TABLE OF CONTENTS

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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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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

Peter D. Feaver

Dr. Feaver is a Visiting Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, on sabbatical leave from Duke University, where he is a professor of political science and public policy and directs the Program in American Grand Strategy. He served on the National Security Council staff in the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

Richard H. Kohn

Dr. Kohn is professor emeritus of history and peace, war, and defense at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was chief of Air Force history on the Air Staff at the Pentagon during the 1980s and has taught as a visiting or adjunct professor at the Army and National War Colleges.

Notes

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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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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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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/.

46. See Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Civil-Military Relations and Civilian Control

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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Civil-military relations at the top of government in the United States involves hundreds of people besides the most senior political and military leaders in the executive branch. The principals and staffs in OSD, JCS, the White House, the service secretariats, combatant commands, government departments, and independent agencies inside and outside the Department of Defense, and in the Congress, are involved in making policy, crafting and coordinating decisions, and executing the laws and decisions of elected and appointed officials. In this chapter on the subject from her book **The Inheritance: America's Military After Two Decades of War (2022),** ***Dr. Mara Karlin discusses the problems in cooperation and collaboration in recent years in national defense from her extensive experience in DoD and as a scholar of military affairs. For this, her second book, she draws on dozens of interviews with flag officers. Further information on her background is available at https://www.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Biography/Article/2499282/dr-mara-karlin/. Is your own experience consistent with her analysis?***

4

The Military's Relationship with Its Overseers

The Crisis of Meaningful Civilian Control

"We're probably raising Powells."

The last two decades of war have transformed the cracks that have always existed between the military and the civilians who formulate national security policy—most of whom are in the executive branch—into a chasm. A *crisis of meaningful civilian control* afflicts the military's relationship to the government, the third leg of Clausewitz's social trinity. The manner in which civilian political leaders have made decisions about military interventions, which has often been done with little strategic clarity, has, on the whole, represented a failure of civilian control of the military. Absent meaningful civilian control, the military has resorted to framing conflicts in its own ways, further fomenting the crisis. This is illustrated in four patterns of behavior: some in the military's tendency to blame civilians for failures rather than to conduct serious introspection; the resurgence of the Powell Doctrine; the popularity of

the "best military advice" concept; and military efforts to minimize civilian oversight in crucial arenas.

The crisis of confidence and the crisis of caring both interact with and shape the crisis of meaningful civilian control. The first has meant that civilian leaders have repeatedly sent the military to deal with problems it could not reasonably solve on its own. The second, in which the public elevated an increasingly alien military over other forms of public service while largely abdicating its own civic duty, has made the military feel increasingly isolated but means it hasn't had to face the costs of strategy failures abroad. Aggravating each of these legacies of war—harming the military's inability to understand its purpose and inhibiting the public's ability to shape what is being done in its name—impedes civilian control of the military.

In the U.S. system, there exist multiple institutional lenses for examining civil-military relations in general, and civilian control of the military in particular, because civilians oversee the military through both the executive and legislative branches of government. The president is the constitutionally declared commander in chief. Congress is given the "power of the purse"—the ability to disburse funds—and the right to authorize the use of force. The secretary of defense is the civilian "overseer in chief," manifesting oversight as the only civilian in the chain of command (besides the president) and engaging with the U.S. military daily on an extensive range of issues of enormous significance to national security. This role is, therefore, critical for understanding the crisis of meaningful civilian oversight.

Regardless of which lenses or theories one uses to examine civil-military relations, the entire concept of civilian control of the military is imbued with tension.[1] Some question if there truly is a crisis in meaningful civilian oversight and, more broadly, in civil-military relations. There is, traditionally, little anxiety about a military coup within the United States (even if tongue-in-cheek gifts like posters from the 1964 film *Seven Days in May*, which imagines a fictional coup attempt, do occasionally transit the Pentagon). Scholar and retired Major General Charles Dunlap warns that "crisis" is an old trope that "never materialized."[2] Scholar Peter Feaver is similarly skeptical. Recalling a conversation during a bumpy

period of civil-military relations in the mid-1990s, Feaver reminds us of his European colleague's quip: "In my country, we aspire to reach the depths to which you say you have sunk in the United States."[3] Yet Feaver acknowledges there are "challenges" and sees merit in the "paradox" in which scholarship of civil-military relations in the United States focuses on such concerns even though the problems often are quite small. Feaver sees productive utility in this worrying, which enables such problems to, ultimately, remain contained.[4] Other scholars, like Risa Brooks and Lindsey Cohn, and numerous practitioners, like the 2018 National Defense Strategy commissioners, are much more concerned.[5] Another indicator of these problematic dynamics is illustrated by a 2020 survey that found nearly 70 percent of post-9/11 veterans believe that "civilians who have not been to war should not question those who have."[6] While "crisis" may not be the term that resonates with everyone in this community of civil-military scholars and practitioners, it is undeniable that something in the civil-military relationship is adrift. These dynamics exist along a spectrum—they are not binary—and even those holding divergent views would, nevertheless, concur that civil-military relations have drifted into problematic territory. The strength of civilian control and the manifestation of civilian tensions with the military has not struck the appropriate balance. Natural tensions have created a gap. Norms that have been undone have exacerbated this gap and need to be reestablished.

While the post-9/11 wars have not resulted in a civil-military relationship crisis along the lines of General MacArthur during the Korean War—who was, ultimately, relieved of command by President Harry Truman for his unwillingness to accede to civilian guidance—one can and should expect healthier relations. Moreover, there exist particular challenges in managing these tensions inherent to extended periods of conflict, like the post-9/11 wars, since "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," whereas the military faces unprecedented pressure to show progress and to account for losses.[7]

Military leaders—like the commanders of the wars in Iraq and Af-

ghanistan over the last two decades—have repeatedly expressed confidence in their ability to accomplish the tasks given to them by the political leadership. The dearth of examples of senior officers acknowledging that the military's "can do" culture often has been at odds with what they were being told to do is striking. As victory has proven elusive, the military's assignment of blame to external factors like bad political decisions or insufficient resources—admittedly real problems, of course—has inhibited its ability to take sufficient ownership for the current state of affairs. If the military leadership has made insufficient effort to speak hard truths to the civilian powers, then it is incumbent on them to accept some responsibility for the course of the post-9/11 wars. Wholly ceding ownership of failure to civilians is wrong—and, ultimately, itself a failure of duty.

