffs in spring 2020, including the firing of tear gas to disperse peaceful protestors, Esper and Army general Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs—in his combat fatigues—marched by Trump's side so that Trump could stage a photo opportunity at a church. Adding to this turmoil were a series of statements and policy letters from Esper, each of the Joint Chiefs, Mattis, and several retired four-stars critical of militarized responses to demonstrations and the handling of other crises. Karlin summed up the situation: "If this isn't a civil-military relations crisis, I don't know what is."[80] But, as I argued at the time, these statements were consistent with their roles. Specifically, "to the extent any of these statements are seen as political, let alone partisan, it says a lot about our state of affairs and should cause us great shame as a nation. But they're not only consistent with the values of the Constitution, federal law, and the Uniformed Code of Military Justice but it would be unconscionable for men who lead so many African-American service members to not get out in front of this issue."[81]

In terms of the balance of power between the uniformed military and civilian policy makers shifting in favor of the former during the Trump administration, it was both a continuation of preexisting trends and a clash between the values of the military profession and the actions of a highly unusual president. While Mattis's relationship with Dunford and being steeped in those same values might reasonably have been expected to reinforce that tension, we see that it continued, even escalated, under Esper's tenure. The key variable, then, was Trump, not whether the SecDef was a "true" civilian.

It is too soon to fully assess other predictions in this ambit, but we have some early clues. The long-standing norm, enshrined in law since 1947, of the SecDef being a "true" civilian seems to have been discarded. Logically, Mattis's confirmation as SecDef made it easier for Austin to be nominated and confirmed, although the direct evidence is mixed. Mattis's waiver was approved 268–151 by the House and 81–17 by the Senate in 2017.[82] Four years later, the House voted 326–78 and the Senate 69–27 for Austin's appointment.[83] Granting that two elections had altered the membership of both bodies, that is an increase of 58 votes in the House but a decrease of 12 in the Senate. There are a variety of possible explanations for that, including the fact that so many Democrats, particularly in the Senate, had been so adamantly opposed to the Mattis waiver and insisted that it be a one-time measure.[84] Still, the margins in both cases were overwhelming, lending credence to those who argued that the norm no longer reflected a consensus.

Whether the de facto eligibility of retired generals and admirals to serve as SecDef will lead to them being routinely appointed remains to be seen. But the circumstances that led to Mattis and Austin being chosen were unique. Trump seemed to have something of a fetish for generals, particularly those with outsized reputations for machismo, and had been renounced by much of his party's national security establishment. He had relatively few options. Biden had been widely expected to make Flournoy the first woman SecDef. For whatever reason, he did not. But he was under enormous pressure to appoint a Black person to the post, and as Bishop Garrison ably demonstrated, that radically narrowed the available talent pool because so few Blacks serve as senators, governors, or Fortune 500 CEOs.[85] Additionally, Biden had worked with Austin before and was especially impressed by him.[86]

Still, while Hicks, by virtue of her appointment as Austin's deputy, has likely supplanted Flournoy as the most likely candidate to be the first woman SecDef, it would certainly shock no one if retired admiral

Michelle Howard, who served on Biden's transition team and has subsequently been appointed by Austin to a prestigious commission, added that post to her list of firsts. It is hard to imagine that she would face serious opposition in Congress.

Similarly, it is too early to know whether having two retired generals in short order appointed to the top Pentagon post will deter civilians from service there. Certainly, though, Biden has had no difficulty attracting top talent to the department.

Was the Military Further Politicized?

Within days of taking office, Trump committed several transgressions against the norms of CMR, often with Mattis or Kelly standing idly by. Critic Andrew Exum explained, "Whether it is the Memorial Wall at the C.I.A., or the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon, he is using institutions that have previously been walled off from politics to generate political support for some of his more contentious policies."[87] Trump opened his remarks to military personnel at MacDill Air Force Base by implying that most there had voted for him.[88] Richard H. Kohn argued that Trump went too far: "Leading off with the election, attacking the press and talking about endorsements is a clear attempt to politicize the military and invite their partisanship. In rhetoric and style, his words mimicked a campaign rally."[89]

Jason Dempsey and Amy Shafer suggested that the cabinet generals amplified these transgressions. In ther view, "Kelly and Mattis hold[ing] political roles so recently after stepping out of uniform place[d] the military in a particularly influential position within the Trump administration, and, accordingly, [put] its reputation and role in American politics and society at great risk."[90] They also indicated that Trump's "comments may tie the military's reputation very closely to that of his administration—with potentially negative consequences for continued bipartisan support for the armed forces."[91]

Despite much uproar and pushback from Mattis and Kelly, the pattern continued. In July 2017, Trump urged Sailors attending the commissioning of the USS *Gerald R. Ford* to wade into domestic politics, stating, "I don't mind getting a little hand, so call that congressman and call that senator and make sure you get it" [referring to passing his defense budget]. He added, "And by the way, you can also call those senators to make sure you get health care." Carter rightly termed this "a serious breach of presidential norms," noting that "this could have been interpreted as an order from the commander in chief to the service members in attendance to support the Republican Party agenda."[92]

As both an active duty officer and one who had not previously held military posts of the prominence that Mattis and Kelly had, McMaster was in a particularly weak position. His prestige as a combat leader was frequently leveraged by the president for partisan political aims. Daniel Kurtz-Phalen was blistering in his critique of the situation, stating that "McMaster was sent to undercut stories about Trump's disclosure of Israeli intelligence to the Russian foreign minister—only to be contradicted the next day by Trump himself." Further, "in exchange for destroying his reputation, McMaster is not earning Trump's gratitude for being so supine, according to recent reports, but Trump's ire for not being supine enough."[93]

But, as with Mattis, not everyone put the blame on Trump's shoulders. Jeet Heer stated, "If McMaster is willing to trade his good name for a chance to whisper in Trump's ear, he's no different than Jared Kushner, Steve Bannon, Paul Ryan, or any of the other courtiers bending the knee before Trump." Twisting the knife further, he continued, "As always, Trump is a clarifying figure: in this case, disabusing us of the myth of the American military as non-ideological Svengalis. McMaster, by this light, isn't sullying his reputation or that of the military. Rather, he's showing his true colors."[94]

Thomas Ricks agreed, asserting, "I don't see McMaster improving Trump. Rather, what I have seen so far is Trump degrading McMaster."[95] Additionally, McMaster co-authored an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* with Gary Cohn, director of Trump's National Economic Council, critiquing the policies of the Obama administration. It declared, "This administration will restore confidence in American leadership as we serve the American people."[96] Consequently, Kimberly Dozier and Noah Shachtman reported, "A growing cadre of former military officers who served with . . . McMaster are quietly calling for him to retire from service, worried the embattled Trump administration is tarnishing the U.S. military's reputation by deploying their own personal three-star general as a political shield."[97]

Beyond that, while many of these incidents had Trump in a leading role, some of the retired generals harmed their reputations as nonpartisan servants on their own. In his tenure at Homeland Security, Kelly was a strong champion of the travel ban, border wall, and other controversial policies.[98] As White House chief of staff, he told reporters that veterans feel "a little bit sorry" for civilians who hadn't "experienced the wonderful joy you get in your heart" from national service.[99] Of course, Kelly was making those statements years earlier while still in uniform. In a December 2010 speech, he told a crowd of former Marines and local business people, "If anyone thinks you can somehow thank them for their service

and not support the cause for which they fight—our country—these people are lying to themselves. . . . More important, they are slighting our warriors and mocking their commitment to this nation."[100]

Trump had a unique talent for putting officials who are supposed to be apart from partisan politics in awkward positions implying their endorsement of his policies. This was by no means limited to active or retired military personnel. Combining Justice Amy Coney Barrett's swearing-in ceremony and a campaign rally was an especially egregious example.[101] Thus, I tend to blame him more than Mattis, Kelly, and McMaster for these incidents. But their very presence lent the prestige of their service to Trump's cause. Still, these incidents did not stop under Esper. Indeed, as previously discussed, the level of crisis escalated.

Once again, the longer-term predictions are difficult to assess. But there is little evidence that senior military officers have become any more prone to shade their advice to please their political masters or position themselves for postretirement appointments. Indeed, as previously noted, the opposite seemed to occur, as the chairman and the service chiefs pushed back time after time against not only Trump's attempts to politicize them but also policies they deemed damaging to good order and discipline.

The exceedingly modest possibility of being chosen to be SecDef one day is unlikely to modify behavior given how much serendipity is involved. The prospect of a Trump presidency would have seemed absurd when Mattis took over CENTCOM in 2010. And his outsized persona, which attracted Trump to him, would almost surely have alienated him from just about any other president. Similarly, a Biden presidency was a long shot in 2013 when Austin succeeded Mattis.

Was Trump Restrained?

Simpson was quite prescient when she expressed doubt that Trump "will be able to manage a coterie of competing advisors, much less listen to them."[102] In the end, neither Mattis nor any of the other generals had much success in reining in Trump's excesses. Then again, neither did any of the civilians, including his own family.

At the outset, though, the theory had promise. Less than three months into Trump's term, Kimberly Dozier popularized the term "Axis of Adults" to describe "a new band in town that's guiding national security by quietly tutoring the most powerful man in America." She applied it especially to Mattis, Kelly (then still at DHS), and McMaster but also included Mike Pompeo (then still at CIA) and, importantly, then-secretary of state Rex Tillerson, who had no military experience.[103] She attributed the coinage

to former Obama staffer Colin Kahl, who used it in a Twitter thread a month earlier.[104] Around the same time Eric Fehrnstrom declared, "Thank God for the generals," observing that "in an administration riven by staff bickering and internal disputes, President Trump's senior military appointees are taking a leading role and acting as a restraining influence."[105]

Senator Blumenthal declared Mattis, Kelly, and McMaster "standouts of dependability in the face of rash and impulsive conduct," adding that "there certainly has been a feeling among many of my colleagues that they are a steadying hand on the rudder and provide a sense of consistency and rationality in an otherwise zigzagging White House."[106] His colleague Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) agreed, stating that "I for one am glad they're there—because they're thoughtful . . . because they're lawful and because they're rational." Yet he recognized the tradeoffs. Schatz asserted, "I feel like the concern about the need to maintain civilian oversight of the military is a totally legitimate one, but that concern should be addressed at a later time. In the meantime, we should be reassured that there are competent professionals there who want to make smart choices."[107] Along these lines, Kurtz-Phelan argued in May 2017, "If we make it through 2020 without a civilization-threatening international calamity, a decent share of the credit will go to the men Donald Trump likes to call 'my generals.'"[108]

Even small returns to the norm, such as McMaster removing Trump domestic policy advisor Steve Bannon from the official NSC roster, were a sign the "adults" were winning. An anonymous senior administration official declared, "H. R. has been a steadying force." Another stated, "There is now an efficient process to debate ideas, put them before the president and come to fairly swift decisions—a contrast to the chaos NSC staffers described in the early weeks under now-resigned National Security Advisor Mike Flynn."[109]

In August 2017, Jonathan Capehart wrote a column declaring that "in a wild twist that only Trump could pull off, the generals surrounding the president are the ones protecting our democracy—from him." He cited in particular Mattis's refusal to treat Trump's Twitter announcement banning transgender troops from the military as an order. That this came a day after JCS chairman Gen Joseph Dunford's declaration that all senior leaders would continue to "treat all of our personnel with respect" did not seem to bother Trump in the least.[110]

Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay note that the early restraining influences went beyond countering the president's excesses on Twitter to Trump being talked out of unconventional foreign policy choices. In par-

ticular, "when Syria launched chemical weapons attacks against rebels in April 2017, the Trump White House followed a textbook process in determining whether and how to retaliate," and "Trump's decision four months later to send additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan reinforced the belief that his advisers held the reins. They further observe that "Trump seemingly admitted as much when he announced the troop increase, saying, 'My original instinct was to pull out—and, historically, I like following my gut.' He had changed his mind because of meetings with 'my Cabinet and generals.'"[111]

But, quite naturally, having his instincts constantly challenged frustrated Trump. According to Daalder and Lindsay, "The Afghan troop increase came only after Trump railed at his generals for wanting to do more in Afghanistan, leaving Mattis visibly upset after one meeting." In fact, Mattis, "worried by Trump's poor grasp of global politics, . . . held a now-famous briefing for the president in July 2017 on why America played an outsized role in the world. With charts and maps, the briefers patiently explained how alliances and trade deals actually benefited the United States. Trump's response was short and to the point: 'This is exactly what I don't want.'"[112]

The ability to restrain was quite short-lived. Tillerson was fired via Twitter in March 2018 after 13 months of bitter struggles with Trump.[113] McMaster was forced into retirement later that month, "a victim of his hawkish stances on Afghanistan and Syria and for saying publicly that the evidence of Russian interference in the 2016 election was 'incontrovertible.'"[114] Mattis and Kelly both made it to December before resigning in frustration.

In a phone interview just after he submitted his resignation, "Kelly defended his rocky tenure, arguing that it is best measured by what the president did not do when Kelly was at his side." In particular, he claimed that he had held back "pullout of all U.S. troops from Syria and half the 14,000 troops from Afghanistan," both of which Trump announced immediately after Kelly's departure. Further, his supporters credited him with "persuading Trump not to pull U.S. forces out of South Korea, or withdraw from NATO, as he had threatened."[115]

The fact that McMaster was fired and Mattis and Kelly resigned in protest points to the limits of their ability to restrain Trump. Their military prestige likely gave them more sway than Tillerson had early on, but it only went so far; indeed, Trump would pillory them all once they departed.

Further, to the extent he was persuadable on foreign policy matters, Pompeo and Esper were just as effective as the retired generals. After the

abrupt withdrawal from Syria backfired, Trump allowed a significant reversal of the policy.[116] Similarly, they successfully slowed his attempts to pull troops out of Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and elsewhere.[117] And, of course, America remains in NATO and South Korea. The constants were an ability to form a personal relationship with Trump and persuade him that their advice was in his best political interests, neither of which the generals were able to do.

Conclusions

While Trump's tenure provided a natural experiment, constantly testing the norms of CMR, it was arguably sui generis. Notwithstanding the Austin appointment, Biden appears at this early juncture to be a return to a "normal" presidency and consequently will likely have fewer blatant challenges of the relationship.

In the short term, at least, the assessment of Hicks, Brooks, and others that the norms of US civil-military relations were strongly embedded in military culture proved correct. Despite enormous pressures from their commander in chief to become involved in partisan politics, they ultimately held fast to their oath to the Constitution. Despite coming too close for comfort to the first failure in American history to peacefully transition power after an election, we never had to test whether the American military would follow an illegal order from the president to keep him in office or declare him a "domestic enemy" and force him out of office.[118] However, the suggestion it would ever come to that is absurd because our institutions are mature, with multiple safeguards built in.[119] Despite enormous political pressure, state and local election officials, the judiciary, and Congress thwarted attempts to overturn the election results, rendering military interference unnecessary.

Yet there remains reason for concern for the future. That questions like "Should a lack of military experience disqualify someone from senior leadership roles at the Department of Defense?" and "Should the secretary of defense be required to have served in the military?" are being seriously entertained at this juncture demonstrates how far the debate has swung.[120] This is not a function of Trump's presidency but of the fact that, as Schake put it, the "public has outsourced its expertise to the military itself."[121] Further, the easy congressional votes on the Mattis and Austin waivers and the fact that so few military leaders understand why one is required to begin with are informative. These circumstances strongly suggest that almost half a century of an all-volunteer force and a large standing military

for eight decades have eroded our understanding of why these original concerns about civilian control existed in the first place.[122] SSQ

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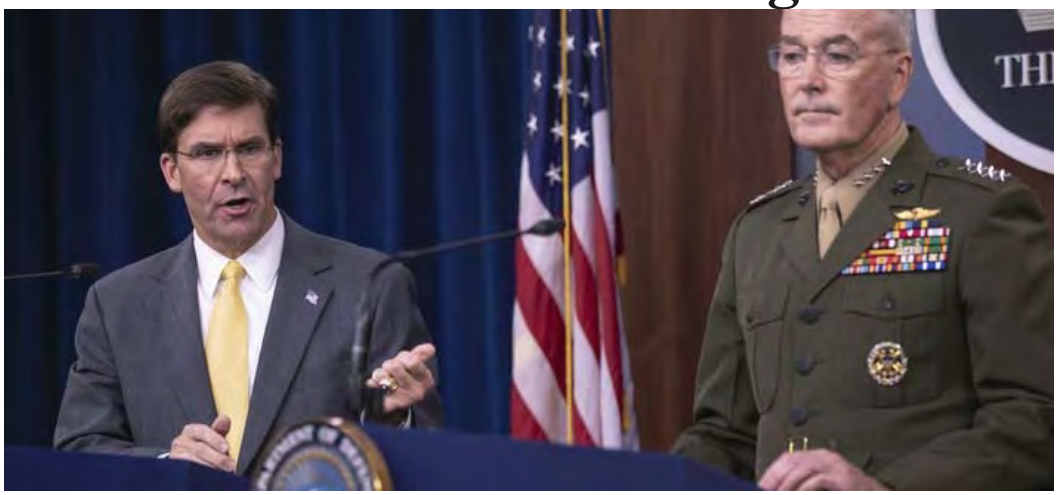
While civil-military relations focuses largely on the interactions of the President, White House, and Congress with the senior military leadership, a great deal goes on across the military establishment with political appointees at top levels in the Pentagon, as well as elsewhere. The extent to which civilian control of the military affects policy, planning, decision-making, and other critical activities of the armed forces, depends often on civilians at levels that often escape notice or comment in the defense community. In this essay, three experienced and knowledgeable observers believe civilian control has weakened inside the Pentagon, the product of vacancies in key positions and increased influence of military staffs. Is this a legitimate worry? Are there downsides to a diminished civilian perspective in these key defense areas?

https://www.defenseone.com/voices/mara-e-karlin/13220/?oref=d-article-author

Two Cheers for Esper's Plan to Reassert Civilian Control of the Pentagon



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One might believe that leaving more decisions to uniformed experts would depoliticize policy. The opposite is true.

Updated with a response from a spokesman for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and a response from the authors.

The longest-ever gap in civilian leadership atop the Department of Defense came to an end on July 23, when Mark Esper was sworn in as secretary of defense. His presence in the chain of command, second to Trump, may seem enough to ensure civilian control of the Armed Forces. But the implementation of this American tenet is more complex. Civilian control is a process, not simply a person. And out of sight of most Americans, civilians are losing control over key processes that manage war plans, deployment decisions, and the programs that determine what kind of military the U.S. builds for the future.

Many see no problem with this tilt toward military management of the department. The U.S. military is one of the most-respected government institutions, its technical and operational expertise seemingly unrivaled. It can seem counterintuitive for civilians to manage key decisions of war planning, conflict, and building the future military. But even those who urge civilian deference to military expertise know strategist Carl von Clausewitz's observation that "war is the continuation of politics by other means." Statute, and history too, have determined that America is better served when politicians shape the nation's approach to its defense, even though it is messy, difficult, and naturally infused with tension.

This balance between civilian and military influence over defense policy shifts frequently. But last year, the bipartisan, congressionally mandated National Defense Strategy Commission warned that "civilian voices have been relatively muted on issues at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy." We three authors have all advised defense secretaries on these areas — one of us also worked on the Commission — and we fear that these recent changes privilege military perspectives with consequences for democratic control of the armed forces. Disrupting this balance is not simply a matter of law or scholarship. It upends comparative advantages that servicemembers and civilians can bring to bear on complex security challenges, and it deeply increases the risk of politicizing the military.

Secretary Esper seems attuned to the general problem. During his Senate confirmation hearing, he told Chairman Inhofe and Senator Shaheen that he intended to fill extended vacancies in key civilian roles. He pledged to work closely with the Congress on budgetary matters to ensure that defense resources are in line with national interests and priorities. And during a recent press conference, he asserted the importance of civilian control over the military. We applaud his approach so far. And we urge him to do more.

Digging into the war plans should be at the top of Esper's to-do list. Title 10 instructs the secretary of defense to provide military planners with up-front policy guidance for war planning and then to periodically review those plans, ultimately approving of or rejecting the final product. In his own confirmation hearing, William Perry said his top priority would be "reviewing and assessing war plans and deployment orders." As the 19th defense secretary understood, these issues are rife with high-stakes, political-military consequences and require critical oversight by civilians. Concerns about the faithful execution of the law in recent years has led to language in the annual Defense authorization bills re-emphasizing the importance of civilian oversight of war planning and reviews.

Over the last several years, formal engagements for civilian review of war plans have been cut back, with significantly less secretary-level oversight. Guidance to the Joint Staff also eliminated several of the secretary's in-progress reviews, a key component of civilian control over the planning process. Instead, planning revisions and the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have evolved to become more symbiotic. The Chairman now serves as the "global integrator" of war plans requiring a global view of the potential crisis. Such practice, though conceptually attractive, can impute to the military the kind of strategic, diplomatic, and political context that civilians traditionally provide.

Civilian oversight and input of war plans is not only an expectation of Congress, but a logical division of labor. War-planning is an inherently political endeavor, reliant on not only the operational options the military uniquely provides, but also the domestic and geopolitical choices embedded in deterrence, escalation management, and acceptable costs and risks. Moreover, civilians have shown that when offered war plans that ignore political-military interests, they will develop their own options that poorly consider military capacities. Esper can reassert civilian oversight of this process immediately by restarting planning reviews.

Title 10 also gives authority to the defense secretary to direct the deployment of the U.S. military. How, where, and in what ways the military operates plays a crucial role in shaping and setting the global security environment in line with U.S. national security priorities. The secretary generally offers long-term guidance on the regular allocation of forces and provides specific approval for crisis deployments, with inputs from his civilian and military staff. But under the "global integrator" approach, this practice has shifted to enable the Chairman to make his own tradeoffs of forces against global needs and threats below a particular threshold. On the margins, such changes are not a catastrophic release of civilian control, and a compelling case can be made that time sensitive or low-impact decisions of small numbers of forces do not merit the secretary's attention. But cumulatively and over the course of many secretary-chairman relationships, this arrangement may erode the secretary's power over military activities. As the National Defense Strategy Commission asserted, "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."

Secretary Esper should review at length the delegation authority given to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in deploying forces, adjusting the number, type, and purpose for which he feels comfortable signing away his Title 10 authority. As importantly, he should involve the defense undersecretary for policy in shaping these decisions.

Finally, Title 10 also requires the defense secretary to direct the "goals, priorities, and objectives" for building the future U.S. military. He is responsible for managing more employees than Walmart and leading an institution whose annual budget is more than three times larger than ExxonMobil. In doing so, the secretary must consider how best to spend the hundreds of billions of dollars requested of the Congress to ensure the military has a force that appropriately balances among capability, capacity, and readiness to ensure it can win future wars. This requires not only broader political context, but also choosing winners and losers across the military services.

In 2018, Secretary Mattis released a blunt defense strategy that refocused the military away from fighting terrorists and wrestling with Middle East conflicts toward competing with China and Russia. Yet the strategy faces real challenges in its implementation. From near-term crises with Iran to competing strategies that offer alternate priorities, there is no shortage of distractions in time, attention, and resources.

Esper will need to ensure that his priorities drive the military's priorities in guiding the future force's shape and purpose, not the reverse. Implementing the National Defense Strategy will only occur through his vigilant supervision and willingness to take risk in those areas where the military will be reluctant. It is not easy for a generation of military leaders who have grown up fighting wars in the Middle East to deprioritize the region. Nor is it simple for the defense institution to give up long-standing assumptions on force structure. But Esper has to be the one to calculate the political and policy risks on these sensitive issues, which can give the military the space needed to generate the innovative operational concepts only it can build.

Perhaps it is tempting to believe that if the military assumes one or more of these political decisions, the questions will lose political relevance and therefore can be answered in a purely technocratic way. And here is an area where Esper's instincts may be failing him. At the end of August, he declared that he will keep DoD out of politics, in part, by acting "in an apolitical way" himself. Perversely, this is much more likely to lead to the politicization of the military. Military officers will be used by political leaders for their own ends; senior leaders will be promoted based less on their service branch's institutional interests and more on domestic political considerations. The defense secretary and his staff serve as a crucial buffer between the military and the political whims precisely by being the ones to engage in politics on behalf of the Department. Esper should not dodge these bullets; he should take them so the military does not have to.

Esper should take a zero-tolerance approach to politicization of the military. And he should strengthen the technocratic bulk of the civil service to ensure that he and his successors have a professional class who can support him in these crucial roles.

To be clear, the goal is not civilian micromanagement. The Founders and their successors determined a division of labor between civilian and military servants that maximizes their comparative advantages while also demanding frustrating but productive friction. But in the end, that division is designed to favor the judgment of elected politicians. For Esper to shift power back toward civilian officials while demanding excellence from both elements of his staff in these three processes—planning, force allocation, and sizing and shaping the military—is not only by the book, it's a democratic outcome.

Defense One received a response to this piece from Col. Patrick S. Ryder, USAF, Special Assistant for Public Affairs to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

Your Sept. 9 op-ed titled 'Two Cheers for Esper's Plan to Reassert Civilian Control of the Pentagon', while properly highlighting the constitutional importance of civilian control of the military, inaccurately characterizes the role and authorities of the Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff. Everything the Chairman and the Joint Staff do is done under the principles of civilian control of the military. To be clear, no Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine deploys anywhere worldwide without oversight from the Secretary of Defense and input from DoD civilian policymakers. Contrary to the authors' assertions, the Chairman exercises no operational control over any U.S. military forces and his duties as global integrator are purely advisory in nature in accordance with Title 10 and his role as principal military advisor to the President and Secretary of Defense. In fact, rather than eroding civilian control of the military as the authors suggest, the Joint Staff's global integration efforts are all focused on enhancing the ability of the Secretary and DoD civilian policymakers to make globally informed decisions as they lead the Department of Defense.

The authors respond:

We appreciate the enthusiastic and thoughtful response that this piece has generated across the defense community. Civilian control of the military remains a strongly held principle among defense practitioners. We also welcome the spokesman's serious engagement with the piece. But we believe some of his assertions are flawed. First, the piece makes no claims about changes in operational control, but about deployment and posture decisions. Second, we do not argue that civilian control has evaporated, but that it is weakening significantly, as demonstrated by the trends in important DoD processes we describe and supported by a wide range of defense community members from across the political spectrum. Principle may exist without the processes to support it; without those, principle is an aspiration rather than a practice. Everyone in the defense community is familiar with Huntington's work on civil-military relations; however, Huntington made a later argument that "structural decisions" such as the ones we highlight often have constraining effects on strategic matters in defense policy. It is this slow reduction in civilian control over structural defense matters that we call attention to in our piece.

We welcome further engagement with the Joint Staff and other interested parties on these issues.

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A change in presidential administration always requires something of a reset in civil-military relations at the top of the government, just as changes in the makeup of Congress, particularly of the armed services and appropriations committees, can require the armed services to adjust to new civilian bosses and perhaps different policies and focuses. The changes in the wake of the 2020 election make for a significantly different civil-military relations environment: not only people, but policies, procedures, and priorities. This article compares and contrasts the Trump administration and the expectations as of January 1 of what the incoming Biden administration will look like. It might be helpful to make a list of what's likely to change and what's likely to remain the same, or similar. Using your own list, how should the armed forces adjust to the new administration?

https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/biden-inherits-a-challenging-civil-military-legacy/

BIDEN INHERITS A CHALLENGING CIVIL-MILITARY LEGACY

JIM GOLBY AND PETER FEAVER

JANUARY 1, 2021

COMMENTARY

Joseph Biden will be the most experienced first-time president in nearly 30 years when he enters office, but he and his team will inherit a civil-military relationship as tenuous as any in recent memory. Not only will they have to deal with the fallout of President Donald Trump's unusual legacy as commander-in-chief, they will need to try to avoid some of the unhealthy civil-military dynamics left over from the Obama administration. Biden and his team will grapple with all of this through a national security establishment that has changed in some important ways since Democrats last were at the helm. This would be a daunting assignment even in a stable time, but — given the potential threats on the horizon and the other crises Biden inherits — restoring a healthier civil-military balance will be especially challenging. Civilians may have the right to be wrong, but the margin for error in this environment is slim.

Trump's Civil-Military Legacy

By any measure, Trump's tenure was a difficult one for civil-military relations. This problematic legacy can be grouped into the "4 P's": the president, people, processes, and politicization. The problems started at the top, with the president suffering from a civil-military tin ear — one not attuned to, and perhaps openly disrespectful of, the norms and traditions that shore up best-practices in the making and implementation of national security policy. Trump was the least-prepared occupant of the Oval Office in American history, particularly with regard to his role at the top of the national security chain of command. He also is the president who grew the least while in office, ending

his four-year term with egregious examples of the same sort of deviant practices that marred his earliest days.

To be sure, Trump had some genuine avenues of appeal to the military. He obviously admired certain aspects of military tradition — the pomp and circumstance of parades and the macho appeal of battle cries. He earned some credit by insisting on reversing the projected defense cuts of the Obama era. Polls showed that, like previous Republican candidates, more veterans preferred him to the Democratic alternative, although here his advantage was markedly less than that enjoyed by his predecessors. During his first two years in office, Trump granted the military a somewhat freer hand to pursue counter-ISIL operations, openly contrasting this approach with perceptions of Obama-era micromanagement that chafed some in the military.

But these instrumental appeals were matched with a personal style that seemed to demand personal loyalty to him rather than to the Constitution. Time and again, Trump treated his senior military leaders as if they were courtiers, rather than the professional servants of the state that they consider themselves to be. Perhaps no single moment captures this gulf better than the televised first meeting of the full Cabinet on June 12, 2017. As the camera panned the room, secretary after secretary offered up cringe-worthy paeans of personal praise to Trump until it was the turn for Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, who reversed the tables by speaking of the honor of representing the "men and women of the Department of Defense." The gulf remained large throughout Trump's tenure and was reinforced in the final months when, in the midst of the president's unprecedented efforts to overturn his electoral defeat, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley pointedly emphasized that the military "do[es] not take an oath to a king or a queen, a tyrant or a dictator. We do not take an oath to an individual. … We take an oath to the Constitution." That this boilerplate statement was deemed newsworthy and treated as an implicit rebuke of the president speaks volumes about the strain that Trump's personalistic style has caused for civil-military relations.

Trump also struggled to recruit and retain experienced professionals, especially in the national security arena, in part because so many of the Republican civilian national security establishment had signed letters openly refusing to support his candidacy, even after he secured the party's nomination. As a consequence, Trump created acute civil-military imbalances by over-relying on current and recently retired military officers to fill key political roles usually reserved for civilians. Though serving in civilian political roles, Trump referred to them as "my generals," and he made it clear that he relied on them for military advice as much as, if not more than, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other service chiefs — the ones identified by statute as the president's key military advisers. The administration further hollowed out the civilian ranks by filling in lower-level positions with less-qualified or impossible-to-confirm appointees who were kept on in an "acting" status to make them function more like disposable errand boys than like fully empowered executive officers. Trump's tumultuous personnel policies carried over into even the top political positions. After Mattis departed, the Department of Defense

endured a full six months of being led by a series of acting secretaries, unprecedented in the department's history.

The combination of unfilled civilian positions and weakened oversight processes helped the Joint Staff and the combatant commands become even more powerful as bureaucratic actors, further eclipsing the civilian Office of the Secretary of Defense in the policymaking process within the Department of Defense. Again, the failure of the administration to evolve over time has been evident, with the problems bedeviling the administration in the first six months of Trump's term becoming even more acute in its last six months. The Trump administration is ending with the weakest civilian staff of any modern president.

The uneven policy processes of the Trump administration exacerbated these difficult civil-military dynamics. On issues where the president did not personally engage, an orderly process emerged roughly akin to what previous administrations developed. But when the president did engage personally, that process was jettisoned and rendered irrelevant. In its stead was an approach of "policy-by-tweet" and "advised-by-cable TV-pundits" through which the president wrong-footed his own team over and over again.

For instance, the administration produced two major strategies — the *National Security Strategy* and the *National Defense Strategy* — that were well received and well integrated with each other, as intended by statute. But they were largely irrelevant to any issue on which the president himself personally engaged. Thus, the *National Security Strategy* emphasized the importance of allies and America's treaty commitments, while Trump's personal involvement entailed denouncing allies and calling into question America's treaty commitments. It identified Russia as a principal geopolitical foe, while Trump expressed undisguised admiration for Putin and bent over backwards to excuse Russian meddling in American elections.

This dysfunction further weakened civilians vis-à-vis the military. Traditionally, civilians at lower levels in the national security policymaking process derive their influence from the extent to which they reflect the power of the president himself. But if the president rules by capricious tweet, the civilian policy adviser becomes mostly irrelevant and little of consequence stands between the commander-in-chief and the uniformed military officials who implement the orders.

These approaches fed into an overall politicization of civil-military relations, accelerating a trend that predated Trump but that became dramatically worse during his tenure. Trump spoke of the military as his natural political base — or what, in his mind, should be his base, if it had not been corrupted by "deep state" enemies determined to undermine his presidency. Thus, in a stroke, everyone in the establishment became partisan friend or foe.

If a friend — or, more accurately, *while* a friend, since, for Trump, loyalty down the chain of command was ephemeral — then no favor was too great. Trump gave the most extreme blanket pardon ever given by a president to retired three-star general Mike

Flynn, who had pled guilty to felony charges of lying to hide suspicious contacts with Russian interlocutors. Trump likewise overruled the chain of command and intervened in a precedent-breaking way to grant pardons and commutations to servicemembers charged with war crimes. These individuals repaid the president by attending campaign fundraisers for his reelection and by denouncing Trump's political enemies as if they were enemies of the United States. But if deemed a partisan foe, then no slur was too great. When the president was stung by multiple reports that he had been heard denigrating dead and wounded American veterans as "suckers and losers," Trump lashed out at senior generals and admirals as political opponents "because they want to do nothing but fight wars so that all of those wonderful companies that make the bombs and make the planes and make everything else stay happy."

As the 2020 campaign season intensified, Trump fed concerns that he would reject any electoral outcome that did not result in him getting a second term, which, in turn, led otherwise responsible observers to speculate about a possible role for the military in enforcing the electoral results on a recalcitrant incumbent. Milley sought to distance the military from this kind of speculation by underscoring the military oath to the Constitution and by emphasizing that the Constitution identified no such role for the military. Trump's stubborn refusal to allay doubts even led to the widely publicized transgression of a taboo: Senior former officials from Democratic and Republican administrations war-gamed a previously impossible-to-imagine contingency: open partisan contestation after the election that escalated to armed conflict. That war game in turn led former senior Trump officials to call for pro-Trump "counter coup" planning. Some reports even suggest that Trump recently asked the pardoned Flynn about wild conspiracy theories the latter has been spreading in the media stating that Trump has the authority to deploy the military to seize voting machines in swing states and "basically rerun an election in each of those states." The military will not follow illegal orders if Trump gives them. However even this speculation in the Oval Office is causing damage that may change expectations about the military's role in politics after Trump departs.

This legacy is disturbing, but it remains to be seen how enduring the harm will be. The nomination of retired general Lloyd Austin, only four years after Trump ignored the norm against appointing a retired general as secretary of defense, suggests some of Trump's actions may have fundamentally transformed the civil-military playing field. But it is worth distinguishing between a civil-military violation — which can range from minor to severe — and the lingering consequences of that violation — which can range from transient to enduring. To be sure, the more severe the violation, the more likely it is that the damage will take some time to undo. But not always. It is also worth noting that some parts of the civil-military system may recover from the same harm sooner than other parts.

Austin's nomination may complicate the return to regular order in the Pentagon, especially if he is not attentive to the civil-military challenges he inherits. Even so, the effects of Trump's norm-breaking behavior may be less likely to persist as long within the Defense Department and the civil-military processes that involve it as they are in the broader political and cultural milieus that feed into and underlay the policymaking

process. In breaking so many taboos for short-term political advantage, seemingly without paying an immediate price for doing so, Trump may have shaped the incentives for future presidents and other public officials to seek similar short-term political expediency. If so, the harm to civil-military relations could linger longer than a return to a semblance of regular order within the Department of Defense might suggest.

Lessons from the Obama Era

Biden's team is surely lamenting the civil-military legacy it is inheriting from the Trump administration, but members of the team should also recall the flawed civil-military legacy the Obama administration left at the end of President Barack Obama's term in 2016. Although these missteps pale in comparison to the legacy Trump leaves behind, mutual mistrust often colored interactions between civilian and military leaders well before Trump entered the scene.

The Obama team's civil-military record was uneven, marred by high levels of friction and micromanagement, some real and some perceived. The Defense Department chafed against restrictions imposed by an inexperienced commander-in-chief and enforced by a National Security Council staff that had grown so large that even its own director admitted reform was necessary. Within the Department of Defense, successive changes also created challenges for the recruitment, retention, and management of the civilian professional staff with statutory responsibility for providing oversight on a daily basis. By the end of the Obama era, the secretary of defense already was starting to bypass his own civilian staff, turning instead to their military counterparts for policy advice and operational management.

Some of the responsibility for these problems also falls on senior uniformed leaders who pushed the boundaries of their policy influence by limiting options for civilian decision-makers and embracing the practice of offering what they called "best military advice." These dual trends had the effect of creating political pressure for elected leaders to accept military recommendations. Even before Trump took office, the balance between the influence of members of the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense was beginning to lean heavily toward the Joint Staff — a pattern that intensified in the Trump years.

Moreover, while Biden has the great advantage of having campaigned as a unity candidate, he brings in other baggage by presiding over a divided party. It is notable that the first high-profile Cabinet post that progressives within his own party chose to contest on ideological grounds was the position of secretary of defense. The divisions within the Democratic Party on defense spending, nuclear modernization, counter-terrorism, China, and even how to respond to climate change are at least as big, and perhaps bigger, than those that separate Biden from many Republican leaders in the House and Senate. Biden may have compounded this problem by nominating a retired general to a post that will require strong political skills to work across a divided party and with a divided Congress while also trying to reestablish atrophied processes in a Defense Department that looks much different than it did four years ago.

Biden's team may also suffer the negative consequences of the repeated appeals made by Democrats, Never Trump Republicans, and others during the Trump era for the military to function as "the adults in the room" by checking Trump as he sought to implement controversial policies. A military bureaucracy that has been praised for slow-rolling policies it does not like probably will not quickly unlearn those techniques. Indeed, many of these habits were evident even before Trump. It may be only a matter of time before the Biden team encounters some bureaucratic friction of its own. These unhelpful military tendencies may well be exacerbated by the gender and, perhaps, age dynamics that veterans of the Obama administration identified and lamented. It is highly likely that the Biden team will boast placing a record number of women national security professionals in key positions throughout the administration. Some may also be significantly younger than their military counterparts, even though most will have had significant Defense Department experience of their own. The Obama administration discovered that it took time for the military to adjust to these changing social realities: There were far too many episodes of gross unprofessionalism, many by military leaders who failed to show women political appointees the respect they deserved in the process.