BLAMING OTHERS: A "STAB-IN-THE-BACK" NARRATIVE

Over nearly two decades of conflict, the crisis of meaningful civilian control has manifested in disproportionate blame for strategic missteps placed at the feet of civilian policymakers, leading to the hollowing out of civilian credibility with the military. As one former senior civilian official explained, the military has inherited "cynicism in multiple directions" that includes "a challenge with being truthful to itself." Another former senior officer lamented that "the military isn't ready to . . . accept that some part of our failure is due to lack of its own efforts." In his opinion, the military has accepted that it should have done a better job planning for the post-conflict phase in Iraq, but it has not acknowledged its other mistakes in the post-9/11 wars. "Isn't it our responsibility to help translate military outcomes into political ends? We failed to do our share of that here," he declared.

The unwillingness to conduct meaningful introspection was pointedly captured in one former senior officer's argument that the military has a "stab-in-the-back narrative" focused on blaming civilian leaders for their lack of commitment and for micromanaging the conflicts. Few narratives could be more familiar to students of military history than blaming the politicians and civilians for getting in the way of military

victory. For example, the "stab-in-the-back" theory of defeat was adopted by many German veterans following their loss in World War I, and it was popular in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.[8] I recognize that, as scholar Jeffrey P. Kimball underscores, such references can be "inflammatory." As he accurately points out, however, "It seems safe to hypothesize that such legends are common responses to defeat in war."[9] In the case of the Vietnam War, in particular, those who propagated this narrative believed that victory would have occurred "if the correct strategy had been followed and if certain of the civilian strategists had . . . allowed the U.S. military to fight the kind of war they were most experienced with."[10] Simply put, one should not be terribly surprised by the military blaming others, but it is, nevertheless, concerning.

The upbraiding largely falls on civilian leaders. The Army's study of the Iraq War, for example, holds few punches in castigating civilian officials like Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; in contrast, military leaders come across as largely blameless.[11] The military is "quick to blame other leaders like [Coalition Provincial Authority chief Paul] Bremer and Rumsfeld," explained one senior officer. This blame transcends those who have fought in the post-9/11 wars themselves. For example, while discussing the Iraq War at a military service academy, I heard young cadets recount the senior officials they blamed for the Iraq war, including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith. None named a single senior military leader. Given that most of them had been kindergarteners in 2003, this narrative was clearly one they had inherited from others rather than developed through lived experience. Like the "stab-in-the-back" narrative itself, of course, destructive inherited narratives are not new. Following the Vietnam War, former Marine James Webb—a future Reagan administration official and U.S. Senator—exacerbated civil-military tensions by helping infect the post–Vietnam War generation of servicemembers with disdain for those outside the military. In his view, the public wrongly blamed the military for defeat. In his view, the military leadership should have excoriated civilians for a number of wartime sins, including dereliction, micromanagement, misunderstanding, and poor decisionmaking.[12]

This dynamic of blame extends throughout the Obama years, as well. As one senior retired general officer lamented, "the senior military realized under the Obama administration they should be seen and not heard." One general officer explained that he saw Obama administration officials as "suspicious of the military . . . like [they thought] it had been given too much latitude and deference, and it resulted in strategic overreach."

A different senior retired general officer erupted in anger when discussing the Obama administration, explaining that "the military was deliberately marginalized by people who didn't want it to have a voice." He went further, claiming that "nobody even cared to win" and lambasting civilian Obama administration leaders for allegedly "cry[ing] crocodile tears at Walter Reed [Medical Center] but not car[ing] about the outcome" of the wars. While surely exaggerating the case, his vitriol was conspicuous, and his accusations represented a dangerous impugnment of the motivation and competence of the civilian leaders with whom he had worked. He diagnosed the Bush administration as "blind to the complexities and risks of action" and the Obama administration as "blind to the risks of inaction," remarking that "it's extraordinary the extent to which there was self-delusion [among the civilian leaders] in these wars." He feared that contemporary civilian officials, like those of the Vietnam era, were "looking for what Lyndon Johnson was looking for: military advice that conforms to their predispositions." More specifically, another retired senior general officer said, "I've been astounded by how much bitterness I sense from the military about the Obama administration," underscoring that he found that "the military—the senior leadership down to the mid-grade officer corps—is very suspect of the civilian leadership."

One often-cited driver of this suspicion is President Obama's 2011 decision to withdraw from Iraq. While the Obama administration leadership saw the Bush administration's agreement with the Iraqi government on withdrawal as binding, that approach meant the Obama administration would bear any subsequent blame (or take the credit) for following through with it. As ISIS erupted across Iraq and Syria and the security situation in Iraq declined over the years that followed, some military leaders grew frustrated with civilian decisionmakers. Indeed, a former senior civilian official underscored that the decision to withdraw is "often characterized inaccurately in part because of what happened afterwards."

To be very clear, much of this blame is well deserved. Civilian leaders have the authority and the responsibility to make decisions—best described by scholar Peter Feaver as the "right to be right," but also the "right to be wrong."[13] Throughout the post-9/11 wars, there have been many examples of them making the wrong decision, of course.[14] As one former senior general officer underscored, "Ultimately, the civilian leadership owns the decisions, but they make those based on best military advice." While his statement is prima facie accurate, it also is a rather subtle reminder that the military leadership has weighty responsibilities, as well. Failing to exercise those responsibilities, particularly due to distrust of civilians, can have dangerous consequences for the responsible use of force. Civilian leadership is an enduring reality for past, present, and future military leaders, so engaging it productively—even amid dysfunctional and potentially catastrophic decisions—remains critical.

"LIKE VIETNAM, WE'RE PROBABLY RAISING POWELLS"

This third crisis is colored by the resurgence of the Powell Doctrine in the post-9/11 wars, which came up often in my interviews, and has a concerningly constrained view of what constitutes meaningful civilian control. The Powell Doctrine stemmed from Colin Powell's perplexing service in the Vietnam War. His first tour in Vietnam ended early because, he was told, the conflict was going well. His second tour was colored by the My Lai massacre investigation. His thinking was further refined by two key events: Operation Just Cause, the U.S. military operation to depose Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, and Operation Desert Storm, the Persian Gulf War. As he described both during and after his service as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff (CJCS), Powell believed that the United States must possess "a clear political objective and stick to it. Use all the force necessary, and do not apologize for going in big if that is what it takes. Decisive force ends wars quickly and in the

long run saves lives. Whatever threats we faced in the future, I intended to make these rules the bedrock of my military counsel."[15]

He underscored the criticality of capturing American public backing for war, arguing that the failure to align each leg of Carl von Clausewitz's social trinity—the military, the government, and the people—in support of the Vietnam War led to defeat.[16] Conversely, he argued that the Persian Gulf War was Vietnam's antithesis. In his view, the "best part from my perspective is the way in which the American people saw this operation," which he explained as commanding broad American support despite prewar concerns over "tens of thousands" of potential American casualties.[17]