To be sure, the new Biden team will not be a carbon copy of the Obama team and even those that return will do so with new perspective and their own lessons learned in the interval. However, they would be wise to recognize that a rapid shift in leadership styles now may create a sort of civil-military whiplash. The Biden team almost certainly will want to reestablish processes that provide greater civilian direction for war plans, budgeting, and global priorities. After four years of relative autonomy for the Joint Staff and combatant commands, combined with reduced daily civilian oversight due to under-filled political positions in the Pentagon, a micromanagement narrative could almost write itself. Biden and his team will need to be attuned to these dynamics and look for early opportunities to establish trust and clarify their expectations about the civil-military relationship while also providing senior military officers a real voice in the policy process that makes them feel respected and heard.

The Institutional Context

Biden's team will have to manage these challenges with a toolbox that is under severe fiscal constraint and with military leaders who already believe they are strapped thin. Trump did manage to increase defense spending trends and slightly decrease the number of American military personnel deployed abroad, resulting in a meaningful reinvestment in defense capabilities and a moderate decrease in operational tempo. But future defense budgets will be under severe pressure, perhaps rivaling in the aggregate the kinds of cuts imposed by the Budget Control Act, though hopefully with more flexibility and predictability to manage them in more sensible ways than the threat of a sequester straitjacket permitted. Moreover, the decline in foreign deployments was matched, and in some cases exceeded, by a decline in "permanent" foreign basing. The result is that the strains of military deployments on military personnel and their families are as great as in earlier periods, when a larger number and a greater scale of deployments were supported by more robust foreign basing infrastructure. To pick just

one example: A shorter NATO rotation to Germany or Poland without family accompanying (and without combat pay as a sweetener) could impose more strain on morale than a longer rotation with family. There are few signs that civilian and military leaders fully understand these challenges or that they are willing to make difficult tradeoffs.

In the meantime, the last four years have seen a failure to make the needed investments in the other tools of statecraft, particularly diplomacy and development. While morale in the foreign policy and national security ranks will likely improve, at least initially, with the return of something resembling establishment values, the damage caused by deferred or dysfunctional approaches to human capital will hobble the Biden team for some time to come and will, in particular, make it hard to quickly rebuild the capacity of civilian services to match advances in the uniformed ranks — especially in the face of the prolonged resource fights to come. The Trump team was especially vigorous in burrowing in some of its most partisan and suspect appointments into civil service positions and on bipartisan boards within the national security establishment. An early challenge for the Biden team will be deciding — likely on a case-by-case basis — whether the restoration of the “above-partisan-politics” norm in these areas requires engaging in the seemingly partisan practice of cleaning house, or whether the norm would be made stronger through greater forbearance. None of these choices will be straightforward.

In terms of the institutional environment, legislative changes and four years of weak civilian control mean that Biden will face a much stronger chairman of the Joint Chiefs and associated Joint Staff than he faced barely four years ago. The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act granted the chairman additional responsibilities for global integration, technically expanding only his advisory role. In practice, these powers have become more expansive, with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff taking on some roles that traditionally had fallen to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Trump administration officials also changed some of the procedures for war plan reviews and political guidance, reducing the number of interactions between military leaders and mid-level political appointees that previously had provided the civilian Office of the Secretary of Defense more opportunities to play an active oversight role. Trump’s unorthodox and tumultuous personnel policies also shifted practical authority to the Joint Staff. Long nomination delays and unfilled civilian posts resulting from Trump administration infighting weakened that office further, leaving Mattis and his successors more beholden to the advice and influence of the better-staffed and more efficient Joint Staff. Trump’s first chairman, Gen. Joe Dunford, enjoyed an unusually close and trusting relationship with Mattis, whom Dunford had served under as a marine. A similar dynamic also existed between Milley and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, who had led the Army as chief of staff and secretary, respectively, during the early days of the Trump administration.

The appointment of Austin risks exacerbating this unbalance, unless he takes pains to develop and empower a capable team of civilians in his immediate office and within the larger Office of the Secretary of Defense — a point that has already been emphasized.

The initial signs on this front are encouraging. The announcement that the Biden administration will nominate Kathleen Hicks as the first female deputy secretary of defense and Colin Kahl as the undersecretary of defense for policy ensure that strong, experienced civilian leaders who take civil-military issues seriously will hold key roles in the Pentagon assuming the Senate confirms their appointments, as we fully expect. The unofficial reports that Austin will pick Kelly Magsamen as his chief of staff, likewise puts a well-connected civilian with political experience in a key position. We both know all these individuals well, and one of us has worked for Hicks (who oversaw Golby's work on the "Thank You for Your Service" podcast) and Kahl (who was Golby's direct supervisor on Vice President Biden's national security staff).

Even with these capable selections, the civil-military dynamics awaiting the new secretary of defense and his team in the Pentagon will be daunting. Because of the policy and personnel dynamics during the Trump administration, the Joint Staff and the combatant commanders have become accustomed to a greater degree of autonomy and influence. Biden's political appointees, sitting at the head of the table and asking detailed questions, will immediately cause some friction between these groups. They also will find themselves with smaller staffs, fewer resources, and a shorter institutional memory than their military counterparts. Some of the savviest members of the Biden team will recognize in these challenges echoes of the challenges political appointees faced late in the Obama years. But their intensity in combined form will stretch Biden and members of his team in new ways. They must not let their well-intentioned — and much needed — desire to reestablish processes of civilian oversight undermine the trust necessary for effective civil-military cooperation.

At the same time, senior military officers on the Joint Staff and at the combatant commands should prepare their staffs for increased expectations of public transparency, civilian interaction, and intrusive questioning than that to which they have become accustomed in recent years. A culture that pronounces micromanagement at the first sign of tough questioning can also undermine the trust required for effective civil-military communication. Iterative discussion and questioning are an essential part of the process of aligning military ways and means with political ends. More developed process and predictability can benefit the military, too, but there will be conflict and misunderstanding as these institutional muscles learn to flex again. However, the Biden team will bear the primary burden of demonstrating that its goal is not civilian control for the sake of control, but rather civil-military trust and cooperation geared toward the shared goal of effective national security policies.

The Societal Setting

Perhaps the aspect that will take the Biden team the longest to adjust to is the new societal context — the social milieu in which these civil-military dynamics take place. In a nutshell, the Biden administration must adjust to deeper political polarization and changing attitudes about the appropriate role of serving and retired military officers in foreign policy and national security debates.

Two survey comparisons underscore this challenge: a 2014 YouGov survey — the closest thing we have to a comparable survey from the time Biden was in the White House — and nationally-representative surveys of 4,500 Americans that the National Opinion Research Center conducted on our behalf in 2019 and 2020 (and that are proprietary until we finish a book on this topic) that reflect the environment today. We do not have enough active duty military in these samples to offer statistically meaningful descriptions of the attitudes of the actual personnel who will constitute the "military" in civil-military policymaking, but previous surveys have shown that the attitudes of veterans, particularly of recent veterans, is a satisfactory proxy that can guide our understanding. While some civil-military gaps we explored in both surveys are overstated because they are driven primarily by demographic differences, others have grown and will create sharper civil-military challenges for the Biden administration. We also have found several areas where civilian and veteran respondents largely agree, but in ways that undermine civilian control over policy processes.

Among the most striking findings from the 2014 snapshot was a "familiarity gap" tied to the lack of public knowledge about the military. Despite numerous ongoing American troop deployments, many civilian respondents — often as many as a quarter or a third — would not even venture to answer basic questions about the military. Civilian and veteran respondents also expressed very different views about whether and how to use military force. In general, veterans were more reluctant to express support for the use of military force than civilian respondents, but civilians were more likely to favor troop limits or other restrictions when troops were deployed. Both civilian and veteran respondents expressed growing support for various forms of military resistance to unwise civilian orders. With respect to traditional civil-military norms and best practices, these findings — including that majorities of nearly all subgroups supported the idea of military resignation in protest — were somewhat troubling. In part, these civil-military trends were likely the result of broader societal trends reflecting lost public confidence in elected officials. In 2014, nearly 80 percent of all respondents reported that political leaders do not share the public's values. In contrast, nearly three-quarters of Americans expressed confidence in the military, with only small differences between civilian and veteran populations. These attitudes extended and intensified long-standing patterns seen in other surveys during the post-Cold War Era.

Today, this dynamic persists and is intensified still further. In 2020, approximately 69 percent of Americans express "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military, down slightly from 74 percent in 2019 and 2014. Even at 69 percent, esteem for the military is higher than it is for any other national institution, and indeed far higher than it is for Congress, the Supreme Court, or the presidency. The public's confidence in the military is highly conditioned on partisanship, with 82 percent of Republicans expressing confidence in the military compared to just 60 percent of Democrats, reflecting a five-point larger difference between parties than in 2014. Biden's slice of the electorate in 2020 also contains large groups that harbor serious concerns about the military. Only 53 percent of self-identified liberals express confidence in the military, with confidence dropping below 49 percent for both women liberals and non-white liberals. Our research suggests even these numbers may overstate the public's true confidence in the military

by as much as 20 percentage points due to social pressure, however. Yet, the fact that many Americans feel this pressure is itself a sign of the military's influence in American society and politics.

The five-point drop in confidence from 2019 to 2020 may, in part, be due to the military's involvement in a number of controversies related to the Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020. Although Trump ultimately decided against invoking the Insurrection Act to use active duty troops in support of law enforcement on domestic soil, members of the National Guard did back up federal law enforcement in Washington, D.C. on June 1, when they cleared Lafayette Square prior to Trump's photo op at St. John's church. We did find differences between civilian and military attitudes about the use of the Insurrection Act, however. As many as 57 percent of veterans told us they would support the use of active duty troops if protests continued compared to only 41 percent of civilians. We also primed a subset of respondents with reports suggesting the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the use of active duty troops. The views of civilians who received this prompt did not change at all, but support among veterans who received this prompt dropped 8 points to 49 percent. While pundits and national journalists focused on the electoral implications of retired generals' comments, our survey suggests their statements were likely more influential in shaping the attitudes of veterans and service members on this narrow issue.

The Biden administration's commitment to restoring normal processes may give it an initial civil-military honeymoon, but it should not expect that to translate automatically into deference or an easy civil-military relationship. In our 2020 survey, 62 percent of all veterans and 66 percent of post-9/11 veterans agreed with the statement, "Civilians who have not been to war should not question those who have." In contrast, 42 percent of civilians agreed with the statement while only 30 percent disagreed, suggesting that pressure for civilian leaders to defer to military officers emanates from both groups. Post-9/11 veterans — who volunteered to serve in America's all-volunteer force during America's longest military conflicts with no full-time mobilization of society — also expressed some open contempt in our survey for those who did not volunteer. A full 60 percent of post-9/11 veterans "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the eligible Americans who did not volunteer to serve during wartime should feel guilty compared to just 43 percent of older veterans and 22 percent of civilians. Given perceptions that the Biden team will be prone to micromanagement, members of the Joint Staff may find it easy to fall back into those familiar narratives when new political appointees enter the Defense Department prepared to reestablish oversight and processes that have laid somewhat dormant since the Obama years.

The Biden team should also expect some normal points of civil-military friction on policy and missions to emerge. In general, veteran and military respondents in our survey are more likely to believe the military's most important role is to compete with great powers like China and Russia, especially when compared to Democratic respondents. Veteran respondents are also more hawkish on Iran than civilian respondents. They also tend to be more optimistic, though only slightly so, on the success of military operations in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although only 13 percent of all civilians and 10 percent of

Democrats agreed that these operations have been “very successful,” 24 percent of post-9/11 veterans said the same. Veterans were also particularly optimistic on progress in Afghanistan, though there are notable generational divides: 44 percent of post-9/11 veterans “agree” or “strongly agree” that the United States has accomplished its goals in Afghanistan while 39 percent “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” Older veterans and civilians break 30-47 and 21-39, respectively. Post-9/11 veterans are also particularly supportive of troop reductions in the context of the deal with the Taliban with 54 percent in support and only 29 percent against. While there is some civilian support among civilians for troop reductions as part of a deal with the Taliban, a 40 percent plurality of civilians chose “no opinion” when asked about both troop reductions and military success in Afghanistan. Most Americans simply are not paying much attention.

Conclusion

Civil-military relationships are not an end in themselves. These relationships exist only to provide effective national security policies in a given geopolitical environment in the context of democratic accountability. Unfortunately, the environment is not benign. As they sort through the civil-military and institutional baggage — the items they bring with them and the items they inherit — Biden’s team must also navigate intensified great-power conflict, persistent instability in the broader Middle East, strained ties with key allies, and little progress on all of the other stubborn problems that have bedeviled leaders in the post-Cold War era, including: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, transnational networks of terrorism, failed states, and ethnic rivalries. And, of course, Biden must still lead the country out of the worst pandemic in a century while recovering from all of the associated economic upheaval. There will be no strategic holiday during which the Biden team can painstakingly sort through its civil-military affairs.

The new commander-in-chief starts with the enormous advantage of being “not Trump.” He will need all of that advantage — and will need to have learned from Obama-era missteps — in order to navigate through the tricky civil-military waters we have described above. Members of the Biden team come in as seasoned professionals, but we hope that leads them to caution and humility rather than unwariness and hubris as they conduct national security policy. If Lloyd Austin wins over the critics and proves himself to be both fully sensitive to these civil-military realities and savvy in how he seeks to overcome them, he may yet emerge as the successful and strong secretary of defense the Department of Defense so desperately needs. The early slate of civilian nominees named for key roles is a welcome sign. The initial weeks after the inauguration will be of particular importance in setting the tone, especially after the tumultuous and stressful transition. Even so, the norm of civilian management of the Defense Department will be more difficult to reestablish, like so many other civil-military norms that have weakened in recent years, if Congress does grant another recently-retired general legal permission to serve as secretary of defense. Biden, and Austin, will need all the top civilian defense talent they can get.

Notwithstanding all of the other urgent priorities vying for his attention, neglect of the civil-military file would likely impose intolerable costs on Biden down the road — a price that would be vividly evident, sooner or later, when an urgent national security crisis takes center stage. The only prudent course is for the Biden team to attend to both policy and process at the same time — to move out quickly on the pandemic and the economy, while also setting the national security establishment on the path to healthier civil-military relations. Problems in the civil-military foundations of an administration must be fixed before a crisis lays bare the rot that may lie just out of view.

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The Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan

The recent withdrawal of Americans from Afghanistan has provoked enormous controversy over the decision to withdraw and just as great, of the timing and the way in which the U.S. undertook the withdrawal. In the series of articles below, we provide some background on the last two decades of American military effort in that country, on the public's attitude toward the policy and campaign as of late 2020, recent reporting on how the decision was made by the Biden Administration, and the reaction by some senior military leaders. We believe the American experience in Afghanistan will overhang U.S. civil-military relations at all levels for years to come. What are your views of how we prosecuted the campaign, militarily and politically, and what in retrospect we can learn from the experience at this point in time?

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

REVIEW ESSAY

Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold

Why America Failed in Afghanistan

BY CHRISTINA LAMB

July/August 2021

In 2008, I interviewed the United Kingdom's then outgoing military commander in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, in a dusty firebase in Helmand Province, where international troops had been battling the Taliban on a daily basis for territory that kept slipping away. The war in Afghanistan could not be won militarily, Carleton-Smith told me. He was the first senior coalition military officer to say so publicly, and the story made the front page of the British *Sunday Times*. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates promptly denounced Carleton-Smith to the news media as "defeatist."

Thirteen years on, U.S. President Joe Biden appears to have reached the same conclusion as the British brigadier. In April, Biden announced that the United States would pull all its remaining troops out of Afghanistan by the 20th anniversary of 9/11, ending what he referred to as "the forever war." But by now, such a withdrawal was all but a foregone conclusion: the Taliban had proved a stubborn enemy that was not going anywhere and that indeed controlled close to half the country's territory.

How the conflict once known as "the good war" (to distinguish it from the war in Iraq) went so wrong is the subject of a new book, *The American War in Afghanistan*, which claims to be the first comprehensive account of the United States' longest war. Its author, Carter Malkasian, is a historian who has spent considerable time working in Afghanistan, first as a civilian official in Helmand and then as a senior adviser to the U.S. military commander in the country. A sprawling history of more than 500 pages, the work stands in stark contrast to Malkasian's previous book, *War Comes to Garmser*, which tells the compelling story of one small district in Helmand. In his new book, Malkasian considers just how it could be that with as many as 140,000 soldiers in 2011 and some of the world's most sophisticated equipment, the United States and its NATO allies failed to defeat the Taliban. Moreover, he asks why these Western powers stayed on, at a cost of more than $2 trillion and over 3,500 allied lives lost, plus many more soldiers badly injured, fighting what the British brigadier and others long knew was an unwinnable war.

FATAL BEGINNINGS

The Afghan intervention seemed, at the start, a success story. The United States entered Afghanistan in October 2001 with the backing of the United Nations and fueled by worldwide outrage over the 9/11 attacks. It dispatched B-52 bombers, laser-guided missiles, and Green Berets, who worked alongside local militias to topple the Taliban within 60 days, with the loss of only four U.S. soldiers (three a result of friendly fire) and one CIA agent. The operation seemed

a model of intervention and cost a total of $3.8 billion: President George W. Bush described it as one of the biggest "bargains" of all time. Observes Malkasian: "The ease of the 2001 success carried away sensibility."

The Taliban fell, Osama bin Laden fled to Pakistan—and the Bush administration no longer seemed to know what it was trying to achieve in Afghanistan. Bush made much of women's rights, declaring in his State of the Union address in January 2002 that "today women of Afghanistan are free," after "years as captives in their own homes," when the Taliban forbade girls from going to school and women from working, wearing lipstick, or laughing out loud. But Washington had no appetite for rebuilding Afghanistan and almost no understanding of the war-ravaged country, let alone of how much work would be needed to secure and reconstruct it.

Malkasian argues that the United States made mistakes between 2001 and 2006 that set the course for failure. The catalog of errors he recounts is by now familiar. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld did not want to invest in the Afghan army—and by the end of 2003, just 6,000 Afghan soldiers had been trained. Warlords, whom most Afghans blamed for the country's descent into violence in the first place, roamed free and even became ministers and members of parliament. At the same time, the United States and its allies shut the Taliban out of talks on a political settlement, failing to appreciate that the group represented a point of view that many among the majority Pashtuns shared. The United States should have pressed its advantage, Malkasian suggests, at a time when the Afghan government had popular support and the Taliban were in disarray. Instead, it empowered militias and conducted overly aggressive counterterrorism operations that alienated ordinary Afghans and led the excluded Taliban to resort once more to violence.

Nonetheless, the Bush administration classed Afghanistan as a success and turned its attention to Iraq. The Taliban fled across the border to Pakistan, where they regrouped, raised funds, recruited in the madrasahs, and trained with the assistance of Pakistan's security service, the Inter-Services Intelligence. Many ISI officers had worked with Taliban leaders for decades and shared their worldview. Moreover, Malkasian notes that Islamabad's strategic thinking centered on its rivalry with India. Pakistan had fought four wars with its neighbor and feared that India would encircle it by gaining influence in Afghanistan. India had 24 consulates in Afghanistan, Pakistani officials complained; in fact, it had only four.

Pakistan's role turned out to be fatal. Even as the United States prosecuted its war in Afghanistan, those it fought found refuge and training in the country next door. But the Bush administration not only turned a blind eye to Pakistan's machinations; it provided Pakistan with $12 billion, more than half of which was a reimbursement for military operations, as American officials believed that Islamabad was helping in what they saw as the more important fight against al Qaeda.

THE HEART OF AFGHANISTAN

Afghan officials like to blame Pakistan for the deepening war. But the Taliban had something more in its favor—something Malkasian calls "the Taliban's tie to what it meant to be Afghan." The heart of Afghanistan, by Malkasian's description, is the *atraf*, or countryside, with its mud-walled homes, hidden-away women, and barefoot children, a realm where "other than cell-phones, cars, and assault rifles, the 21st century was invisible." Into this space came American soldiers with night-vision goggles and missiles the price of Porsches. The last foreigners the villagers had seen were the Russians who occupied their country in the 1980s. The Taliban were

able to use that memory as a powerful motivator in a country that prided itself on defeating superpowers and never having been colonized.

Malkasian believes that the Taliban profited from their posture as a force for Islam, against infidels. But my own reporting in Afghanistan suggests a somewhat more ambiguous dynamic. Mullahs in villages would rage against the foreign presence, but they collected their salaries from a government dependent on foreigners. Ordinary Afghans I spoke to suggested that religion was less important to them than pride in their history of defeating superpowers. The fact that the Taliban paid unemployed farmers further boosted the group's advantage. Moreover, as Malkasian details, the Taliban exploited tribal rivalries that Western forces didn't understand. Many powerful Pashtun tribes, such as the Ghilzais, the Ishaqzais, and the Noorzais, felt cut out. They resented foreign troops for disrespecting their culture (entering women's quarters, bombing wedding parties) and attempting to eradicate their poppy crops.

The United States had created conditions that called for a more robust Afghan state than it had built. As Malkasian writes, "If a state faces a hostile safe haven on its border and mistreats various segments of its population, it had best have capable military forces of one form or another." When the Taliban reemerged in earnest in 2006, their forces were estimated at only 10,000, which should have been containable. But the foreign forces in Afghanistan were unfamiliar with the terrain, both geographic and cultural; the U.S. leadership was distracted by Iraq, where a civil war was spinning out of control; and Afghanistan had not even a small, capable army.

As for Afghan President Hamid Karzai, he was furious about NATO airstrikes and what he saw as British meddling in Helmand, where he had been forced to remove a governor. Increasingly paranoid, rather than unite tribes that might have stepped in to fight the Taliban, he tried to divide them, lest they become a political threat. Later, the Afghan security forces were ramped up and gained numerical superiority over the Taliban and at least equivalent ammunition and supplies. Still, they threw in the towel at decisive moments. "The Taliban had an edge in inspiration," writes Malkasian. "The average soldier and policeman simply wanted to fight less than his Taliban counterpart. Many could not reconcile fighting for Afghanistan alongside an infidel occupier and against a movement that represented Islam."

In stressing the religious dimension, however, Malkasian overlooks more material conditions that sapped motivation from many Afghan fighters. Some were reluctant to fight for a government whose insatiable demand for bribes they felt was the bane of their lives. Others were well aware that there would be no medevacs for injured security forces and that corrupt commanders were siphoning off their fuel and supplies, as well as pocketing the pay for "ghost fighters," who existed only on the books. They saw little utility in risking their lives for a predatory government when the Taliban seemed just as likely to return.

THE CLOCKS AND THE TIME

The United States, sucked in ever deeper, seemed to exhaust every strategy, from maintaining a light footprint to surging U.S. troops, increasing them almost threefold, to more than 80,000 by 2010. President Barack Obama, who was constitutionally wary of pouring troops and dollars into military interventions, and who had opposed the war in Iraq at its inception, found himself sending more and more Americans to prop up a government that had lost the trust of its people. But he never considered getting out altogether: the cost was just too high. "The United States was stuck," writes Malkasian. And the Taliban expanded their influence with the support of Iran and Russia, both of which were interested in making life hard for the Americans.

So how did Washington come unstuck, and why now? U.S. President Donald Trump, with his "America first" policy, was never going to have much time for Afghanistan; indeed, one of his campaign promises was to end the war. By the autumn of 2018, with midterm elections approaching, Trump raged to his generals that their strategy had been "a total failure" and he wanted out. For the first time, talks with the Taliban took on real urgency. In February 2020, Washington signed a deal promising withdrawal by May 1, 2021. The Afghan government had been completely excluded from these negotiations. When Biden came into office, Kabul hoped the new president would not only delay the withdrawal but also leave a permanent force in place. In the end, it got only four months' grace.

In announcing a September pullout, Biden argued that the United States should "be focused on the reason we went in the first place: to ensure Afghanistan would not be used as a base from which to attack our homeland again. We did that. We accomplished that objective." But even this point is not entirely clear-cut. True, there hasn't been an attack from Afghanistan since 9/11. But al Qaeda has not gone away. In fact, the situation is more complicated than before, as there is not only al Qaeda to contend with but also Islamic State Khorasan, or IS-K, which is small in numbers but has conducted deadly suicide attacks in Afghanistan, including on maternity hospitals and schools, particularly in Kabul.

The current U.S. plan is to contain terrorism from afar, using drones, intelligence networks, and special operations raids launched from bases somewhere in the region. William Burns, the CIA director, admitted that this plan involved "a significant risk." It was "not the decision we hoped for," said the British defense chief, Nick Carter.

"These are professional understatements," William Hague, a former British foreign secretary, wrote recently in response. "Most western security officials I know are horrified."

Even if the United States' war is over, Afghanistan's is not. In the last 15 years, more than 40,000 civilians have been killed. The Afghan government and the Taliban began peace talks in Qatar late last year—but since then, the fighting has intensified, causing even more casualties. When peace talks got underway between the Taliban and the United States in 2019, I asked young Afghans what peace would mean to them. "Being able to go for a picnic," said one. "Not having to wonder if you will come back again when you leave for work or study," said another. Most, however, could not answer at all. Fully 70 percent of the Afghan population is under the age of 25, and fighting has gone on since the Soviet invasion in 1979. These Afghans have only ever known war.

Malkasian's book raises a disturbing question: In the end, did the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan do more harm than good? "The United States exposed Afghans to prolonged harm in order to defend America from another terrorist attack," he writes. "Villages were destroyed. Families disappeared. . . . The intervention did noble work for women, education, and free speech. But that good has to be weighed against tens of thousands of men, women, and children who died."

Those "noble" achievements are not negligible, however. There are now 3.5 million Afghan girls in school (although more than two million still do not go). Women are working in all sorts of fields: law enforcement, cinema, robotics. The health-care system has been transformed, and life expectancy for Afghan women has increased by almost ten years. Afghanistan has flourishing media. Even the presence of cell phones indicates a society connected with the rest of the world. Young Afghans will not easily give up these hard-won rights.

The fear is that these gains may now be threatened. Since the peace deal was signed, there have been dozens of assassinations of judges, journalists, and human rights activists, as well as the horrific bombing of a girls' school. And however U.S. policymakers may seek to dress it up, to the Taliban, the American pullout is a victory. As the oft-quoted Taliban adage goes, "You have all the clocks, but we have all the time."

The Afghans, after all, never believed that the Americans would stay. Back in 2005, in the remote village of Shkin, a place of intense fighting in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan, I watched local villagers happily accept health care and other help from U.S. soldiers in the day, then rocket their base at night. When I asked them why, they had a simple explanation: "In the end, they'll be gone, and the bad guys will still be here."

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The Ides of August

https://www.sarahchayes.org/post/the-ides-of-august

August 15, 2021

I've been silent for a while. I've been silent about Afghanistan for longer. But too many things are going unsaid.

I won't try to evoke the emotions, somehow both swirling and yet leaden: the grief, the anger, the sense of futility. Instead, as so often before, I will use my mind to shield my heart. And in the process, perhaps help you make some sense of what has happened.

For those of you who don't know me, here is my background — the perspective from which I write tonight.

I covered the fall of the Taliban for NPR, making my way into their former capital, Kandahar, in December 2001, a few days after the collapse of their regime. Descending the last great hill into the desert city, I saw a dusty ghost town. Pickup trucks with rocket-launchers strapped to the struts patrolled the streets. People pulled on my militia friends' sleeves, telling them where to find a Taliban weapons cache, or a last hold-out. But most remained indoors.

It was Ramadan. A few days later, at the holiday ending the month-long fast, the pent-up joy erupted. Kites took to the air. Horsemen on gorgeous, caparisoned chargers tore across a dusty common in sprint after sprint, with a festive audience cheering them on. This was Kandahar, the Taliban heartland. There was no panicked rush for the airport.

I reported for a month or so, then passed off to Steve Inskeep, now Morning Edition host. Within another couple of months, I was back, not as a reporter this time, but to try actually to do something. I stayed for a decade. I ran two non-profits in Kandahar, living in an ordinary house and speaking Pashtu, and eventually went to work for two commanders of the international troops, and then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (You can read about that time, and its lessons, in my first two books, *The Punishment of Virtue* and *Thieves of State.*)

From that standpoint — speaking as an American, as an adoptive Kandahari, and as a former senior U.S. government official — here are the key factors I see in today's climax of a two-decade long fiasco:

Afghan government corruption, and the U.S. role enabling and reinforcing it. The last speaker of the Afghan parliament, Rahman Rahmani, I recently learned, is a multimillionaire, thanks to monopoly contracts to provide fuel and security to U.S. forces at their main base, Bagram. Is this the type of government people are likely to risk their lives to defend?

Two decades ago, young people in Kandahar were telling me how the proxy militias American forces had armed and provided with U.S. fatigues were shaking them down at checkpoints. By

2007, delegations of elders would visit me — the only American whose door was open and who spoke Pashtu so there would be no intermediaries to distort or report their words. Over candied almonds and glasses of green tea, they would get to some version of this: “The Taliban hit us on this cheek, and the government hits us on that cheek.” The old man serving as the group’s spokesman would physically smack himself in the face.

I and too many other people to count spent years of our lives trying to convince U.S. decision-makers that Afghans could not be expected to take risks on behalf of a government that was as hostile to their interests as the Taliban were. Note: it took me a while, and plenty of my own mistakes, to come to that realization. But I did.

For two decades, American leadership on the ground and in Washington proved unable to take in this simple message. I finally stopped trying to get it across when, in 2011, an interagency process reached the decision that the U.S. would not address corruption in Afghanistan. It was now explicit policy to ignore one of the two factors that would determine the fate of all our efforts. That’s when I knew today was inevitable.

Americans like to think of ourselves as having valiantly tried to bring democracy to Afghanistan. Afghans, so the narrative goes, just weren’t ready for it, or didn’t care enough about democracy to bother defending it. Or we’ll repeat the cliche that Afghans have always rejected foreign intervention; we’re just the latest in a long line.

I was there. Afghans did not reject us. They looked to us as exemplars of democracy and the rule of law. They thought that’s what we stood for.

And what did we stand for? What flourished on our watch? Cronyism, rampant corruption, a Ponzi scheme disguised as a banking system, designed by U.S. finance specialists during the very years that other U.S. finance specialists were incubating the crash of 2008. A government system where billionaires get to write the rules.

Is that American democracy?

Well…?

Pakistan. The involvement of that country's government -- in particular its top military brass -- in its neighbor’s affairs is the second factor that would determine the fate of the U.S. mission.

You may have heard that the Taliban first emerged in the early 1990s, in Kandahar. That is incorrect. I conducted dozens of conversations and interviews over the course of years, both with actors in the drama and ordinary people who watched events unfold in Kandahar and in Quetta, Pakistan. All of them said the Taliban first emerged in Pakistan.

The Taliban were a strategic project of the Pakistani military intelligence agency, the ISI. It even conducted market surveys in the villages around Kandahar, to test the label and the messaging. “Taliban” worked well. The image evoked was of the young students who apprenticed themselves to village religious leaders. They were known as sober, studious, and gentle. These Taliban, according to the ISI messaging, had no interest in government. They just wanted to get the militiamen who infested the city to stop extorting people at every turn in the road.

Both label and message were lies.

Within a few years, Usama bin Laden found his home with the Taliban, in their de facto capital, Kandahar, hardly an hour's drive from Quetta. Then he organized the 9/11 attacks. Then he fled to Pakistan, where we finally found him, living in a safe house in Abbottabad, practically on the grounds of the Pakistani military academy. Even knowing what I knew, I was shocked. I never expected the ISI to be *that* brazen.

Meanwhile, ever since 2002, the ISI had been re-configuring the Taliban: helping it regroup, training and equipping units, developing military strategy, saving key operatives when U.S. personnel identified and targeted them. That's why the Pakistani government got no advance warning of the Bin Laden raid. U.S. officials feared the ISI would warn him.

By 2011, my boss, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Taliban were a "virtual arm of the ISI."

And now this.

Do we really suppose the Taliban, a rag-tag, disjointed militia hiding out in the hills, as we've so long been told, was able to execute such a sophisticated campaign plan with no international backing? Where do we suppose that campaign plan came from? Who gave the orders? Where did all those men, all that materiel, the endless supply of money to buy off local Afghan army and police commanders, come from? How is it that new officials were appointed in Kandahar within a day of the city's fall? The new governor, mayor, director of education, and chief of police all speak with a Kandahari accent. But no one I know has ever heard of them. I speak with a Kandahari accent, too. Quetta is full of Pashtuns — the main ethnic group in Afghanistan — and people of Afghan descent and their children. Who are these new officials?

Over those same years, by the way, the Pakistani military also provided nuclear technology to Iran and North Korea. But for two decades, while all this was going on, the United States insisted on considering Pakistan an ally. We still do.

Hamid Karzai. During my conversations in the early 2000s about the Pakistani government's role in the Taliban's initial rise, I learned this breathtaking fact: Hamid Karzai, the U.S. choice to pilot Afghanistan after we ousted their regime, was in fact the go-between who negotiated those very Taliban's initial entry into Afghanistan in 1994.

I spent months probing the stories. I spoke to servants in the Karzai household. I spoke to a former Mujahideen commander, Mullah Naqib, who admitted to being persuaded by the label and the message Karzai was peddling. The old commander also admitted he was at his wits' end at the misbehavior of his own men. I spoke with his chief lieutenant, who disagreed with his tribal elder and commander, and took his own men off to neighboring Helmand Province to keep fighting. I heard that Karzai's own father broke with him over his support for this ISI project. Members of Karzai's household and Quetta neighbors told me about Karzai's frequent meetings with armed Taliban at his house there, in the months leading up to their seizure of power.

And lo. Karzai abruptly emerges from this vortex, at the head of a "coordinating committee" that will negotiate the Taliban's return to power? Again?

It was like a repeat of that morning of May, 2011, when I first glimpsed the pictures of the safe-house where Usama bin Laden had been sheltered. Once again — even knowing everything I knew — I was shocked. I was shocked for about four seconds. Then everything seemed clear.

It is my belief that Karzai was a key go-between negotiating this surrender, just as he did in 1994, this time enlisting other discredited figures from Afghanistan's past, as they were useful to him. Former co-head of the Afghan government, Abdullah Abdullah, could speak to his old battle-buddies, the Mujahideen commanders of the north and west, and their comrades within the Afghan armed forces. You may have heard some of their names as they surrendered their cities in recent days: Ismail Khan, Dostum, Atta Muhammad Noor. The other person mentioned together with Karzai is Gulbuddin Hikmatyar -- a bona fide Taliban commander, who could take the lead in some conversations with them and with the ISI.

As Americans have witnessed in our own context — the #MeToo movement, for example, the uprising after the murder of George Floyd, or the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol — surprisingly abrupt events are often months or years in the quiet making. The abrupt collapse of 20 years' effort in Afghanistan is, in my view, one of those cases.

Thinking this hypothesis through, I find myself wondering: what role did U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad play? And old friend of Karzai's, he was the one who ran the negotiations with the Taliban for the Trump Administration, in which the Afghan government was forced to make concession after concession. Could President Biden truly have found no one else for that job, to replace an Afghan-American with obvious conflicts of interest, who was close to former Vice President Dick Cheney and who lobbied in favor of an oil pipeline through Afghanistan when the Taliban were last in power?

Self-Delusion. How many times did you read stories about the Afghan security forces' steady progress? How often, over the past two decades, did you hear some U.S. official proclaim that the Taliban's eye-catching attacks in urban settings were signs of their "desperation" and their "inability to control territory?" How many heart-warming accounts did you hear about all the good we were doing, especially for women and girls?

Who were we deluding? Ourselves?

What else are we deluding ourselves about?

One final point. I hold U.S. civilian leadership, across four administrations, largely responsible for today's outcome. Military commanders certainly participated in the self-delusion. I can and did find fault with generals I worked for or observed. But the U.S. military is subject to civilian control. And the two primary problems identified above — corruption and Pakistan — are civilian issues. They are not problems men and women in uniform can solve. But faced with calls to do so, no top civilian decision-maker was willing to take either of these problems on. The political risk, for them, was too high.

Today, as many of those officials enjoy their retirement, who is suffering the cost?

POLITICO

HISTORY DEPT.

Opinion | Why Afghan Forces So Quickly Laid Down Their Arms

Opposing Afghan factions have long negotiated arrangements to stop fighting — something the U.S. either failed to understand or chose to ignore.

Members of the Taliban move toward the front line on a tank captured outside of Kabul on Feb. 18, 1995.

Opinion by ANATOL LIEVEN

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In the winter of 1989, as a journalist for the *Times* of London, I accompanied a group of mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan's Ghazni province. At one point, a fortified military post

became visible on the other side of a valley. As we got closer, the flag flying above it also became visible — the flag of the Afghan Communist state, which the mujahedeen were fighting to overthrow.

“Isn’t that a government post?” I asked my interpreter. “Yes,” he replied. “Can’t they see us?” I asked. “Yes,” he replied. “Shouldn’t we hide?” I squeaked. “No, no, don’t worry,” he replied reassuringly. “We have an arrangement.”

I remembered this episode three years later, when the Communist state eventually fell to the mujahedeen; six years later, as the Taliban swept across much of Afghanistan; and again this week, as the country collapses in the face of another Taliban assault. Such “arrangements” — in which opposing factions agree not to fight, or even to trade soldiers in exchange for safe passage — are critical to understanding why the Afghan army today has collapsed so quickly (and, for the most part, without violence). The same was true when the Communist state collapsed in 1992, and the practice persisted in many places as the Taliban advanced later in the 1990s.

Taliban fighters huddle in a frontline shelter during a lull in fighting south of Kabul, March 22, 1995. | Craig Fujii/AP Photo

This dense web of relationships and negotiated arrangements between forces on opposite sides is often opaque to outsiders. Over the past 20 years, U.S. military and intelligence services have generally either not understood or chosen to ignore this dynamic as they sought to paint an optimistic picture of American efforts to build a strong, loyal Afghan army. Hence the Biden administration’s expectation that there would be what during the Vietnam War was called a “decent interval” between U.S. departure and the state’s collapse.