While Powell is quick to emphasize that "the so-called Powell Doctrine exists in no military manual," and argues that it is not composed of "rules," neither he nor other senior military leaders have hesitated to write about or discuss it.[18] Powell's immediate successors as CJCS, General Hugh Shelton and General Richard Myers, indicated their support for the key elements of his doctrine.[19] Major Mike Jackson, deputy director of the Modern War Institute at West Point, recounted how during his time as "a cadet in the mid-to-late 1990s, the Powell Doctrine was essentially gospel at West Point."[20] Indeed, in his retirement speech one year before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, CENTCOM Commander General Anthony Zinni discussed the multitude of challenges that the U.S. military faced, including al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, and expressed his fear that the U.S. military would have difficulty responding to these challenges and then "bitch and moan . . . dust off the Weinberger Doctrine and the Powell Doctrine and throw them in the face of our civilian leadership."[21]

Despite its popularity, the Powell Doctrine suffers from some flaws that limit its utility in conflicts like the post-9/11 wars. First, it offers an incredibly limited conception of conflict. Powell's emphasis on "using all the force necessary" and his use of terms like "decisive force" leaves too little room for the importance of deterrence before and during conflict and escalation throughout it.[22] By dismissing the potential political-military importance of gradual escalation in coercing adversaries—as Powell put it during discussions about Bosnia, once civilians "tell me

it's limited, it means they do not care whether you achieve a result or not"—he thrusts policymakers into the untenable position of binary all-or-nothing military campaigns rather than nuanced ones appropriately scaled to a particular conflict and its unique political context.[23]

Looking at the Persian Gulf War and Powell's recommendations for using overwhelming force, one scholar wondered if this view "may in itself have contributed to there being a Gulf crisis in the first place." Particularly worrisome, the scholar posits that "this focus on war-fighting strategy led the U.S. military to underestimate the value of limited military action as a deterrent to war in the first place" rather than launching a full-blown conflict.[24]

In immediately pushing for such an enormous force commitment during the Persian Gulf conflict, one wonders if Powell was testing the civilian leadership's seriousness rather than deftly aligning resources with strategy. Given the unremarkable shows of force and lack of deterrent moves by the U.S. military before it initiated the massive mobilization of half a million troops to the Middle East, it is entirely possible that the Powell Doctrine stood in the way of policymakers taking deterrent steps that could have avoided war in the first place. Regardless, the doctrine's emphasis on using the various tools of statecraft separately from the threat to use force also ignores the complementary impact the former can and should have with the military.[25] Although Powell described his doctrine in 2017 as "classical military doctrine," it clearly is anything but.[26]

Second, the doctrine's persistent desire for "a clear political objective" before using force dismisses that such objectives often evolve during conflict.[27] It is an unrealistic standard and presents a catastrophic starting point for healthy civil-military relations, particularly given the character of the post-9/11 wars. As scholar Eliot Cohen described, "the result . . . is a military posture that is prepared only for all-or-nothing operations, likely to provide civilian leaders with only the harshest of military choices, or indeed none at all."[28] Indeed, Powell described the Gulf War as "the only time in my career, or in, frankly, most of American military history, where a chairman [of the joint chiefs of staff] can say to the president of the United States, I guarantee

the outcome. And the reason I could guarantee that outcome is that the president gave us everything we asked for."[29] Ironically, then-national security advisor Brent Scowcroft believed that Powell's massive request for personnel and assets was "deliberately large with the hope that the President would reject them and there'd be no operation." He advised President Bush to give Powell everything he requested—not because he believed it was needed, but because he thought it would be the only way to get the military on board.[30]

The civil-military implications of his doctrine are loud and problematic, stemming not just from binary views on the use of force but also its tendency to shape binary views on the proper roles and responsibilities of civilians and military personnel that severely impedes the former's meaningful control of the latter. As one scholar explained, "There is a definite sense of 'us' and 'them' that permeates Powell's views on statecraft and the use of military force. His 'us' is definitely his extended family—the armed forces of the United States. Powell's 'them' are his civilian masters, including the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and their advisors, experts and academics."[31]

What is most meaningful about the Powell Doctrine, however, is its resurgence during the post-9/11 wars. If this book's Dickensian "ghost of wars past" is Vietnam, then my interviews made clear that the Powell Doctrine remains a "ghost of wars present." One senior general officer warned that, given the character of terrorism, "it's hard to shoehorn the Powell Doctrine in where we are today." Still, he contrasted the wars of today with the Gulf War, which "had objectives, accomplished them, and went home," and identified the Powell Doctrine as a preferable approach to the use of force. One senior officer snapped, "Like Vietnam, we're probably raising Powells: I went to war and I did everything you asked and I fought honorably, but dammit, what do you want me to do?" In his view, the last two decades of war "will create a leader—like the Powells that said we are not going to fall into that again."

One retired senior general officer said his peers use language like "Colin Powell, [when he said] stay out of that kind of thing." In line with the Powell Doctrine, one senior general officer explained that "there's this fallacy of limited war." He judged that the United States should

not get into a conflict "unless our vital national interests [are] at such a threatened state that we're prepared to make a long-term investment." Similarly, diplomat Kael Weston quotes a three-star general officer reflecting on his top lesson from serving in Iraq, a lesson that sounds about as impractical as the Powell Doctrine: If "you are not going to stay, don't go."[32] Based on his experience with the most senior military leaders, one former senior official feared they planned to "win big and get out" in future wars, in line with the Powell Doctrine. An overreaction toward the Powell Doctrine as a part of the legacies of the post-9/11 wars could, thus, inform war planning in a dramatic way.

While there is no contemporary survey research that explicitly examines the military's views of the Powell Doctrine, there have been a few illuminating proxy surveys. In 2004, 45 percent of mid-grade military officers supported "decisive force," a key element of the Powell Doctrine.[33] In 2011, nearly the same percentage of post-9/11 veterans supported the employment of "overwhelming force" against terrorism.[34] And in 2016, more than half of veterans supported key elements of the doctrine, such as using force "quickly and massively," but "only in pursuit of the goal of total victory."[35]

There are a number of implications of the Powell Doctrine's resurgence in the military. Looking back, it may have made it more difficult for military leaders to consider limited objectives for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan given that commanders consistently developed ambitious campaign plans and requested additional resources. One former senior general officer concurred, saying the military "only understand[s] the big approach to war" and could not envision a different type of conflict. Today, it shapes how the military is learning from the post-9/11 wars. The Army's study of the Iraq War, for example, indulges in Powell Doctrine-esque rhetoric such as propagating the notion that the United States's wartime objectives were static.[36] Looking forward, it may feed the military's obsession with achieving tactical and operational goals as opposed to strategic-level successes. Since waging war is a political instrument, the military's conduct always should be subservient to the political goal. Operational victory means little unless it results in a strategic success. The military's judgment must, therefore, serve the

political objective. This will prove difficult if the Powell Doctrine also encourages an "us-versus-them" mentality in the military that encourages greater mistrust of, or skepticism toward, the civilian leaders who send troops to war.