While the coming months and years will reveal what the U.S. government did and didn’t know about the state of Afghan security forces prior to U.S. withdrawal, the speed of the collapse was predictable. That the U.S. government could not foresee — or, perhaps, refused to admit — that beleaguered Afghan forces would continue a long-standing practice of cutting deals with the Taliban illustrates precisely the same naivete with which America has prosecuted the Afghanistan war for years.

The central feature of the past several weeks in Afghanistan has not been fighting. It has been negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan forces, sometimes brokered by local elders. On Sunday, the *Washington Post* reported “a breathtaking series of negotiated surrenders by government forces” that resulted from more than a year of deal-making between the Taliban and rural leaders.

Taliban fighters sit on a vehicle along the street in Jalalabad province on Aug. 15, 2021. | AFP via Getty Images

In Afghanistan, kinship and tribal connections often take precedence over formal political loyalties, or at least create neutral spaces where people from opposite sides can meet and talk. Over the years, I have spoken with tribal leaders from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region who have regularly presided over meetings of tribal notables, including commanders on opposite sides.

One of the key things discussed at such meetings is business, and the business very often involves heroin. When I was traveling in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, it was an open secret that local mujahedeen groups and government units had deals to share the local heroin trade. By all accounts, the same has held between Taliban and government forces since 2001.

An Afghan farmer works on a poppy field collecting the green bulbs swollen with raw opium, the main ingredient in heroin, in the Khogyani district of Jalalabad, east of Kabul, Afghanistan. | Rahmat Gul/AP Photo

The power of kinship led to a common arrangement whereby extended families have protected themselves by sending one son to fight with the government army or police (for pay) and another son to fight with the Taliban. This has been a strategy in many civil wars, for example, among English noble families in the 15th-century Wars of the Roses. It means that at a given point, one of the sons can desert and return home without fearing persecution by the winning side.

These arrangements also serve practical purposes. It is often not possible for guerrilla forces to hold any significant number of prisoners of war. Small numbers might be held for ransom, but most ordinary soldiers are let go, enlisted in the guerrillas' own ranks or killed.

Three Taliban militiamen dance alongside one of their tanks at a position some 15 kms north of Kabul Saturday November 9, 1996 on their way to the front line. | Santiago Lyon/AP Photo

Thus, as in medieval Europe, Afghanistan has a tradition to which the Taliban have adhered closely — and which helps explain the speed of their success. The Taliban will summon an enemy garrison to surrender, either at once or after the first assaults. If it does so, the men can either join the besiegers or return home with

their personal weapons. To kill them would be seen as shameful. On the other hand, a garrison that fought it out could expect no quarter, a very strong incentive to surrender in good time.

The Soviet-backed Afghan state survived for three years after the Soviet withdrawal, and in fact outlasted the USSR itself — a telling commentary on the comparative decrepitude of the "state" that the United States and its partners have attempted to create since 2001. During my travels with the mujahedeen, I was present at a hard-fought battle at Jalalabad in March 1989, in the immediate wake of the Soviet withdrawal, when Afghan government forces beat off a massive mujahedeen assault.

But after the USSR collapsed and Soviet aid ended in December 1991, there was very little fighting. Government commanders, starting with Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum (who since 2001 has been on the American side, illustrating the fluidity of Afghan allegiances), either took their men over to the mujahedeen, fled or went home — and were allowed to do so by the victors. Kabul was captured intact by the mujahedeen in 1992, as it is being captured by the Taliban now. In the later 1990s, while in some areas the Taliban faced strong resistance, elsewhere enemy garrisons also surrendered without a fight and in many cases joined the Taliban.

A government fighter pauses to read a book at a traffic roundabout in Kabul, Afghanistan, March 18, 1995. | Craig Fujii/AP Photo

Deals between Afghan and Taliban forces during the U.S. war have been detailed in works like *War Comes to Garmser* by Carter Malkasian and *An Intimate War* by British soldier Mike Martin. A report by the Afghanistan Analysts Network describes such an agreement in Pakhtia province in 2018:

"Haji Ali Baz, a local tribal elder, told AAN that it was agreed that the government's presence would be limited to the district centre, and neither side would venture into the areas controlled by the other. This agreement resulted in all of the government security posts outside the district centre being dismantled. In the words of Haji Ali Baz, this led to the end of the fighting, which had 'caused a lot of trouble for the people.'"

Most recently, as described in the *Washington Post* Sunday, after the Biden administration declared in April that U.S. forces were withdrawing, "the capitulations began to snowball."

Afghan society has been described to me as a "permanent conversation." Alliances shift, and people, families and tribes make rational calculations based on the risk they face. This is not to suggest that Afghans who made such decisions are to blame for doing what they felt to be in their self-interest. The point is that America's commanders and officials either completely failed

to understand these aspects of Afghan reality or failed to report them honestly to U.S. administrations, Congress and the general public.

A soldier (L) belonging to strict Moslem Taliban militia forces orders an elderly man to join the Friday noon prayer on October 25, 1996 at Kabul's main Pul-i-Khishti mosque. | SAEED KHAN/AFP via Getty Images

We can draw a clear line between this lack of understanding and the horrible degree of surprise at the events of the past several days. America didn’t predict this sudden collapse, but it could have and should have — an unfortunately fitting coda to a war effort that has been undermined from the start by a failure to study Afghan realities.

MilitaryTimes

Afghanistan

Final inspector general report details all the ways the U.S. failed in Afghanistan

Meghann Myers

18 August, 2021

Members from the Afghan-international security force patrol a street in Nad 'Ali District after intelligence indicated militant activity. Helmand province, Afghanistan, June 7. The final Afghanistan special inspector general report details how the U.S. built an unsustainable Afghan military. (Spc. Joseph Wilson/Army)

On Sunday, the Taliban officially took over the government of Afghanistan, the final nail in the coffin after 20 years of nation building by the U.S. and its allies. The next day, the Pentagon's independent inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction issued his final report, with the details of how it all went wrong.

Simply put, according to the report, the U.S. tried to create a country nearly from whole cloth and in its own image, underestimating how long that would take, and continuously reinventing what success looked like when the reconstruction failed to meet the most recent metric.

"The U.S. government also clumsily forced Western technocratic models onto Afghan economic institutions; trained security forces in advanced weapon systems they could not

understand, much less maintain; imposed formal rule of law on a country that addressed 80 to 90 percent of its disputes through informal means; and often struggled to understand or mitigate the cultural and social barriers to supporting women and girls," according to the SIGAR.

Chaos at Kabul airport

Crowds swarmed the runway at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul as people desperately tried to get flights out of the country in the hours after the Taliban took over the Afghanistan capital. US forces secured the military side of the airport amid tense scenes of Afghans doing anything they could to get on a plane, including rushing aircraft and clinging to landing gear.

The 140-page report boils the issues down to seven points:

- "The U.S. government continuously struggled to develop and implement a coherent strategy for what it hoped to achieve."
- "The U.S. government consistently underestimated the amount of time required to rebuild Afghanistan and created unrealistic timelines and expectations that prioritized spending quickly. These choices increased corruption and reduced the effectiveness of programs."
- "Many of the institutions and infrastructure projects the United States built were not sustainable."
- "Counterproductive civilian and military personnel policies and practices thwarted the effort."

- “Persistent insecurity severely undermined reconstruction efforts.”
- “The U.S. government did not understand the Afghan context and therefore failed to tailor its efforts accordingly.”
- “U.S. government agencies rarely conducted sufficient monitoring and evaluation to understand the impact of their efforts.”

All told, 2,443 U.S. service members were killed and 20,666 were injured, in addition to 66,000 Afghan troop deaths and 48,000 Afghan civilian deaths, according to the report.

The bill totaled $145 billion spent on building military and government organizations, with another $837 billion on fighting insurgencies.

“The extraordinary costs were meant to serve a purpose — though the definition of that purpose evolved over time,” according to the report. “At various points, the U.S. government hoped to eliminate al-Qaeda, decimate the Taliban movement that hosted it, deny all terrorist groups a safe haven in Afghanistan, build Afghan security forces so they could deny terrorists a safe haven in the future, and help the civilian government become legitimate and capable enough to win the trust of Afghans.”

While progress was made, there was little faith that they could sustain without a U.S. presence.

A decade ago, the prevailing wisdom was that the invasion and subsequent counterinsurgency effort in Iraq had poached both resources and political will from Afghanistan. A surge early in the Obama administration was meant to rectify it.

“U.S. officials believed the solution to insecurity was pouring ever more resources into Afghan institutions — but the absence of progress after the surge of civilian and military assistance between 2009 and 2011 made it clear that the fundamental problems were unlikely to be addressed by changing resource levels,” according to the report.

It’s been said that the Afghanistan war wasn’t a 20-year conflict, but a one-year conflict fought 20 times. SIGAR uses the same framing for the reconstruction effort.

“U.S. officials often underestimated the time and resources needed to rebuild Afghanistan, leading to short-term solutions like the surge of troops, money, and resources from 2009–2011,” the report reads. “U.S. officials also prioritized their own political preferences for what they wanted reconstruction to look like, rather than what they could realistically achieve, given the constraints and conditions on the ground.”

Then there was the nature of overseas assignments. New teams constantly rotated in and out, without much continuity.

“U.S. personnel in Afghanistan were often unqualified and poorly trained, and those who were qualified were difficult to retain,” according to the report. “DoD police advisors watched American TV shows to learn about policing, civil affairs teams were mass-

produced via PowerPoint presentations, and every agency experienced annual lobotomies as staff constantly rotated out, leaving successors to start from scratch and make similar mistakes all over again."

The report draws major parallels with the war in Vietnam, as a similar effort to tamp down an insurgency and train up local forces to sustain their own fight.

"Don't believe what you're told by the generals or the ambassadors or people in the administration saying we're never going to do this again," John Sopko, head of the SIGAR office, told reporters in July. "That's exactly what we said after Vietnam: we're never going to do this again. Lo and behold, we did Iraq. And we did Afghanistan. We will do this again."

Despite the poor track record, the report encourages the U.S. to prepare for the inevitability that it will try something like this again.

"U.S. agencies should continue to explore how they can ensure they have the strategic planning capabilities, reconstruction doctrine, policies, best practices, standard operating procedures, institutional knowledge, and personnel structures necessary for both large and small reconstruction missions," the report concludes.

About Meghann Myers

Meghann Myers is the Pentagon bureau chief at Military Times. She covers operations, policy, personnel, leadership and other issues affecting service members.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-myth-of-war-weary-americans-11606863481

OPINION | COMMENTARY

The Myth of 'War Weary' Americans

Our poll finds the public ambivalent about the war in Afghanistan, not in a hurry for withdrawal.

By Peter D. Feaver and Jim Golby
Dec. 1, 2020 5:58 pm ET

President Trump greets troops at Afghanistan's Bagram Airfield, Nov. 28, 2019.
PHOTO: OLIVIER DOULIERY/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

President Trump has made clear his determination to reduce America's military footprint in Afghanistan, regardless of the consequences. The most recent version of Mr. Trump's plan—a reduction to 2,500 troops by early January—may not satisfy those pushing for a complete withdrawal, but it will go further than most of Trump's military advisers and the GOP leadership in Congress want to go. Only his most ardent supporters will be truly happy.

For all the talk of war-weariness, bring-them-home sentiment doesn't appear to

be forcing Mr. Trump's hand. The American public's attitudes toward Afghanistan are nuanced, according to a National Opinion Research Center survey conducted on our behalf in September and October. After 19 years of fighting, the war in Afghanistan has been called America's longest, but many American's don't seem to be paying attention. Forty-one percent of our respondents had no opinion on whether the U.S. has accomplished its goals in Afghanistan.

This lack of awareness feeds the withdrawal narrative: Why stay if we aren't accomplishing anything? But it may also reflect the ambivalence of two successive U.S. presidents who wanted out of the Afghanistan conflict. Barack Obama spoke enthusiastically about the importance of the Afghan mission as a candidate in 2008. But since December 2009, when he announced a temporary surge of troops coupled with a fixed and arbitrary timeline for their withdrawal, White House messaging in support of the war has been rare.

There is support for withdrawing some troops, especially among Mr. Trump's base: 53% of Trump supporters in our poll favor troop reductions and 16% oppose them. But support is limited among the broader public: 34% of respondents support troop withdrawals, while 25% oppose them. Even this tepid support may be conditional. Our survey asked about troop reductions in exchange for counterterrorism assurances the Taliban made as part of the deal, but so far they have failed to live up to their commitments.

The results of our survey suggest some interesting civil-military divides. Veterans (44%) expressed greater support for troop reductions than the general public (33%). Opposition to reductions was also higher among veterans (31%) than civilians (24%). A plurality of civilian respondents (43%) expressed no opinion. There was also a notable generational divide among veterans. Forty percent of veterans who served before 9/11 support troop reductions, while 32% oppose them. Among post-9/11 veterans, support is higher; 54% of post-9/11 veterans in our sample favor troop drawdowns in the context of the Taliban agreement and 29% don't.

Few Americans believe that 19 years of war in Afghanistan have been successful.

Overall, only 22% of respondents told us they believed the U.S. had achieved its goals in Afghanistan, with post-9/11 veterans roughly twice as likely to say so at 44%. And again, no opinion (39%) was the most common answer among civilian respondents.

Whom do Americans hold responsible for the situation in Afghanistan? Veterans assessed the performance of civilian and military leaders roughly the same. Approximately 60% of veterans thought civilian political leaders had a good plan, listened to military advice as much as they should have, and integrated military and nonmilitary tools effectively. Roughly the same number of veterans thought military leaders did the same things effectively.

Civilian respondents were less likely to credit military leaders on their performance, again because many civilians didn't even offer an opinion. Civilian respondents also were more critical of civilian political leaders than veterans were, largely because partisanship shaped their answers. Democrats credited Democratic civilian political leaders for their role in planning and execution of war plans in Afghanistan, but blamed Republican political leaders for theirs. The opposite was true for Republicans. Independents, on the other hand, blamed civilian political leaders from both parties.

Which brings us back to President Trump's current Afghanistan endgame. By splitting the baby, Mr. Trump probably has avoided the full-blown civil-military crisis with his commanders that a more draconian "all the troops home by Christmas" order would have generated. Mr. Trump will own the decision, but he'll probably be gone before the negative consequences materialize. His national-security team—the newcomers and the veterans of previous Afghan policy fights—has united behind him, however grudgingly. The military units left behind in Afghanistan may face acute vulnerabilities reminiscent of Dien Bien Phu and even Benghazi, but the incoming Biden team at least will have some remaining options.

The fight over Afghanistan policy will go another round—and in the next round, the civil-military questions and partisan blame games that have been mostly suppressed until now could become the main action.

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U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, is a senior fellow at the University of Texas’ Clements Center for National Security.

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The New York Times

NEWS ANALYSIS

Taliban Sweep in Afghanistan Follows Years of U.S. Miscalculations

An Afghan military that did not believe in itself and a U.S. effort that Mr. Biden, and most Americans, no longer believed in brought an ignoble end to America's longest war.

American soldiers overseeing training of their Afghan counterparts in Helmand Province in 2016. Adam Ferguson for The New York Times

By **David E. Sanger** and **Helene Cooper**

Published Aug. 14, 2021 Updated Aug. 19, 2021

WASHINGTON — President Biden's top advisers concede they were stunned by the rapid collapse of the Afghan army in the face of an aggressive, well-planned offensive by the Taliban that now threatens Kabul, Afghanistan's capital.

The past 20 years show they should not have been.

If there is a consistent theme over two decades of war in Afghanistan, it is the overestimation of the results of the $83 billion the United States has spent since 2001 training and equipping the Afghan security forces and an underestimation of the brutal, wily strategy of the Taliban. The Pentagon had issued dire warnings to Mr. Biden even before he took office about the potential for the Taliban to overrun the Afghan army, but intelligence estimates, now shown to have badly missed the mark, assessed it might happen in 18 months, not weeks.

Commanders did know that the afflictions of the Afghan forces had never been cured: the deep corruption, the failure by the government to pay many Afghan soldiers and police officers for months, the defections, the soldiers sent to the front without adequate food and water, let alone arms. In the past several days, the Afghan forces have steadily collapsed as they battled to defend ever shrinking territory, losing Mazar-i-Sharif, the country's economic engine, to the Taliban on Saturday.

Mr. Biden's aides say that the persistence of those problems reinforced his belief that the United States could not prop up the Afghan government and military in perpetuity. In Oval Office meetings this spring, he told aides that staying another year, or even five, would not make a substantial difference and was not worth the risks.

In the end, an Afghan force that did not believe in itself and a U.S. effort that Mr. Biden, and most Americans, no longer believed would alter the course of events combined to bring an ignoble close to America's longest war. The United States kept forces in Afghanistan far longer than the British did in the 19th century, and twice as long as the Soviets — with roughly the same results.

For Mr. Biden, the last of four American presidents to face painful choices in Afghanistan but the first to get out, the debate about a final withdrawal and the miscalculations over how to execute it began the moment he took office.

“Under Trump, we were one tweet away from complete, precipitous withdrawal,” said Douglas E. Lute, a retired general who directed Afghan strategy at the National Security Council for Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. “Under Biden, it was clear to everyone who knew him, who saw him pressing for a vastly reduced force more than a decade ago, that he was determined to end U.S. military involvement,” he added, “but the Pentagon believed its own narrative that we would stay forever.”

“The puzzle for me is the absence of contingency planning: If everyone knew we were headed for the exits, why did we not have a plan over the past two years for making this work?”

A Skeptical President

From the moment that news outlets called Pennsylvania for Mr. Biden on Nov. 7, making him the next commander in chief for 1.4 million active-duty troops, Pentagon officials knew they would face an uphill battle to stop a withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. Defense Department leaders had already been fending off Mr. Biden’s predecessor, Donald J. Trump, who wanted a rapid drawdown. In one Twitter post last year, he declared all American troops would be out by that Christmas.

And while they had publicly voiced support for the agreement Mr. Trump reached with the Taliban in February 2020 for a complete withdrawal this May, Pentagon officials said they wanted to talk Mr. Biden out of it.

After Mr. Biden took office, top Defense Department officials began a lobbying campaign to keep a small counterterrorism force in Afghanistan for a few more years. They told the president that the Taliban had grown stronger under Mr. Trump than at any point in the past two decades and pointed to intelligence estimates predicting that in two or three years, Al Qaeda could find a new foothold in Afghanistan.

Shortly after Lloyd J. Austin III was sworn in as defense secretary on Jan. 22, he and Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recommended to Mr. Biden that 3,000 to 4,500 troops stay in Afghanistan, nearly double the 2,500 troops there. On Feb. 3, a congressionally appointed panel led by a retired four-star Marine general, Joseph F. Dunford Jr., publicly recommended that Mr. Biden abandon the exit deadline of May 1 and further reduce American forces only as security conditions improved.

A report by the panel assessed that withdrawing troops on a strict timeline rather than how well the Taliban adhered to the agreement heightened the risk of a potential civil war once international forces left.

But Mr. Biden, who had become deeply skeptical of American efforts to remake foreign countries in his years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as vice president,

asked what a few thousand American troops could do if Kabul was attacked. Aides said he told them that the presence of the American troops would further the Afghan government's reliance on the United States and delay the day it would take responsibility for its own defense.

The president told his national security team, including Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and his national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, that he was convinced that no matter what the United States did, Afghanistan was almost certainly headed into another civil war — one Washington could not prevent, but also, in his view, one it could not be drawn into.