Scholar-practitioner Frank Hoffman, a self-proclaimed skeptic of the Powell Doctrine, tried to apply its criteria as a frame through which to analyze the post-9/11 wars because of its continued resonance. In doing so, he found serious flaws: fuzzy objectives, misplaced enthusiasm for clear victory, and the fading drumbeat of public disinterest. His argument, that the doctrine does, ultimately, "serve a useful purpose . . . to ensure the fundamental questions about purpose, risk and costs were addressed up front" is particularly compelling given the gut-wrenching costs of nearly two decades at war.[37] For the record, Hoffman does not say that the doctrine has succeeded in doing so but, rather, that it can be useful in facilitating proper scrutiny of strategy. Steve Leonard, the "Doctrine Man," is an advocate of referencing the Powell Doctrine for a similar reason. He sees it as a tool for asking the right questions: "not a checklist, but a menu for critical analysis and strategy formulation."[38]

Might a new set of views replace the Powell Doctrine? In his analysis of the *Washington Post*'s "Afghanistan Papers," journalist Greg Jaffe recalled that the last time the U.S. military was unable to attain victory, in the Vietnam War, "its new religion became the Powell Doctrine."[39] One senior official was skeptical that we will see the development of an alternative, however, as the Powell Doctrine became accepted in large part because the military itself accepted its defeat in the Vietnam War. In his view, "for the next chairman of the joint chiefs of staff to suggest a Powell Doctrine, he would need to acknowledge that Iraq and Afghanistan were failures; the military isn't ready to do that." Similarly, a senior general officer said that "there have not been the decisive conclusions to these conflicts that will set in stone a break with the past and allow us to start fresh in the future." To follow Jaffe, after two decades of inconclusive conflict in the post-9/11 wars, we do not know whether the military will become Powell Doctrine fundamentalists, strategic agnostics, or converts to some new doctrinal religion. We can, however, hope that the most effective proselytizers will preach greater awareness and understanding of how one fights and, hopefully, why meaningful civilian control is crucial.

A FIVE-SIDED TOWER OF BABEL: UNTANGLING CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

One of the major reasons for the crisis of meaningful civilian control is a mess of authorities, guidance, roles, and responsibilities among the organizations and people who manage violence.[40] Such a convoluted swirl—exacerbated by personalities—has bedeviled the United States throughout the post-9/11 wars. A cacophony of strategic guidance across the Department of Defense, ultimately, impedes meaningful civilian control because it makes it harder to determine which guidance is superior; easier to cherry-pick convenient justifications for preferred policies; trickier to cut through convoluted and confused dialogue over intent and efficacy; and safer to engage in bitter bureaucratic knife-fighting than otherwise.[41] This confusion over roles and responsibilities can be well understood by examining the office of the secretary of defense (OSD). While it is the epicenter of steady civilian oversight of the military inside the Pentagon, its purpose is poorly understood.

The secretary of defense, like the president, manifests civilian control. "The Secretary (of Defense) is the principal assistant to the President in all matters relating to the Department of Defense" and provides "authority, direction, and control" over the Department of Defense, according to U.S. law.[42] In establishing the position of secretary of defense, President Harry Truman understood the criticality of having a senior member of his cabinet wholly consumed with military affairs. He created it "to enhance the powers and effectiveness of his own office; by shifting military coordination to a supersecretary and a chief of staff, Truman hoped to free himself for more immediate concerns" and to strengthen the civilian role in the chain of command.[43]

In practice, the secretary of defense is the most senior civilian who engages the U.S. military on a daily basis and on an extensive range of issues. In day-to-day operations, the secretary is the civilian "overseer in chief." Of course, the secretary of defense alone cannot manage the De-

partment of Defense—as I have written elsewhere, "oversight requires an organization, not an individual"—but he is not expected to do so.[44] The secretary of defense exerts civilian control with and through his staff. Meaningful civilian control requires civilian oversight, which I define as "watchful and responsible care" over the formulation, implementation, and assessment of national security affairs.[45] The OSD must exercise robust oversight to make civilian control by the secretary of defense possible. OSD's purpose is to "assist the Secretary of Defense in carrying out the Secretary's duties and responsibilities and to carry out such other duties as may be prescribed by law."[46] OSD staff cover a wide range of issues on behalf of the secretary of defense that have shaped the U.S. approach to the post-9/11 wars, including research, engineering, acquisitions, policy, personnel, readiness, intelligence, and budgeting, among others.[47]

By informing the secretary of defense on these issues and shaping the department's policies, OSD staff help the secretary facilitate the alignment of political ends and defense resources in strategic ways. To be clear, OSD is not a separate power center in the Department of Defense. Rather, it is "the management and advisory team" for the (ultimate) boss: the secretary of defense."[48] Scholar Charles Stevenson's book on the secretary of defense provides the most thorough description of the responsibilities of OSD personnel: "They are tasked to develop and promulgate policies to support U.S. national security objectives; to oversee DoD plans and programs; to develop systems to supervise policy implementation and program execution; and to serve as the focal point for DoD participation in other security community activities. In short, they are extra sets of arms and legs, eyes and ears, and authoritative voices for the secretary and other senior officials."[49]

As one former senior civilian official explained, "It isn't just a single voice—not just the secretary of defense or the deputy secretary of defense—where oversight gets executed. The Department is far too big of an enterprise. There has to be lieutenants."

Without a capable and informed staff, no individual has the wherewithal to do the secretary of defense's job decently, much less effectively.[50] In line with Deborah Avant's work on principal-agent theory,

"principals must think hard about how to select appropriate agents and monitor them to ensure that they act as the principal prefers."[51] Such "appropriate agents" in the context of the Defense Department must have the capabilities and expertise to guide how the military implements secretary of defense-level intentions. To take one example: the under secretary of defense for policy (USDP) plays a critical role in supporting the "overseer in chief." Over the years, this position has been refined by Congress, including most recently in the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, which stated these responsibilities include "overall direction and supervision" over the National Defense Strategy, global force posture, and force development, in addition to guiding and reviewing war plans.[52] Issues like how to manage, employ, and develop the military, and how to treat U.S. allies, partners, competitors, and adversaries around the world, are fundamental to meaningful civilian control.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS HEIGHTEN CRISIS

Across nearly two decades of conflict, the dynamics inside the Pentagon heightened the crisis of meaningful civilian control. The balance of power swayed between the office of the secretary of defense and the joint staff. It is useful to first recall that the Goldwater-Nichols reforms, which made the CJCS the "principal military advisor" to the president and to the secretary of defense, empowered the joint staff, as did creating a vice chairman role. As one former senior civilian official reflected, however, this "inadvertently undermined civilian control and blurred the distinctions between the Secretary's and Chairman's responsibilities," which exacerbated dynamics between OSD and the joint staff.[53] This did not condemn OSD to impotence, however. For example, Donald Rumsfeld—who had famously tense relationships with senior military leaders—entered the George. W. Bush administration as its secretary of defense; he was quoted as exhorting, "I want to reinstitute civilian control of the military!"[54] Unsurprisingly, Rumsfeld's team in OSD held a lot of relative power and had a rocky relationship with the joint staff. This dynamic is most colorfully described by journalist Dana Priest, who wrote that they

"weren't willing to take anything for granted. If you said the sun was up, they raised the blind and said, 'Let us see.'"[55]

Later in the post-9/11 wars, under the tenure of Secretary Robert Gates, which spanned the Bush and Obama administrations, relations between the office of the secretary of defense and the joint staff were markedly different. To be sure, civil-military tensions still existed. Gates recounted in his memoirs how frustrating it was to get CJCS Admiral Michael Mullen to support him on rebalancing the military to focus on non-state conflict. Mullen, who served in that role from late 2007 through late 2011, did not agree with Gates's decision to include in the defense strategy language that rebalancing would *"require assuming some measure of additional, but acceptable, risk in the traditional sphere."*[56] Instead, he sought to issue strategic guidance that ignored the issues of terrorism, the Iraq War, and the Afghanistan War; this was bureaucratically contradictory, since it was "the opposite of what he and I had been telling Congress," according to Gates, and politically insensitive, since he planned to release it just before the 2008 presidential election.[57]

This represented a rather dramatic violation of scholar Peter Feaver's description of civil-military roles, in which the "military quantifies the risk, the civilian judges it."[58] During Mullen's tenure as chairman, moreover, tensions bubbled as Mullen sought to enhance the CJCS's stature. Gates believed that Mullen "felt the role of the chairman had been diminished over a period of years, and he was determined to strengthen it and make the chairman a much more publicly visible senior military leader."[59]

In spite of these tensions and occasional blips, however, Gates's tenure is seen as a zenith in relations between these two entities that has not been attained since. "I believe the last time there was true balance was when Gates was there," lamented one former senior official, who defined "balance" as having capable and confident senior civilian leaders willing and able to execute meaningful oversight. A few former senior officials discussed what conditions allowed Gates to strike this balance between the civilian and military leadership. First, the secretary of defense had a substantial background in national security affairs. Second, he had both President Bush and President Obama's full support to run

the Department of Defense in line with his vision. Third, he actively managed dynamics between the office of the secretary of defense and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff.

While Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld met these thresholds to varying extents, his approach to management alienated key constituencies. One former senior official said that Gates told his team that both OSD and the joint staff formed "one staff that supports me" and he wanted everyone to "play nice." For example, under his leadership, the under secretary of defense for policy and the vice chairman of the joint chiefs of staff signed a memorandum of understanding to facilitate collaboration between them and their staffs. In doing so, explained another former senior official, they hoped to develop better policy by better staffing the secretary of defense and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. Overall, as a final former senior official explained, "The biggest factor in all of this is leadership and having a secretary of defense who knows how things are supposed to work."

In the years since Gates's departure, tensions have grown between the office of the secretary of defense and the joint staff for a multiplicity of reasons. Indeed, they have grown so acute that one former senior official compared it to the brief and (infamously rocky) professional relationship between Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and CJCS Powell. After both Aspin and Powell departed in 1994, new Secretary of Defense William Perry and new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili gathered their senior leadership teams and declared that "this is dysfunctional, does not serve our country, and will change." They made it clear that the secretary of defense and CJCS would now be one another's "closest counterparts." They warned that "anyone who can't get with the program will be thanked for their service" and then fired. According to this former official, the dynamics between the joint staff and the office of the secretary of defense changed for the better "within one week." Unfortunately, as of January 2021, there has been no similar senior civilian and military leader reckoning despite growing dysfunction that serves the nation no better now than it did in 1994.

Multiple former senior officials emphasized that the secretary of defense must play a crucial role in pushing past these tensions to be ef-

fective. They argued that the secretary is uniquely positioned to inform and actively manage civil-military dynamics. "The biggest factor in all of this is leadership and having a secretary of defense who knows how the system was designed, how things are supposed to work—what good looks like," explained one former senior official. Change only happens in the Defense Department, as one emphasized, "if the secretary himself rides herd and fires people." A third former senior civilian official emphasized that the under secretary of defense for policy's roles and responsibilities "can't be exercised if the secretary doesn't want them to be—or if the secretary isn't attuned to making it possible for the under secretary to do that." But if the secretary is unwilling to make it clear that OSD staff speaks for him or her, then the system goes awry. "If the secretary doesn't set that tone and guard it and protect against infringements where he or she sees that happen," then the joint staff will dismiss or ignore the civilian staff. Using colorful metaphors to describe their frustration with the secretaries of defense who failed to set that atmosphere, one former senior official exclaimed that the "fish rots from the head," and counseled, "if no one is guarding the henhouse, the fox is going to have a field day."

The CJCS plays a crucial role as well, of course. Chairmen throughout the post-9/11 wars have varied considerably in how they approached the role and their interaction with senior civilian leaders. For example, General Richard Myers was known for taking a more quiescent and constrained view of his role. General Martin Dempsey had a more defined professional vision: he described his job as being "the dash," as in the punctuation mark, bridging political and military affairs.[60]

More recently, General Joseph Dunford, a well-respected, professional, and accomplished military leader who served as chairman from 2015 to 2019, "came in with a very distinct agenda for what he believed should be the purview of the joint chiefs of staff," explained one senior officer. As chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Dunford sought to increase the chairman's power, including working with Congress to gain more authority to allocate and transfer forces.[61] Under the rubric of "global integration," which Congress mandated as the chairman's role in 2016, Dunford played a more meaningful leadership role across the

military services and the combatant commands—and, in particular, in adjudicating their differing priorities.[62] The ostensible reasoning that Dunford sought this authority was to make the Defense Department better able to contend with contemporary and future wars, including the changing speed of communications, emerging domains of warfare, and expanding global challenges—although other possible justifications include his desire to escape civilian micromanagement and overcome key civilian leadership vacancies.[63] It is, of course, not only the joint staff who can or should adjudicate inter-combatant command debates.