By March, Pentagon officials said they realized they were not getting anywhere with Mr. Biden. Although he listened to their arguments and asked extensive questions, they said they had a sense that his mind was made up.

In late March, Mr. Austin and General Milley made a last-ditch effort with the president by forecasting dire outcomes in which the Afghan military folded in an aggressive advance by the Taliban. They drew comparisons to how the Iraqi military was overrun by the Islamic State in 2014 after American combat troops left Iraq, prompting Mr. Obama to send American forces back.

"We've seen this movie before," Mr. Austin told Mr. Biden, according to officials with knowledge of the meetings.

But the president was unmoved. If the Afghan government could not hold off the Taliban now, aides said he asked, when would they be able to? None of the Pentagon officials could answer the question.

On the morning of April 6, Mr. Biden told Mr. Austin and General Milley he wanted all American troops out by Sept. 11.

The intelligence assessments in Mr. Biden's briefing books gave him some assurance that if a bloody debacle resulted in Afghanistan, it would at least be delayed. As recently as late June, the intelligence agencies estimated that even if the Taliban continued to gain power, it would be at least a year and a half before Kabul would be threatened; the Afghan forces had the advantages of greater numbers and air power, if they could keep their helicopters and planes flying.

Even so, the Pentagon moved swiftly to get its troops out, fearful of the risks of leaving a dwindling number of Americans in Afghanistan and of service members dying in a war the United States had given up for lost. Before the July 4 weekend, the United States had handed over Bagram Air Base, the military hub of the war, to the Afghans, effectively ending all major U.S. military operations in the country.

"Afghans are going to have to be able to do it themselves with the air force they have, which we're helping them maintain," Mr. Biden said at the time. A week later, he argued that the Afghans "have the capacity" to defend themselves.

“The question is,” he said, “will they do it?”

The Will Is Gone

To critics of the decision, the president underestimated the importance of even a modest presence, and the execution of the withdrawal made the problem far worse.

“We set them up for failure,” said David H. Petraeus, the retired general who commanded the international forces in Afghanistan from 2010 until he was appointed C.I.A. director the next year. Mr. Biden’s team, he argued, “did not recognize the risk incurred by the swift withdrawal” of intelligence and reconnaissance drones and close air support, as well as the withdrawal of thousands of contractors who kept the Afghan air force flying — all in the middle of a particularly intense fighting season.

The result was that Afghan forces on the ground would “fight for a few days, and then realize there are no reinforcements” on the way, he said. The “psychological impact was devastating.”

But administration officials, responding to such critiques, counter that the Afghan military dwarfs the Taliban, some 300,000 troops to 75,000.

“They have an air force, a capable air force,” something the Taliban does not have, John F. Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, said on Friday. “They have modern equipment. They have the benefit of the training that we have provided for the last 20 years. It’s time now to use those advantages.”

But by the time Mr. Kirby noted those advantages, none of them seemed to be making a difference. Feeling abandoned by the United States and commanded by rudderless leaders meant that Afghan troops on the ground “looked at what was in front of them, and what was behind them, and decided it’s easier to go off on their own,” said retired Gen. Joseph L. Votel, the former commander of United States Central Command who oversaw the war in Afghanistan from 2016 to 2019.

Mr. Biden, one administration official said, expressed frustration that President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan had not managed to effectively plan and execute what was supposed to be the latest strategy: consolidating forces to protect key cities. On Wednesday, Mr. Ghani fired his army chief, Lt. General Wali Mohammad Ahmadzai, who had only been in place for two months, replacing him with Maj. Gen. Haibatullah Alizai, a special operations commander. The commandos under General Alizai are the only troops who have consistently fought the Taliban these past weeks.

Richard Fontaine, the chief executive of the Center for a New American Security, an influential Washington think tank that specializes in national security, wrote that in the end, the 20-year symbiosis between the United States and the Afghan government it stood up, supported and ushered through elections had broken down.

“Those highlighting the Afghan government’s military superiority — in numbers, training, equipment, air power — miss the larger point,” he wrote recently. “Everything depends on

the will to fight for the government. And that, it turns out, depended on U.S. presence and support. We're exhorting the Afghans to show political will when theirs depends on ours. And ours is gone."

On Saturday, as the last major city in northern Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, Mr. Biden accelerated the deployment of 1,000 additional troops to the country to help ensure the safe evacuation of U.S. citizens and Afghans who worked for the U.S. government from Kabul.

Mr. Biden released a lengthy statement in which he blamed Mr. Trump for at least part of the unfolding disaster. He said, "I inherited a deal cut by my predecessor" which "left the Taliban in the strongest position militarily since 2001 and imposed a May 1, 2021, deadline on U.S. forces."

He said when he took office, he had a choice: abide by the deal or "ramp up our presence and send more American troops to fight once again in another country's civil conflict."

"I was the fourth president to preside over an American troop presence in Afghanistan — two Republicans, two Democrats," Mr. Biden said. "I would not, and will not, pass this war onto a fifth."

The New York Times

Miscue After Miscue, U.S. Exit Plan Unravels

President Biden promised an orderly withdrawal. That pledge, compounded by missed signals and miscalculations, proved impossible.

By Michael D. Shear, David E. Sanger, Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, Julian E. Barnes and Lara Jakes

Published Aug. 21, 2021 Updated Aug. 24, 2021, 3:29 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON — The nation's top national security officials assembled at the Pentagon early on April 24 for a secret meeting to plan the final withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. It was two weeks after President Biden had announced the exit over the objection of his generals, but now they were carrying out his orders.

In a secure room in the building's "extreme basement," two floors below ground level, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III and Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, met with top White House and intelligence officials. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken joined by video conference. After four hours, two things were clear.

First, Pentagon officials said they could pull out the remaining 3,500 American troops, almost all deployed at Bagram Air Base, by July 4 — two months earlier than the Sept. 11 deadline Mr. Biden had set. The plan would mean closing the airfield that was the American military hub in Afghanistan, but Defense Department officials did not want a dwindling, vulnerable force and the risks of service members dying in a war declared lost.

Second, State Department officials said they would keep the American Embassy open, with more than 1,400 remaining Americans protected by 650 Marines and soldiers. An intelligence assessment presented at the meeting estimated that Afghan forces could hold off the Taliban for one to two years. There was brief talk of an emergency evacuation plan — helicopters would ferry Americans to the civilian airport in Kabul, the capital — but no one raised, let alone imagined, what the United States would do if the Taliban gained control of access to that airport, the only safe way in and out of the country once Bagram closed.

The plan was a good one, the group concluded.

Four months later, the plan is in shambles as Mr. Biden struggles to explain how a withdrawal most Americans supported went so badly wrong in its execution. On Friday, as scenes of continuing chaos and suffering at the airport were broadcast around the world, Mr. Biden went so far as to say that "I cannot promise what the final outcome will be, or what it will be that it will be without risk of loss."

One day after the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, thousands of people who were desperate to flee the country rushed to the airport in Kabul. Wakil Kohsar/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

A helicopter leaving the United States United States Embassy in Kabul on Sunday, which was shut down by the end of the day, its flag lowered and removed. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

American soldiers trying to restrain the crowds on Monday at the Kabul airport. Wakil Kohsar/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

An Afghan family sitting on the tarmac on Monday. Flights were eventually suspended temporarily for safety reasons. Wakil Kohsar/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Interviews with key participants in the last days of the war show a series of misjudgments and the failure of Mr. Biden's calculation that pulling out American troops — prioritizing their safety before evacuating American citizens and Afghan allies — would result in an orderly withdrawal.

Biden administration officials consistently believed they had the luxury of time. Military commanders overestimated the will of the Afghan forces to fight for their own country and underestimated how much the American withdrawal would destroy their confidence. The administration put too much faith in President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan, who fled Kabul as it fell.

And although Biden White House officials say that they held more than 50 meetings on embassy security and evacuations, and that so far no Americans have died in the operation, all the planning failed to prevent the mayhem when the Taliban took over Kabul in a matter of days.

Only in recent weeks did the administration change course from its original plan. By then it was too late.

A protest in front of the White House on Sunday. President Biden's top intelligence officers privately offered concerns about the Afghan abilities but predicted that a complete Taliban takeover was not likely for at least 18 months. Tom Brenner for The New York Times

A Sinking Feeling

Five days after the April meeting at the Pentagon, General Milley told reporters on a flight back to Washington from Hawaii that the Afghan government's troops were "reasonably well equipped, reasonably well trained, reasonably well led." He declined to say whether they could stand on their own without support from the United States.

"We frankly don't know yet," he said. "We have to wait and see how things develop over the summer."

The president's top intelligence officers echoed that uncertainty, privately offering concerns about the Afghan abilities. But they still predicted that a complete Taliban takeover was not likely for at least 18 months. One senior administration official, discussing classified intelligence information that had been presented to Mr. Biden, said there was no sense that the Taliban were on the march.

In fact, they were. Across Afghanistan the Taliban were methodically gathering strength by threatening tribal leaders in every community they entered with warnings to surrender or die. They collected weapons, ammunition, volunteers and money as they stormed from town to town, province to province.

In May, they launched a major offensive in Helmand Province in the south and six other areas of Afghanistan, including Ghazni and Kandahar. Back in Washington, refugee groups grew increasingly alarmed by what was happening on the ground and feared Taliban retribution against thousands of translators, interpreters and others who had helped the American war effort.

Leaders of the groups estimated that as many as 100,000 Afghans and family members were now targets for Taliban revenge. On May 6, representatives from several of the United States' largest refugee groups, including Human Rights First, the International Refugee Assistance Project, No One Left Behind, and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service logged onto Zoom for a call with National Security Council staff members.

Displaced families in Kandahar early this month. Refugee groups estimated that as many as 100,000 Afghans and family members were now targets for Taliban revenge. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

Long lines in July for the passport department in Kabul. Members of advocacy groups pleaded with White House officials for a mass evacuation of Afghans. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

The groups pleaded with the White House officials for a mass evacuation of Afghans and urged them not to rely on a backlogged special visa program that could keep Afghans waiting for months or years.

There was no time for visas, they said, and Afghans had to be removed quickly to stay alive. The response was cordial but noncommittal, according to one participant, who recalled a sinking feeling afterward that the White House had no plan.

Representative Seth Moulton, a Massachusetts Democrat, veteran and ally of Mr. Biden, echoed those concerns in his own discussions with the administration. Mr. Moulton said he told anyone who would listen at the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon that "they need to stop processing visas in Afghanistan and just get people to safety."

But doing what Mr. Moulton and the refugee groups wanted would have meant launching a dangerous new military mission that would probably require a surge of troops just at the moment that Mr. Biden had announced the opposite. It also ran counter to what the Afghan government wanted, because a high-profile evacuation would amount to a vote of no confidence in the government and its forces.

Instead, the State Department sped up its efforts to process visas and clear the backlog. Officials overhauled the lengthy screening and vetting process and reduced processing time

— but only to under a year. Eventually, they issued more than 5,600 special visas from April to July, the largest number in the program's history but still a small fraction of the demand.

The Taliban continued their advance as the embassy in Kabul urged Americans to leave. On April 27, the embassy had ordered nearly 3,000 members of its staff to depart, and on May 15, officials there sent the latest in a series of warnings to Americans in the country: "U.S. Embassy strongly suggests that U.S. citizens make plans to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible."

President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan meeting with Mr. Biden in Washington in June. They expressed mutual admiration even though Mr. Ghani was fuming about the decision to pull out American troops. Pete Marovich for The New York Times

A Tense Meeting With Ghani

On June 25, Mr. Ghani met with Mr. Biden at the White House for what would become for the foreseeable future the last meeting between an American president and the Afghan leaders they had coaxed, cajoled and argued with over 20 years.

When the cameras were on at the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Ghani and Mr. Biden expressed mutual admiration even though Mr. Ghani was fuming about the decision to pull out American troops. As soon as reporters were shooed out of the room, the tension was clear.

Mr. Ghani, a former World Bank official whom Mr. Biden regarded as stubborn and arrogant, had three requests, according to an official familiar with the conversation. He wanted the United States to be "conservative" in granting exit visas to the interpreters and others, and "low key" about their leaving the country so it would not look as if America lacked faith in his government.

He also wanted to speed up security assistance and secure an agreement for the U.S. military to continue to conduct airstrikes and provide overwatch from its planes and helicopters for his troops fighting the Taliban. American officials feared that the more they were drawn into direct combat with the militant group, the more its fighters would treat American diplomats as targets.

Mr. Biden agreed to provide the air support and to not make a public show of the Afghan evacuations.

Mr. Biden had his own request for Mr. Ghani. The Afghan forces were stretched too thin, Mr. Biden told him, and should not try to fight everywhere. He repeated American advice that Mr. Ghani consolidate Afghan forces around key locations, but Mr. Ghani never took it.

Afghan commandos in July in Kunduz, a provincial capital in northern Afghanistan that Taliban insurgents have cut off on all sides. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

Afghan Air Force providing air support during the offensive in May in Helmand Province. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

Militia members and Afghan National Army soldiers in the Dehdadi district of Balkh Province, near the front line with the Taliban, in July. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

A week later, on July 2, Mr. Biden, in an ebullient mood, gathered a small group of reporters to celebrate new jobs numbers that he said showed that his economic recovery plan was working. But all the questions he received were about news from Afghanistan that the United States had abandoned Bagram Air Base, with little to no notice to the Afghans.

“It’s a rational drawdown with our allies,” he insisted, “so there’s nothing unusual about it.”

But as the questions persisted, on Afghanistan rather than the economy, he grew visibly annoyed. He recalled Mr. Ghani’s visit and said, “I think they have the capacity to be able to

sustain the government," though he added that there would have to be negotiations with the Taliban.

Then, for the first time, he was pressed on what the administration would do to save Kabul if it came under direct attack. "I want to talk about happy things, man," he said. He insisted there was a plan.

"We have worked out an over-the-horizon capacity," he said, meaning the administration had contingency plans should things go badly. "But the Afghans are going to have to be able to do it themselves with the Air Force they have, which we're helping them maintain," he said. But by then, most of the U.S. contractors who helped keep the Afghan planes flying had been withdrawn from Bagram along with the troops. Military and intelligence officials acknowledge they were worried that the Afghans would not be able to stay in the air.

By July 8, nearly all American forces were out of Afghanistan as the Taliban continued their surge across the country. In a speech that day from the White House defending his decision to leave, Mr. Biden was in a bind trying to express skepticism about the abilities of the Afghan forces while being careful not to undermine their government. Afterward, he angrily responded to a reporter's comparison to Vietnam by insisting that "there's going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States from Afghanistan. It is not at all comparable."

But five days later, nearly two dozen American diplomats, all in the Kabul embassy, sent a memo directly to Mr. Blinken through the State Department's "dissent" channel. The cable, first reported by The Wall Street Journal, urged that evacuation flights for Afghans begin in two weeks and that the administration move faster to register them for visas.

The next day, in a move already underway, the White House named a stepped-up effort "Operation Allies Refuge."

By late July, Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., the head of U.S. Central Command who oversees all military operations in the region, received permission from Mr. Austin to extend the deployment of the amphibious assault ship Iwo Jima in the Gulf of Oman, so that the Marines on board could be close enough to get to Afghanistan to evacuate Americans. A week later, Mr. Austin was concerned enough to order the expeditionary unit on the ship — some 2,000 Marines — to disembark and wait in Kuwait so that they could reach Afghanistan quickly.

By Aug. 3, top national security officials met in Washington and heard an updated intelligence assessment: District capitals across Afghanistan were falling rapidly to the Taliban and the Afghan government could collapse in "days or weeks." It was not the most likely outcome, but it was an increasingly plausible one.

"We're assisting the government so that the Talibs do not think this is going to be a cakewalk, that they can conquer and take over the country," the chief American envoy to Afghan peace talks, Zalmay Khalilzad, told the Aspen Security Forum on Aug. 3. Days later, however, that is exactly what happened.

Taliban fighters in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Sunday on a Humvee seized from Afghan forces. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

The End Game

By Aug. 6, the maps in the Pentagon showed a spreading stain of areas under Taliban control. In some places, the Afghans had put up a fight, but in many others, there was just surrender.

That same day in Washington, the Pentagon reviewed worst-case scenarios. If security further deteriorated, planning — begun days after Mr. Biden's withdrawal announcement in April — led by Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, the president's homeland security adviser, called for flying most of the embassy personnel out of the compound, and many out of the country, while a small core group of diplomats operated from a backup site at the airport.

On its face, the Kabul airport made sense as an evacuation point. Close to the center of the city, it could be as little as a 12-minute drive and a three-minute helicopter flight from the embassy — logistics that had helped reassure planners after the closure of Bagram, which was more than 50 miles and a far longer drive from Kabul.

By Wednesday, Aug. 11, the Taliban advances were so alarming that Mr. Biden asked his top national security advisers in the White House Situation Room if it was time to send the Marines to Kabul and to evacuate the embassy. He asked for an updated assessment of the situation and authorized the use of military planes for evacuating Afghan allies.

Families saying their goodbyes in the parking lot of the airport as their relatives headed for what became the last commercial flight to leave Kabul on Sunday. Kiana Hayeri for The New York Times

Passengers at Kabul's international airport on Sunday before the Taliban swept the city. Kiana Hayeri for The New York Times

Overnight in Washington, Kandahar and Ghazni were falling. National security officials were awakened as early as 4 a.m. on Aug. 12 and told to gather for an urgent meeting a few hours later to provide options to the president. Once assembled, Avril D. Haines, the director of national intelligence, told the group that the intelligence agencies could no longer assure that they could provide sufficient warning if the capital was about to be under siege.

Everyone looked at one another, one participant said, and came to the same conclusion: It was time to get out. An hour later, Jake Sullivan, Mr. Biden's national security adviser, walked into the Oval Office to deliver the group's unanimous consensus to start an evacuation and deploy 3,000 Marines and Army soldiers to the airport.

By Saturday, Aug. 14, Mr. Biden was at Camp David for what he hoped would be the start of a 10-day vacation. Instead, he spent much of the day on dire video conference calls with his top aides.

On one of the calls, Mr. Austin urged all remaining personnel at the Kabul embassy be moved immediately to the airport. It was a stunning turnaround from what Ned Price, the State Department spokesman, had said two days earlier: "The embassy remains open, and we plan to continue our diplomatic work in Afghanistan." Ross Wilson, the acting U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan who was on the call, said the staff still needed 72 hours to leave.

"You have to move now," Mr. Austin replied.

Mr. Blinken spoke by phone to Mr. Ghani the same day. The Afghan president was defiant, according to one official familiar with the conversation, and insisted that he would defend Afghanistan until the end. He did not tell Mr. Blinken that he was already planning to flee his country, which American officials first learned by reading news reports.

Later that day, the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan sent a message saying it would pay for American citizens to get out of the country, but warned that although there were reports that international commercial flights were still operating from Kabul, "seats may not be available."

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken went on Sunday talk shows this week to manage the diplomatic fallout from the deepening crisis. Pool photo by Brendan Smialowski

When Mr. Biden made plans on Sunday to return to Washington to address Americans the next day, the American flag was lowered over the abandoned embassy. Stefani Reynolds for The New York Times

On Sunday, Mr. Ghani was gone. His departure — he would eventually turn up days later in the United Arab Emirates — and scenes of the Taliban celebrating at his presidential palace documented the collapse of the government. By the end of the day, the Taliban addressed the news media, declaring their intention to restore the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The evacuation of the Kabul embassy staff was by that point underway as diplomats rushed to board military helicopters for the short trip to the airport bunker.

Others stayed behind long enough to burn sensitive documents. Another official said embassy helicopters were blown up or otherwise destroyed, which sent a cloud of smoke over the compound.

Many Americans and Afghans could not reach the airport as Taliban fighters set up checkpoints on roads throughout the city and beat some people, leaving top F.B.I. officials concerned about the possibility that the Taliban or criminal gangs might kidnap Americans, a nightmare outcome with the U.S. military no longer in the country.

As Mr. Biden made plans Sunday evening to address Americans the next day about the situation, the American flag was lowered over the abandoned embassy. The Green Zone, once the heart of the American effort to remake the country, was again Taliban territory.

Outside the U.S. Embassy in Kabul on Sunday night after the Taliban seized the capital. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

Mark Mazzetti, Adam Goldman and Michael Crowley contributed reporting.

MilitaryTimes

Your Military

For US military leaders, Afghan news strikes personal chord

By Lolita Baldor Saturday, Aug 21

Afghans swarming the walls and gates of the Kabul airport met with tear gas, gunfire and other obstacles as they continued to try to gain access to the flights.

WASHINGTON (AP) — For senior military and Pentagon leaders, this week's news was profoundly personal.

The photos and videos pouring out of Afghanistan hit a nerve, and triggered searingly vivid flashbacks to battles fought, troops lost and tears shed during their own deployments there. And in a response shaped by their memories and experiences in the war, they urged troops to check in on their buddies, talk to each other and seek help and solace if they need it.

The top two Pentagon leaders made it clear that the scenes unfolding in Afghanistan, as citizens frantically tried to get out of the country and escape the new Taliban rule, were tough for them to watch. And they knew that the visions of Afghans struggling to get on flights — so desperate that some clung to an aircraft as it lifted off — were painful for troops to see.

"All of this is very personal for me. This is a war that I fought in and led. I know the country, I know the people, and I know those who fought alongside me," said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, a retired four-star Army general who served as a commander in Afghanistan in the early

years and then led U.S. Central Command overseeing the Middle East wars as his final post from 2013-16. “We have a moral obligation to help those who helped us. And I feel the urgency deeply.”

Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley speaks at a press briefing at the Pentagon, Wednesday, July 21, 2021 in Washington. (AP Photo/Kevin Wolf) (Kevin Wolf/AP)

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commanded troops in Afghanistan and has talked often about how deeply he felt the loss of each soldier under his watch.

“For more than 20 years, we have prevented an attack on the U.S. homeland. 2,448 lost our lives, 20,722 were wounded in action, and many others suffered the unseen wounds of war. To each of them, I want you to know, personally, that your service matters,” said Milley. “As the Secretary said, for both he and I, this is personal. And I know it’s personal for each and every one of you.”

Austin said troops have a wide range of views on the issue and he urged them to work through it in their own way. “We need to respect that and we need to give one another the time and space to help do it,” he said.

Across the military, many senior officers have done tours in Afghanistan. They led troops in battle. They trained Afghan forces. And they relied heavily on the Afghan interpreters now at risk of violence from the Taliban, and begging for help to leave the country.

In recent days, those leaders have talked privately with their staffs and sent heartfelt public messages to their forces who they know are struggling with a range of emotions: frustration with

the Taliban takeover after two decades of blood and loss; fears that Afghans they worked with won't get out safely; and questions about whether their time in the country mattered.

Special Operations Command Gen. Richard Clarke speaks to his staff during a hearing to examine United States Special Operations Command and United States Cyber Command in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2022 and the Future Years Defense Program, on Capitol Hill, Thursday, March 25, 2021, in Washington. (Anna Moneymaker/The New York Times via AP, Pool) (Anna Moneymaker)

On Friday morning, Gen. Richard Clarke, head of U.S. Special Operations Command, addressed his entire headquarters staff about the situation in Afghanistan. Clarke, who has deployed to Afghanistan several times, has commandos who have done multiple tours in the last two decades and he noted this is an emotional time for them. Speaking over the intercom, he pressed them to reach out to their battle buddies and seek other resources if they need someone to talk to.

Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David H. Berger delivers remarks at a press briefing about the Marine Corps and COVID-19, at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., March 26, 2020. (Lisa Ferdinando/DoD) (Lisa Ferdinando/Office of the Secretary of Defen)

In a blunt letter to his force this week, Gen. David Berger, the Marine Corps commandant, said now is the time to come together. “You should take pride in your service — it gives meaning to the sacrifice of all Marines who served, including those whose sacrifice was ultimate,” said the letter, co-signed by Marine Sgt. Maj. Troy Black.

Berger, who deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 as commander of the 1st Marine Division, has also made sure his Marines have information to give interpreters they worked with in Afghanistan who are asking for help evacuating.

And he noted in his message that Marines may be struggling with a simple question: “Was it all worth it?” The answer, he and Black said, is yes.

Air Force Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, speaks during a change of command ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla., June 28. (Staff Sgt. Marleah Cabano/Air Force) (Staff Sgt. Marleah Cabano/Staff Sgt. Marleah Cabano)

Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, went to his Facebook page to post a note to his commando forces who have gone in and out of Afghanistan for the past 20 years. And he recalled the first troops he lost in battle.

“From the very beginning to the very present, I have been responsible for sending countless Airmen into harm’s way there, not all of whom returned to their families,” said Slife. “In November 2003, I sent home the remains of my teammates and friends in the aftermath of the first fatalities I experienced as a commander. In May of 2011, we killed Osama bin Laden. Highs and lows ... lows and highs ... I’ve felt it all.”

He warned of many hard days and years ahead as troops reflect on their Afghanistan experiences while dealing with physical, psychological and moral wounds.

“If, like me, you find yourself trying to put your own experiences into some context which will allow you to move forward positively and productively, I urge you to talk about it,” and seek out a wide range of resources for help, he said.

Gen. James C. McConville, chief of staff of the Army, speaks to deployed Soldiers of 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade during a visit to Al Udeid Airbase, Qatar, Dec. 17, 2020. During the visit, Soldiers received coins of excellence and battlefield promotions. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Mariah Jones, 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade Public Affairs) (Staff Sgt. Mariah Jones/11th Air Defense Artillery Briga)

Gen. James McConville, chief of staff of the Army, penned a letter to his personnel offering solace. Their sacrifices, he said, will be a lasting legacy of honor. And he also plead with troops to seek help and reach out to their comrades.

“I’d ask that you check in on your teammates as well as our Soldiers for Life, who may be struggling with the unfolding events,” said McConville, who commanded troops in Afghanistan. At the bottom of the letter he scrawled in marker, “Proud to serve with you!”

Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday use the 1MC to address the crew aboard the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Billings (LCS 15) on March 3, 2021. Gilday visited Naval Station Mayport to engage with Sailors, speak to local Navy leadership and tour a number of commands in the area. MC3 Austin Collins/US Navy. (Petty Officer 3rd Class Austin Collins/U.S. Navy)

Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, sent a message to sailors with a similar request.

“Reach out to those who may be struggling, and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to a grateful nation,” he said. “I want to be very clear, your service was not in vain, and it made a difference.”

More than 50 organizations signed a letter offering help to those in need, and said people can call the Veterans Crisis Line and Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255.

The Military and Society

In late 1783, just before leaving for Mount Vernon and returning to civilian life, General Washington bid farewell to the Continental Army. These were not the volunteers or militia of 1775 but hardened veterans who had been molded into a force as professional as Washington and his officers could make it, like the European armies of that era. Washington assumed that they were different from civilians now, that civilian life would present opportunities but challenges, that they would need to "p*rove themselves not less virtuous and usefull as Citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers," and that "little is now wanting to enable the Soldier to change the Military character into that of the Citizen. . . ." He pointed out that t****he country owed its freedom and independence to them but also back pay, and help in making the transition successful. The implication was that there was something of a contract between soldier and society; like so many of his public utterances in that victory year, the "Farewell Address" was addressed to the states, Congress, and the American people—the "bill payers" in other words--to make good on promises to the men who had brought victory. Do democratic countries have such an obligation to its professional and its citizen soldiers? Has the United States lived up to the obligation since 1775? Will it in the future?***

"Washington's Farewell Address to the Army, 2 November 1783," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-12012. [This is an early access document from The Papers of George Washington. It is not an authoritative final version.]

Genll Washington's Farewell Orders issued to the Armies of the United States of America the 2d day of Novr 1783 Rocky Hill, near Princeton

…[Washington reminds the soldiers of all the have achieved and the hardships they endured.]

It is universally acknowledged that the enlarged prospect of happiness, opened by the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, almost exceeds the power of description. And shall not the brave Men who have contributed so essentially to these inestimable acquisitions, retiring victorious from the Field of War, to the Field of Agriculture, participate in all the blessings which have been obtained? In such a Republic, who will exclude them from the rights of Citizens and the fruits of their labours? In such a Country so happily circumstanced, the persuits of Commerce and the cultivation of the Soil, will unfold to industry the certain road to competence. To those hardy Soldiers, who are actuated by the spirit of adventure, the Fisheries will afford ample and profitable employment, and the extensive and fertile Regions of the West, will yield a most happy Asylum to those, who fond of domestic enjoyment, are seeking for personal independence. Nor is it possible to conceive that any one of the United States will prefer a National Bankrupcy and a dissolution of the Union, to a compliance with the requisitions of Congress and the payment of its just debts—so that the Officers and Soldiers may expect considerable assistance in recommending their civil occupations, from the sums due to these from the Public, which must and will most inevitably be paid.

In order to effect this desirable purpose, and to remove the prejudices which may have taken possession of the Minds of any of the good People of the States, it is earnestly recommended to all the Troops that with strong attachments to the Union, they should carry with them into civil Society the most conciliating dispositions; and that they should prove themselves not less virtuous and usefull as Citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers.

What tho' there should be some envious Individuals who are unwilling to pay the Debt the public has contracted, or to yield the tribute due to Merit, yet let such unworthy treatment produce no invective, or any instance of intemperate conduct, let it be remembered that the unbiased voice of the Free Citizens of the United States has promised the just reward, and given the merited applause; let it be known and remembered that the reputation of the Federal Armies is established beyond the reach of Malevolence, and let a conciousness of their achievements and fame, still incite the Men who composed them to honorable Actions; under the persuasion that the private virtues of economy, prudence and industry, will not be less amiable in civil life, than the more splendid qualities of valour, perseverence and enterprise, were in the Field: Every one may rest assured that much, very much of the future happiness of the Officers and Men, will depend upon the wise and manly conduct which shall be adopted by these, when they are mingled with the great body of the Community. And altho', the General has so frequently given it as his opinion in the most public and explicit manner, that unless the principles of the Federal Government were properly supported, and the Powers of the Union encreased, the honor, dignity, and justice of the Nation would be lost for ever; yet he cannot help repeating on this occasion, so interesting a sentiment, and leaving it as his last injunction to every Officer and every Soldier, who may view the subject in the same serious point of light, to add his best endeavours to those of his worthy fellow Citizens towards effecting their great and valuable purposes, on which our very existence as a Nation so materially depends.

The Commander in Chief conceives little is now wanting to enable the Soldier to change the Military character into that of the Citizen, but that steady and decent tenor of behaivour which has generally distinguished, not only the Army under his immediate Command, but the different Detachments and seperate Armies, through the course of the War; from their good sense and prudence he anticipates the happiest consequences; And while he congratulates them on the glorious occasion which renders their Services in the Field no longer necessary, he wishes to express the strong obligations he feels himself under, for the assistance he has received from every Class—and in every instance. He presents his thanks in the most serious and affectionate manner to the General Officers, as well for their Counsel on many interesting occasions, as for their ardor in promoting the success of the plans he had adopted—To the Commandants of Regiments and Corps, and to the other Officers for their great Zeal and attention in carrying his orders promptly into execution—To the Staff for their alacrity and exactness in performing the duties of their several Departments—And to the Non-commissioned Officers and private Soldiers, for their extraordinary patience in suffering, as well as their invincible fortitude in Action—To the various branches of the Army, the General takes this last and solemn oppertunity of professing his inviolable attachment & friendship—He wishes more than bare professions were in his power, that he was really able to be usefull to them all in future life; He flatters himself however, they will do him the justice to believe, that whatever could with propriety be attempted by him, has been done. And being now to conclude these his last public Orders, to take his ultimate leave, in a short time, of the Military Character, and to bid a final adieu to the Armies he has so long had the honor to Command—he can only again offer in their behalf his recommendations to their grateful Country, and his prayers to the God of Armies. May ample justice be done them here; and may the choicest of Heaven's favors both here and hereafter attend those, who under the divine auspices have secured innumerable blessings for others: With these Wishes, and this benediction, the Commander in Chief is about to retire from service—The Curtain of seperation will soon be drawn—and the Military Scene to him will be closed for ever.

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

New York Times, April 14, 2018

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.

A version of this article appears in print on April 14, 2018, on Page SR1 of the New York edition with the headline: The Warrior At The Mall

The New York Times

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/11/us/politics/military-bases-confederate-names-trump.html?searchResultPosition=1

'A Slap in the Face': Black Veterans on Bases Named for Confederates

President Trump has vowed to block efforts to remove Confederate names from military bases.

"I think this social anxiety we have to navigate all the time really did contribute to lower performance." said Daniele Anderson, a former Navy officer. Sarah Blesener for The New York Times

By Jennifer Steinhauer
June 11, 2020

WASHINGTON — When Timothy Berry was recruiting black students for West Point, where he served as class president in 2013, he often reflected on his senior year, when he lived in the Robert E. Lee barracks. It bothered him then; it bothers him now.

“I was trying to tell black and brown students that they would have a home there,” said Mr. Berry, who served as an Army captain with the 101st Airborne Division from 2013 to 2018. “It sent a very strong mixed message.”

For many black service members, who make up about 17 percent of all active-duty military personnel, the Pentagon’s decision to consider renaming Army bases bearing the names of Confederate officers seems excruciatingly overdue. Generations of black service members signed up for the military to defend the values of their country, only to be assigned to bases named after people who represent its grimmest hour.

“It is really kind of a slap in the face to those African-American soldiers who are on bases named after generals who fought for their cause,” said Jerry Green, a retired noncommissioned officer who trained at Ft. Bragg, N.C., which is named for a Confederate general, Braxton Bragg. “That cause was slavery.”

There are 10 major Army installations named for generals who led Confederate troops — all in the former states of the Confederacy — as well as many streets and buildings on military academy campuses that are among at least 1,500 symbols of the Confederacy in public spaces in the United States.

The push to rename military installations and place names is not new, and it is one that black service members and veterans, as well as groups including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, have largely pursued.

The movement this week seemed to attract a growing consensus, including among former senior military officials of all races, before President Trump declared on Wednesday that he would block any of those 10 bases from being renamed.

A petition by the liberal group VoteVets received over 20,000 signatures in 24 hours urging the military to ban Confederate symbols and rename Army bases, a spokesman for the organization said. In a poll conducted this week and released Thursday by the group, 47 percent of 935 registered voters surveyed said they would support the removal of Confederate imagery across the entire military.

The Marine Corps issued a ban last week on displays of the Confederate battle flag at its installations, and the chief of naval operations, Adm. Michael M. Gilday, wrote on Twitter Tuesday that he had directed his staff to “begin crafting an order” banning such displays from public spaces and work areas on bases, ships, aircraft and submarines. Leaders in the Army have called for bipartisan commissions to explore changing the names of some its installations.

“The unique thing about this moment is that white friends and colleagues now see this,” said Mr. Berry, who lives in New York.

After a white supremacist rally in 2017 in Charlottesville, Va., turned deadly when a man drove into a crowd of counterprotesters, and after a white police officer fatally shot a black teenager in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014, “these were conversations that black officers were having among themselves,” he said. “It was not an open conversation among their white peers.”

The fights over statues and Confederate flags in public places have bubbled up often over the years, with their defenders repeatedly suggesting that banning or removing those items would be akin to erasing history.

In 2015, shortly after a white supremacist killed black parishioners in a church in Charleston, S.C., a budget bill in Congress almost failed amid an ugly floor fight in which Democrats, led by black lawmakers from the South, beat back a push by Republicans to allow Confederate symbols at national cemeteries.

This week, Speaker Nancy Pelosi once again called for the removal from the Capitol of 11 statues of Confederate figures, including Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, the latest salvo in a yearslong battle. On Thursday, two veterans in the House also introduced bipartisan legislation to create a process to rename military installations named for Confederates within a year. The Senate Armed Services Committee separately advanced a similar measure with a three-year timeline.

For black members of the military, seeing confederate names on military barracks delivers a special sting, given that they lionize men who led a treasonous war.

“I have been in every one of those barracks,” said Stephane Manuel, another West Point graduate who served in the Army from 2011 to 2017. “I studied in them and had friends there. I didn’t like it. The military hasn’t wanted to reconcile that the Confederate forces were traitors. I always felt from the mere moral standpoint of what they were fighting for went against what West Point stands for today.”

On his deployments, the topic would come up now and then, Mr. Manuel said, often leaving him uncomfortable as his white colleagues defended the practice.

“I felt it was best not to be political,” he said, noting that his experiences led him to establish an education technology start-up, TrueFiktion, which uses comics to tell “the untold stories of marginalized groups.” “I was often one of the few black officers. I felt it was better to leave my perspective at home.”

For some middle-age and older veterans, particularly noncommissioned offices like Mr. Green, who retired from the Army in 1998, the realization of their indignities came later.

“It wasn’t anything that stayed on my mind and I think that was because I was young,” he said. “I don’t ever remember ever having a conversation about it when I was on active duty. With my veteran friends, it later came more to light that African-American veterans were upset about it and it kind of enlightened me, too.”

Daniele Anderson, a former Navy officer who graduated in 2013 from the service’s academy in Annapolis, Md., and went on to serve until 2018, recalled how a professor at the school — later removed for other behaviors — wrote an Op-Ed that denigrated students from the military prep schools, who were disproportionately people of color. Leadership conferences rarely featured minority speakers. In her junior year, Ms. Anderson said, she was in charge of events for Black History Month, and found that the posters she put up around campus were frequently ripped

down. “I was told by fellow classmates that was a regular occurrence during Black History Month,” she said.

“There was always an underlying anxiety and the feeling that you have to always be alert and choosing your words carefully and not wanting to seem like you were playing the race card,” she said. “That really messed with a lot of black and minority students’ confidence. I think this social anxiety we have to navigate all the time really did contribute to lower performance.”

Like others interviewed for this article, Ms. Anderson said the events of the last week made her cautiously optimistic that the military would view the fight over removing Confederate names and symbols as an opportunity to look deeper at its broader culture.

“In the military, we have treated ourselves as if we are separate from society,” she said. “We have to know and understand that the military is part of society, because we draw our people from society, and we look at and listen to the same things as our civilian counterparts do.”

As a black veteran, she said, “I am in a unique position of being able to say, ‘Hey, I went to this institution, I made great sacrifices to do so, and we are calling on these institutions so they can be the best versions of themselves.’ ”

A version of this article appears in print on June 12, 2020, Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Black Veterans Recall the Pain Of Base Names.

Jennifer Steinhauer has been a reporter for The New York Times since 1994. She has worked on the Metro, Business and National desk, and served as City Hall bureau chief and Los Angeles bureau chief before moving to Washington in 2010. She is the author of a novel, two cookbooks and the upcoming book “The Firsts” the story of the women of the 116th Congress.