Throughout the tenure of Secretary of Defense James Mattis, from 2017 through 2018, the six-month tenure of Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, and the two-month gap before Secretary of Defense Mark Esper was sworn in, civilian control declined over critical defense processes, including war planning, managing ongoing military operations, and building the future military. Over the same period, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff enthusiastically embraced more influence over these issues. In short, Mattis and Shanahan shirked their responsibilities to uphold meaningful civilian control of the military.[64] In late 2018, a congressionally-mandated bipartisan commission of former senior civilian and military officials assessed civil-military relations in its quadrennial review of national defense strategy.[65] As the resulting report of the National Defense Strategy Commission warned, "civilian voices have been relatively muted on issues at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy."[66] The commissioners' effort was particularly notable, since previous iterations had not raised this issue.[67]

For years under the Trump administration, the formal processes for senior civilian appointees, including the secretary of defense, to review war plans did not occur. Simultaneously, the joint staff increasingly encroached on this responsibility. For example, the chairman adjusted the war plan review process so that multiple opportunities for the secretary and other senior civilian appointees to review plans, known as in-progress reviews, were eliminated, while the chairman himself played a greater role in a process increasingly adapted to his needs.[68] In 2018, the chairman released strategic guidance in which OSD is largely absent in its staff function and in which the secretary of defense appears only

marginally in relation to topics that are core to that position's responsibilities as established in Title 10 of the U.S. Code.[69] The National Defense Strategy Commission, which, of course, understood that war plans that disregard the political aspects of conflict do not work, reiterated the crucial role played by senior civilian officials in war planning. They also, apparently, felt that this role was threatened, because they urged senior civilian officials to "*exercise fully their Title 10 responsibility for preparing guidance for and reviewing contingency plans.*"[70]

As previously mentioned, over the same period, Chairman Dunford also sought greater authority to shift operational forces around the world.[71] The National Defense Strategy Commission expressed its strong dissent, declaring that, "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."[72] And deliberate or not, "when the chairman sees the civilian role as very circumscribed, his subordinates will pick up on that and adopt that posture," explained one former senior civilian official. While Dunford's approach helped "balance . . . and say no to the combatant commands," according to one retired senior general officer, a different senior officer told me that his tenure as chairman was also marked by a period of "emotionalism" and the "us vs. them dynamic" between OSD and the joint staff described earlier. While the chairman's writ has expanded in recent years, the joint staff still should be cautious of infringing on the secretary's mandate to lead strategic planning in the department.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, for his part, tried to uphold the position's responsibilities; for example, by actively managing the Pentagon through regular, secretary of defense-hosted senior leader forums to review progress on priorities and to oversee implementation of the National Defense Strategy.[73] He also publicly acknowledged the dearth of critical war plan reviews conducted by his most recent successors. While he left them unnamed, Esper was clearly referencing his immediate predecessors, Secretary of Defense Mattis and Acting Secretary of Defense Shanahan. Indeed, as Esper publicly declared in summer 2020, under his leadership, "the Department is updating key war plans for the first time in years."[74] Nevertheless, his loss of influence with President Trump grew clear throughout the second half of 2020, particularly on issues like military base names and the role of the military domestically, resulting in questions about whether he had become a lame duck—questions that were answered when he was fired just after the 2020 presidential election. Clearly, the gap for future senior civilian leaders to fill is substantial.

There is no doubt that personalities also played a key role in deepening the confusion over civilian roles. "I don't think the reason that the power balance has gotten out of whack over there is because all of a sudden the civilians got stupid," remarked one former senior civilian official. Another former senior civilian official observed that "the erosion of goodwill and trust seems much more significant today . . . [before Mattis and Shanahan] it didn't have a depth to it like now." Similarly, one general officer feared that "too many in uniform believe they have insight due to their operational experience or special insight that makes their political military advice greater than their civilian counterparts. That's not accurate. To me, that's dangerous." Of course, personalities also can help cut through the confusion. For example, retired Marine officer Robert Work's efforts as deputy secretary of defense during the Obama administration to refocus the department on high-end conventional conflict demonstrate that meaningful civilian oversight, when exercised by the right civilians, can shift the course of national security.[75]

While congressional involvement has helped clarify roles and responsibilities, it also has made them more complex and difficult. Title 10 is littered with overlapping responsibilities for the chairman of the joint chiefs and other senior civilian and military leaders, including those of the secretary of defense, the under secretary of defense for policy, and combatant commanders.[76] These overlapping responsibilities foment clutter and duplication at best, and considerable confusion and conflict at worst.[77]

Throughout the post-9/11 wars, tensions grew, decreased, and then grew again between senior civilian and military leaders over the most fundamental issues of how to wage war. In the Bush and Obama administrations, and first half of the Trump administration, shifts in the

power balance between OSD and the joint staff—particularly over understanding roles and responsibilities, and aggravated by personalities—often made the issues over which they wrestled even thornier. The consequences of this for democratic control of the armed forces and the military's relevance to larger foreign policy campaigns are profoundly worrisome.

"BEST MILITARY ADVICE": THE RETURN OF HUNTINGTON

One example of the crisis of meaningful civilian control is illustrated in the term "best military advice,"[78] which took hold among the military leadership throughout the last few years of the post-9/11 wars.[79] While the phrase initially came into widespread use just after the September 11 attacks and was occasionally employed by CJCSs General Richard Myers, General Peter Pace, Admiral Michael Mullen, and General Martin Dempsey, it skyrocketed across the Pentagon during the tour of General Joseph Dunford, who frequently used and, therefore, popularized it.[80] For a few years, the phrase infused the joint staff and combatant commands—and their PowerPoint slides and their interagency memorandums—becoming so pervasive that it even made that critical leap into a well-recognized acronym, BMA, as James Golby and I have discussed elsewhere.[81] The term was not defined in law, so it is most generously described by then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford as "professional, competent, and apolitical" military judgment informed by geopolitics and national interests.[82]

As a concept, "best military advice" is a natural outgrowth of civil-military relations scholar Samuel Huntington's theory of objective control. Huntington draws a firm line between the purview of civilians and the purview of the military. The maintenance of these separate spheres epitomizes Huntington's approach. Although this is appealing in its clarity, to military personnel who hate the idea of civilian "meddling," it is, nevertheless, misguided and, ultimately, unhelpful.[83] Scholar Michael O'Hanlon notes how responsibilities cannot be easily separated for military and civilian leaders; they "must of necessity encroach on each other's policymaking territory."[84] In practice, objective control places

significant constraints and limits on the ability of civilians to monitor and control the armed forces.[85] That, in turn, can influence how military and civilian leaders understand their responsibilities in wartime. This is worrying, as scholar Risa Brooks warns:

> Huntingtonian cultural notions can lead to an inadequate sense of ownership among military leaders over the strategic outcomes of their operations. If military leaders offer their advice and civilians do not provide the recommended resources or otherwise heed their recommendations, then military leaders can skirt responsibility for strategic failures. Rather than seeing themselves as mutually accountable for a war's outcome, military leaders influenced by Huntington norms may contend that civilians lost the war because they did not give the military what it needed to win. Alternatively, if military leaders achieve their mission's objective, they may count it as a success, whether or not it contributes to achieving larger strategic or political objectives in the war.[86]

In line with Brooks's warnings about Huntington's approach, "best military advice" is unhealthy for civil-military relations and effective strategic dialogue. "Best" implies that it should not be questioned—a curious implication given the principle of civilian control in the U.S. system. Its insinuation of superiority and its binary approach to engagement impede effective debate, as does its often-false suggestion of a unified military voice. Unitary "military" views to the secretary of defense do not represent advice, not least because unitary military views do not exist.[87] They, instead, represent a narrow and often unrealistic understanding of national security policymaking, colored by repeated and dynamic engagements among a wide variety of actors. In that vein, "best military advice" can be particularly problematic when it is used as an excuse to not share important information with civilian policymakers.

Outside the CJCS's private and personal views being given to the secretary of defense, his or her independent perspective would surely benefit from civil-military discourse before they are provided. Simply put, disagreements should be aired openly rather than dismissed using "best

military advice" as a bureaucratic power play. Above all, "best military advice" is an attempt to draw a thick line between the use of force on one side and politics on the other. That is both a fundamental and dangerous misunderstanding of the purpose of violence as a tool of statecraft, as well as impossible to achieve.

Others, particularly those in the military, hold more positive views of the phrase "best military advice." Some see it as a construct that rather than overwhelming civilians, acknowledges that military advice should be based on deep expertise and rigorous analysis. According to this view, "best military advice" is a defense mechanism against civilian micromanagement and offers clarity on what the military can (and, theoretically, cannot) deliver. Others suggest it is a way for the military to play its role in the policymaking trenches while avoiding political minefields. One general officer, for example, tried to outline how "best military advice" evolves as circumstances and decisions do. He described that "BMA shifts to a compromise position based on other aspects of government . . . from a purist standpoint, BMA . . . has to evolve to that and has to be in lockstep with civilian leadership."

These positive interpretations contrasted vividly with the negative attitudes toward "best military advice" held by the civilians I interviewed. They overwhelmingly brought it up in frustration, and often in reference to the military limiting civilian control. To take one example, a former senior official recalled how then Chief of Staff of the Army General Mark Milley would publicly say that the Army needed to be larger—contrary to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter's public statements—and when approached by a senior official about these comments would explain that he was merely offering "my best military advice." But Milley had discussed the Army's end-strength with the secretary of defense and the president, and the civilian leaders had made the decision to go with a smaller number based on a specific force planning construct. The senior official relates that he pushed back: "You can't go out and say we need a 1.24 million man Army." But Milley believed that the force planning construct—which envisioned a single large war at a time—was wrong. The Army needed to be prepared for war with Russia and North Korea simultaneously.

This engagement demonstrates one pernicious aspect of "best mili-

ry advice." Milley was effectively saying that he had given his best mili-
ry advice, it was disregarded, so the consequences would be wholly on
e senior civilian leadership. As another former senior civilian official
apped when this topic came up in an interview, "We've been listening
to BMA for 17 years and how's that got us?"

Huntington's return through the vehicle of "best military advice" is notable. His approach is taught in U.S. professional military education.[88] Recent surveys of West Point cadets found support for what three scholars termed a "conflicted Huntington model."[89] While nearly three of four cadets surveyed agreed that civil-military collaboration resulted in the best outcomes, they also overwhelmingly adhered to the notion that "military leaders should expect to receive clear guidance about goals and objectives at the beginning of the planning process." The latter is particularly worrisome because it dismisses the iterative nature of national security policymaking. Although only around half of the cadets believe a fundamental element of Huntington's argument—"the concept of separate spheres and a clear division of labor"—it is, nevertheless, a staggering number who, ultimately, adhere to the notion that civilians should stick to a limited set of defense issues.[90] Overall, Huntington's return through the vehicle of "best military advice" reflects the confusion and uncertainty that has plagued the post-9/11 wars, particularly over civil-military roles, responsibilities, and missions. The tension it inspires between civilians and their uniformed counterparts appears to be antagonistic rather than productive.

COMMENCING REPARATIONS: RETHINKING ADVICE AND OVERSIGHT

To fix this crisis of meaningful civilian control, both the military and civilians need to take five key steps. Restoring relationships requires serious efforts to rebuilt trust, to set common expectations, and to stop catastrophizing—that is, to stop constantly revisiting their lowest moments. The military can broadly define advice, and civilians can ensure they have the appropriate expertise and capabilities; both must do their part to facilitate consistent dialogue and foster an atmosphere of collaboration, trust, and transparency to mend and tend relations.

First, the military should more broadly conceptualize the advice it gives civilian leaders.[91] Advice should not simply include recommendations—*do this* or *don't do that*—but, instead, run the gamut of realistic options and assessments. These options should be discrete, paired with detailed costs and benefits, and rigorously assessed. "Military advice should be policy-driven and politically informed," as James Golby and I have written previously. That involves demonstrating the military's cognizance of the guidance set by civilian leaders. One particularly thoughtful and realistic example of such advice comes from former CJCS Martin Dempsey. He responded to a letter from Senator Carl Levin inquiring about military options for Syria—a particularly thorny issue from both a policy and a political perspective—by offering nuanced insights over a series of potential options.[92]

By suggesting thoughtful and considered observations, military leaders should recognize that the advice they give ultimately informs a broader set of considerations by civilians. Civilian politicians like the president and the secretary of defense will weigh options, not based just on Department of Defense priorities but including broader issues and dynamics, as well. Simply put, politics matters. Perhaps civilians did not do a good job helping the military to understand that perspective, but politics, nevertheless, played a role in these decisions.