In a wide-ranging interview in 2020 at the end of his tour as Chief of Staff of the USAF, General David Goldfein discussed two aspects of civil-military relations: racial inclusiveness in the service and civilian control as he experienced and practiced it. His views, valuable for senior leaders in the services, provide two examples of how the larger American society can affect an armed service, and how civilian control can operate at the top of a service. Note his humility in realizing for the first time in depth how differently African Americans, and by implication minorities, experience serving in the armed services. Note also, in civil-military relations, how keenly Gen Goldfein understood the power imbalance between him and the civilians who oversaw him and his armed service but shared responsibility.

Webinar interview of General David Goldfein, Chief of Staff, USAF, by Professor Mara Karlin, Director of the Phillip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Program, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, July 21, 2020.

. . .

DR. KARLIN: So I don't think it would be an easy transition from Space Force to race relations in the military, but it turns out you actually handed me one, which is -- which is you effectively -- you know, what -- what I think we just heard from you is -- is (their agility?) in talking to different sorts of people --

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yeah.

DR. KARLIN: -- and having different kinds of people kind of in your bubble and that you're interacting with. And so that -- that will, then, be my transition to -- to, in particular, frankly, your leadership and the leadership we saw from Chief Master Sergeant Wright, the leadership that we've seen from General Brown as he's coming in, talking about this giant issue of race relations.

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yeah.

DR. KARLIN: (inaudible) on that. You -- you've been out spoken. How are you assessing the state of racism -- and I might just say broadly inclusivity in the Air Force today? What needs to be done, going forward?

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yes. So I'll bridge -- I'll bridge space and race by saying, "Houston, we have a problem." So --

DR. KARLIN:(Very impressive?) (inaudible).

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yeah. So you know, so two things happened when George Floyd was tragically killed. Something broke on the streets of America, and Americans did what Americans always do, from the very beginnings of our history as a nation. They gathered, they demonstrated, they protested a wrong -- albeit, (you know, we?) need to do that peacefully.

But something broke there, and a lot of, you know, I think pent-up frustration and anger came -- came forward. But something else happened, I hope, and that is something broke loose in the United States Air Force. And what broke loose is an opportunity that we've been given to make meaningful, lasting, long-term change when it comes to inclusiveness and belonging in the Air Force.

Because diversity is incredibly important, but I would offer that it's (inclusiveness as?) a culture across the Air Force, primarily at that squadron level. And it's a sense of belonging that is what we have got to invest our time in. And we didn't get here overnight, and we're not going to recover overnight. This is a journey that never ends.

And so what we've done is that we have a series of actions that we're taking, a lot of it getting out there and listening. Chief Wright and I tried to kick off a dialogue that now is going on at a variety of levels across the Air Force.

I had one conversation that was pretty informative -- instructive for me from a young -- one of my previous execs who is African-American and he said, "Chief, you know," he said, "it's the second and third conversation that really matter."

I said, "What do you mean?

He said, "You know, the first conversation is a little uncomfortable and you're starting to get an awareness and understanding of each other and the different life experiences that we all have." He said, "It's when somebody goes back and sleeps on it and thinks on it and then comes back to you and says, 'Hey, I've been thinking about what you said,'" he said, "That's the conversation that I'm having right now that's really important."

And so history is not on our side here. And I will tell you that I've been talking at every level of command in the Air Force. I said, "Let's prove history wrong this time." If we follow history, we'll get excited about this issue for about two

months. And then flu, COVID, hurricanes, you know, wildfires, election will all take -- become more urgent, and it will push aside the more important.

And the important is using this opportunity that we've been given to make meaningful change in our Air Force. And so I've told -- as I said, "Let's prove history wrong, let's not lose our focus, let's not lose our momentum on this."

You know, I don't know -- just you and I, talking here -- I have never been the only woman in a room. I have never been scrutinized to a completely different level than the men in the room, to have everything I say, you know, scrutinized, to have people say (inaudible) me that they thought were sort of (inaudible), but (inaudible).

That's not been my life experience. Every room I've walked into, let's be honest, it's full of me. And so I don't -- I don't know exactly what it feels like to be the only woman in the room; I don't know what it feels like to be the only African-American. But I'm the chief of staff of the Air Force, my job is to understand that.

And so I'm hoping that we'll take this opportunity we've been given, and I'm hoping that we -- I'll tell you, we're incredibly serious about it. The last thing I'll say is, if we're going to be successful, it cannot be from the top down. It's got to be a combination of top-down.

I can't issue an order as chief of staff of the Air Force and just order people to build a culture of inclusiveness and belonging, right? That's got to happen, it's got to be from the gut and it's got to be at every level of an organization, officers, NCOs, civilians.

And so if you sense a little passion in my voice, in my answer, it's because I think we've been given a huge opportunity here and I hope we prove history wrong.

DR. KARLIN: I really appreciate your leadership on that. And I think I speak for a lot of us who -- you know, it meant a lot for us to be able to point to what you are saying and what you are doing, and other senior Air Force leaders. It's -- it was noticed.

The -- you're getting a lot of questions in the chat about leadership. And -- and on civil-military relations, so I want to turn to that in particular.

What have you learned as chief about civil-military relations? What lessons do you want to pass on to your fellow senior military leaders, but also to the young folks from the Air Force who are -- who are watching and who are listening, who are trying to figure out, "How should I work well with civilians? How should I think about politics and politicization and all these things that only grow more intimidating as we get closer to elections?"

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yeah.

DR. KARLIN: What advice would you have to share?

GEN. GOLDFEIN: No, it's such a great, timely question. You know, so when you're -- (I'll share?) (inaudible) especially the young -- the students that you have. You know, so one of the things you do as a -- when you -- when you go before the Senate Armed Services Committee for confirmation, there's a series of questions that the chairman asks.

And one of the questions is, is "Will you come before this committee and give us your personal advice, your best advice regardless of whether it agrees or not with the administration?" I mean, it's a civ-mil foundational question. And if you want to get confirmed, of course, your only answer is, "I will."

DR. KARLIN: Right.

GEN. GOLDFEIN: So that's important to unpack because while I am obligated -- and have sworn to the Senate Armed Services Committee -- that I will give my advice to my civilian leadership, there's never a time where a civilian has to swear that they will take my advice. And I've got to understand that, and accept that. And understand that at the very highest levels, my perspective may not be as broad as the commander in chief.

So when I think about national security and the Air Force's role, let me tell you what I think about, right? I think about defending our borders. I think about our allies and partners. I think about, you know, the capability of being able to do the -- the unblinking eye for the NORTHCOM, NORAD commander.

But here's a couple things I don't think about, that are not my job jar: Wall Street. It's actually not what the chief of staff of the Air Force thinks about when I drive to work, right? The -- roads and bridges across America, infrastructure, interstates, Amtrak is not actually in my job jar.

Okay, so what that means is that when I provide my military advice, I accept the fact that civilian leader that's taking, that's listening to that advice may have (a bit broader?) (inaudible) that they got to figure out whether my military advice fits into that economic and political framework that they're operating in.

And so my advice that -- you know, to young leaders is, first of all, respect the fact that there are those in -- the civilians that have an obligation to provide oversight over military operations.

I will tell you, in four years on the Hill, working with Congress, my experience as chief has been overwhelmingly positive, both with staffers and members. I found them to be responsive, and I think one of the reasons that it's been positive is that I've started every conversation, understanding that in a respectful way, they actually have oversight responsibility over how I spend Mom and Dad's tax money. And that's the way our system is built, so that power is shared, right?

So that's that. Then I would offer to you that there are key relationships as a leader that you've got to invest in almost like, you know, investing in a great marriage, right?

DR. KARLIN: Yes.

GEN. GOLDFEIN: I mean, (you got?) -- it's not work, but you've got to work at it, right? If you want to be successful. And so for me, the most important relationship I have with a civilian is the relationship between the chief and the secretary of the Air Force. Because it's interesting, the division of power.

The decision authority for most actions in the United States Air Force reside under the secretary, that's how Goldwater-Nichols was written. So what does the chief bring? What I bring is credibility, with 37 years in the business. And I bring influence of the position of chief. What does the

secretary bring? The secretary brings decision authority of the civilian leadership.

If you walk down the halls of the, you know, the Air Force -- you know, our office is between the secretary and the chief -- you'll see pictures of secretaries and chiefs. The successful teams are the ones that understood that neither one could move the service alone. You actually have -- you have to understand that you need decision authority and you need credibility to influence, to be able to move the service.

And so therefore, if you're the chief and you want to move the service, you've got to invest time in that civ-mil relationship, and understand and respect the authority of the civilian leader as you move the service. And if you do that and you respect the civilian authority on the Hill, then you can actually accomplish great things.

If you find you're ever looking at the civilian leadership as an irritant or in the way, then move aside because you are no longer accomplishing your job.

DR. KARLIN: Thanks for that. I think, you know, we're really hearing that we should expect tension, but we also need to work hard to mend and tend these kinds of relationships at varying levels, of course, not just between the chief and the secretary.

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Well, it's also, I think, important to think about how we give advice, right? Because the last thing I want to do to a civilian leader is take away decision space. And if I was to, like, come on this forum, for instance, and offer, in a public setting, you know, advice that I'd given privately to the secretary of the Air Force, the secretary of Defense, before a decision was actually made, then shame on me for removing decision space that a civilian leader needs to be able to operate.

And so, again, it's just sort of understanding how you move an organization to get to the right solution and be most effective in civ-mil. I think that is important for everyone to be thinking about. And I will tell you, I think about it every day as chief.

DR. KARLIN:(inaudible) pretty obvious as well, given your successes. I often tell our students, "There's not an issue you

can touch in national security that doesn't have civ-mil implications."

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yes.

DR. KARLIN: You've just got to acknowledge it, figure out what you believe with it and figure out what the folks that you're working, you know, what their beliefs are on it.

GEN. GOLDFEIN: Yes.

It is a truism, for a long time widely accepted by people in the national security community, scholars, and other observers, that armed forces reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, the society from which they come. The U.S. military goes to great lengths in training, in promoting core values, and through command leadership to build cohesion, teamwork, and mutual respect. Efforts to prohibit offensive behavior and symbols, particularly racism and white nationalism, go back many years. In this NPR interview, University of Chicago historian Kathleen Belew explains the more recent origins of far right extremism in the ranks, based on her extensive research on the subject and published in her 2018 book. The presence of many veterans in the crowd that attacked the Capitol on January 6 brought the issue to much greater public attention. In what ways does extremism pose a threat to the armed forces? How large is the problem? What can be done to combat it?

https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2021/01/15/957421470/when-white-extremism-seeps-into-the-mainstream

https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/

When White Extremism Seeps Into The Mainstream

January 15, 20215:57 PM ET

GENE DEMBY

Pro-Trump supporters gather outside the U.S. Capitol following a rally with President Donald Trump on January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC.
Samuel Corum/Getty Images

During the chaos of the Capitol on January 6, it was impossible to miss the flags and symbols. Taken together, they allowed for a kind of brisk vexillology of the American right. There were the Trump 2020 flags, of course — and, as has been widely noted, one rioter brandished a Confederate flag in the Capitol building, a historical first. Some people waved "thin blue line" flags, meant to express support for the police and people who worked in law enforcement, even as they squared off with police officers.

But there were symbols and signs that branded many of the rioters as part of more fringe cohorts: the orange hats of the "Western chauvinist" Proud Boys;
the banner of the Three Percenter Movement, a far-right militia group that sprouted up in response to Barack Obama's presidency; the Kek flag, popular among alt-right types on sites like 4chan and meant to invoke the Nazi war flag; the Gadsden flag, which has been repurposed by a slew of different neo-Nazi and militia groups.

Kathleen Belew, a historian at the University of Chicago, studied the rise of the modern far right for her book, *Bring The War Home: The White Power Movement and*

Paramilitary America. She finds a surprising genesis for the movement in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, when disaffected white veterans returned home to little celebration and a country being transformed by the civil rights movement. Belew spoke to us about the rise of the white power movement and the ways they affect the politics of the mainstream right. This conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

How should we be thinking about the relationship between Trump supporters who are not white power types, but who were nonetheless at the Capitol alongside people who self-identify as such?

What the relationship is between the people who were there simply to protest and exercise their First Amendment rights and the people who were to cause violence is going to be a matter of very, very critical work over the next weeks and months. That interchange between fringe and mainstream is something that is not very well understood, and it's something that will be really important to what happens next.

If you think about membership in the white power movement, it's helpful to think about a set of concentric circles. In the center are people who are violent, radical actors and people whose lives are entirely contained within this movement. Those are the people who educate their children at home using curricula written by white power activists. They go to white power churches. They marry other people in the movement. They have extended family and marital relationships within the movement, et cetera.

And then outside of that is a bigger circle of people who are still very active but less politicized. So those are people who might go to a Klan rally or regularly read Klan newspapers and who make financial contributions. Outside of *that* is a more diffuse circle of people who don't themselves give money and might not go to a rally, but who regularly consume ideas and materials. And that circle, I would guess, is even more populous, because it's very easy to consume this content online now without being directly tied into the movement.

And then outside of *that* is the circle that we really have to pay attention to: where somebody might not read something that's marked as a conspiracy theory, or content brought to you by your local Ku Klux Klan chapter. But they might agree with some of the ideas that are in those texts — especially if those texts are not presented in a straightforward way, or if they come to them through family relationships or social relationships. I'm thinking about Facebook forwards or things people say in a group chat or things that are circulating without citation or facts. That outer circle is really important because these ideas can very easily move into the mainstream, and those people in that outer circle can be located and pulled toward that radical center of action.

Can we get to this history of this movement that you lay out in your book? Tell us what *Bring The War Home* is about.

Immediately after the Vietnam War, a bunch of activists on the extreme right-wing fringe who previously were at odds with each other found enough common ground to

get together into the same social movement. Groups like neo-Nazis and Klan groups had been really warring before this moment. But the Vietnam War created a sense of a common enemy: It was understood as this profound government betrayal where people had been left to fend for themselves, where a corrupt state had not backed up soldiers with enough power to win the war. And I should be clear that that narrative, that understanding of the Vietnam War is not at all just on the fringe — that's kind of our mainstream narrative of the war. But this movement figured out how to opportunistically weaponize that story.

And it's not just veterans, although some veterans and active duty troops have had enormous impact on the level of violence white power groups can carry out. A lot of people are brought into this movement; in every way but race, we're talking about a considerably diverse social movement. This is men, women and children. This is people from every region of the country. We're talking about rural, urban and suburban people. We're talking about a variety of class and educational backgrounds, felons and religious leaders, civilians and active duty troops. It's really a large and complex groundswell.

Why were so many people ready to graft white nationalist ideas onto that post-Vietnam pessimism?

I think it has to do with a broader historical pattern. If you look at the surges in Klan activity throughout its life from the late 1800s forward, the best predictor for a major surge in that kind of action is not economic need, anti-immigration fervor, populism or any number of explanations that people have sort of pointed to. The best predictor for rises in Klan activity is the aftermath of warfare. So when I first learned that, I wondered if I would find a story about veterans coming home and continuing the violence of combat.

But it turns out that that phenomenon of increased violence after warfare is much bigger than veterans, and in fact runs across all of American society. *Everyone* is more violent after warfare. All of our measures of violence, not just among people who have served, but across age groups, across gender, all of those measures go up after wars. So instead, what I think we're seeing is that these groups have figured out how to opportunistically mobilize after warfare because that's when they are able to gain purchase among a whole bunch of people who have this propensity for violence.

What animates this rise in post-war violence?

Well, I think that's the million dollar question. One way of answering looks at warfare as the state monopoly on violence: The state has just mobilized all of this violence, and now is going to exercise its hold during the war. And then when it releases it, there's all this violence amped up and it's no longer so tightly controlled. Another reading has to do with a ricochet effect. And I think in the case of the Vietnam War, this is particularly tangible because the war is prosecuted through and characterized by incredibly efficient technologies of killing that very quickly become available to American civilians — like semiautomatic weapons. And the war is prosecuted in such a way that the lines between

enemy and civilian are particularly blurry. And I think that because of that, there's a lot of sort of overflow back home.

I will say that that overflow is not limited to extremist violence. The 1980s are also when we see a huge paramilitary culture.; People are going to paintball courses, reading *Soldier of Fortune* magazine and playing laser tag, and all that stuff is also about the ricochet effect of the Vietnam War. It's just one that's much less deadly.

***The Turner Diaries* is a widely circulated novel among people on the far right, and you saw similarities between what happened on Wednesday and what happens in the book. Walk us through what you saw.**

The Turner Diaries is a book that is deeply important to the white power movement, not because it is a good novel, but because it answers a really important, imaginative question for this movement: How could a small fringe movement hope to achieve what it set out to do in the 1980s and has been trying to do ever since, which is to violently overthrow the United States, the most militarized superstate in the history of the world? In the novel, I think they talk about this as the problem of a gnat trying to assassinate an elephant.

And what *The Turner Diaries* lays out is really a program of sabotage and guerrilla warfare, including a lot of mass casualty attacks and eventually leading to the genocide of all people of color, all Jewish people and everyone who is non-white throughout the world. So it really does lay out this profoundly violent vision of how they might go from a fringe movement to holding a white homeland, to overthrowing the United States, to achieving an all-white planet. It's a terrifying vision.

Now, this book is more than a novel because of all of the different places it has shown up throughout the life of the white power movement. The white power terrorist group, The Order, kept a stack of them in the bunkhouse when they were training people. [*Editor's note: The Order was a group active in the early 1980s that carried out the killing of the Jewish talk radio host, Alan Berg*.] They distributed the book at paramilitary training camps; people traveled and sold the book. Timothy McVeigh traveled with this book in his car and sold it on the gun show circuit before he bombed the Oklahoma City building.

So here are the things in The *Turner Diaries* that appeared in real life: There is a string of huge mass casualty attacks, but there is also an attack on the Capitol building that is *not* a mass casualty attack. And this is an important distinction. Because there's one way to look at what happened this week and think, O*K, the bombs didn't detonate, the Molotov cocktails didn't ignite. The person who had a military grade weapon did not seem to fire that weapon. It was not a massacre. It was not a bombing.* The casualties were remarkably low.

But it did show how vulnerable the Capitol building is.

Exactly, and so the other way to read this is that this was never meant to be a mass casualty attack. This was meant to be something else. Because the attack on the Capitol in *The Turner Diaries*, it's not to augment the biggest body count it can. It's supposed to be a show of force that awakens other white people to the cause so that they can be recruited.

What do you think is going to happen to the radical far right next — in relationship to mainstream conservatism and in regard to mainstream American politics more broadly?

I think the most important thing to understand is that this is an opportunistic movement — which means that even though Trump seems to be able to incite these people, it does not mean he has the power to call them off. I don't think it is at all clear that he is in command of this as a force. At least insofar as we're talking about the white power contingent of the people who marched on January 6, I don't think it's at all clear that they're interested in political change or even in political activity, particularly. I think they're interested in mobilizing political discontent in order to wage war on democratic institutions. So one part of our conversation, of course, should be about President Trump's accountability, about what this means for the Republican Party, about responsible action by Republican lawmakers. I think that's an important set of conversations, but I'm not at all sure that that's what *these* activists are interested in. I don't think this was a move to dictate the future of the Republican Party. I think this is a move to bring about civil war and instigate civil strife.

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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 politicos, 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.