That view—which will resonate with a student of Clausewitz—is obvious. Two new books offer good examples of how the senior political leader's perspective is different from the senior military leader's view. In President Obama's memoir, he recounted a conversation with General David Petraeus about the balance sheet of continuing the war in Iraq. Petraeus was unable to explain to Obama what circumstances would enable the military to conclude its mission and when those might come to fruition. Obama explained, "I couldn't blame Petraeus for wanting to finish the mission. If I were in your shoes, I told him, I'd want the same thing. But a president's job required looking at a bigger picture." Unlike Petraeus, whose mandate was obviously limited, Obama was responsible for looking at balancing across global security threats, mounting economic challenges at home, and the impact on the force writ large.[93] Similarly, in former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey's memoir, he recalled a difficult conversation with President Obama over the draft defense budget in 2014. The joint chiefs had recommended a larger defense budget than the Obama administration had signaled support for—one week before the midterm congressional elections. Obama called Dempsey, perturbed that the timing could give the impression that the administration did not sufficiently support the military and, therefore, could influence the election. "It hadn't even occurred to us that our memorandum would be interpreted in the context of the midterm elections," explained Dempsey, who was chagrined for belatedly recognizing that "for us [the joint chiefs], the [defense] budget had become a singularly important issue; for the president, it was one of several equally important issues."[94]

Second, civilian officials need to have the relevant expertise, not just simply the will, to enable a meaningful decisionmaking process. As one former senior official explained, "Civilians have to show their value proposition . . . if they want to have a voice in these debates and have those voices be taken seriously, they have to have the expertise to be seen as a credible contributor. They have a responsibility to add value and bring something to the table." Richard Kohn put it well in his advice to senior civilians: "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."[95] In a similar vein, scholar and former senior Pentagon official Kathleen Hicks explained the need for civilians to demonstrate to military personnel that they have "enough knowledge that they can't be gamed but also enough knowledge that maybe you could trust them with the real facts."[96] Scholarly and experiential exposure can deepen this crucial education on how military personnel conceptualize the spectrum of conflict and cooperation.[97] Janine Davidson recommends that the civilian side better educate itself on practical national security affairs, both through academics and experiential opportunities.[98]

Unfortunately, the personnel hiring system exacerbates these challenges. Former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld noted that, during his tenure, the Pentagon "operated with 25.5% of the key senior civilian po-

sitions vacant."[99] Similarly, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman recounted that, in his experience as under secretary, the office of the secretary of defense was "being held together by paper clips and band-aids and bubblegum," with too few personnel, low retention rates, and difficulty finding competent new hires. He contrasted this with the joint staff, an institution he saw as "large, very capable" and growing.[100] Exercising meaningful civilian control was inevitably trying given these personnel challenges, which were aggravated by the volatility, exhaustion, and high operational tempo that characterized the post-9/11 wars. All these challenges surrounding civilian hiring and retention in the office of the secretary of defense invariably contributed to the joint staff's interest in playing an outsize role in policymaking.

Third, both military and civilian leaders can facilitate consistent dialogue and actively encourage this approach at all levels. Major General William Rapp, commandant of the U.S. Army War College, implored that they "have the responsibility to listen to each other and probe the answers they hear."[101] Advice cannot be an excuse for failing to coordinate or share materials with one another, or to squelch debate. They should become comfortable with relying on informed dialogue to understand and, therefore, appropriately shape national security affairs. "Civilians often look at military options to help illuminate [policy] options; military leaders often do not understand that," explained one civilian official with deep experience among senior military general officers. But for those who subscribe to Huntington's objective theory of control, "relations between civilians and the military in advisory processes" are often "essentially transactional, rather than collaborative."[102]

To help military leaders see this perspective, critical issues related to civil-military relations should receive greater emphasis in professional military education. The core curriculum at the U.S. Army War College, for example, spends little time on the subject. It examines neither issues of partisanship nor the relationship between the military and society. And while it offers an elective course that focuses specifically on civil-military relations, only about 2 percent of eligible students sign up for it.[103]

Civilians, in general, should recognize that civil-military dialogue, including the implementation of decisions, is iterative and should encourage regular assessment of the effectiveness of such dialogues to better exercise effective oversight.[104] Civilians in the Pentagon, in particular should be aware of each military service's specific norms, values, and beliefs, as these differences will influence their ability to engage with and oversee military affairs.[105] For example, one former senior official warned, "There's this magicians union [in which] you're never going to get the military to criticize one another to civilians even when they are screwing up . . . no one will talk out of school." Civilians, therefore, need to emulate Secretary Gates, who would "figure out the code words or 'tells' that would let me know whether these men were putting on a show of agreement for me when, in fact, they strongly disagreed."[106] No senior civilian national security leaders will be able to do so effectively absent a deep and textured background in national security affairs.

They also must understand the military's desire for clarity and its can-do attitude, which exists even when it is impractical. "Civilians bathe in ambiguity. For the military, especially the Army, 'Jomini is driving the car,'" cautioned one civilian official, drawing upon the reputation of famed military theorist Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini, well known for promising success on the battlefield through exceedingly precise and scientific rules.[107] One senior general officer, recognizing this, explained that "sometimes, we're accused of being overly optimistic. We have to watch that. That has to be on the table with civilians."

Hicks recommends adopting "incentive structures" to reshape the dialogue around these military characteristics, but also wryly warns, "You learn over time that the reality is that the real refrain from the military is often 'give me guidance—no not *that* guidance.'"[108] She smartly suggests that civilians should not "focus too much on that friction, and the distrust it creates," at the expense of "how you build out better solutions and answers."

Fourth, both civilians and their military counterparts should make a hearty effort to encourage an atmosphere of transparency to begin filling what Brooks terms the "gap of trust" between them.[109] Providing sage advice to the military, Kohn bluntly observes that "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."[110] While civilians are not compelled to follow military advice—as General Goldfein underscored, "Not one civilian leader that I've ever worked with or for has ever had to raise their right hand and say they will take my advice"—they should, nevertheless, demonstrate their willingness to hear and respond to it.[111]

Finally, civilians should do their utmost to convey meaningful guidance. It should clearly state prioritization, resources, and risks. A worthwhile checklist for assessing the strength of guidance includes asking if it is focused on something important that is either new or dictates a change; is clear, if it is implementable, and whether it contradicts itself or inadvertently contradicts other guidance.[112] In the wake of the Chilcot Commission's investigation of how the United Kingdom became embroiled in the Iraq War, the British Ministry of Defence published a "Chilcot Checklist" to facilitate decisionmaking on the use of force. Many of the questions it lists also have broad relevance to the United States in considering decisions related to the post-9/11 wars, including: "Why do we care?; What is happening now?; What might happen next?; What should we do?; How do we ensure action is lawful?; What does success look like?; What do we need to deliver?; How should we do it?; How will you monitor performance?; and, Is the policy working?"[113]

Manifesting oversight is tricky under the best of circumstances. No serious scholar or practitioner of civil-military relations would argue that a deputy assistant secretary or assistant secretary of defense should tell the CJCS how to do that job effectively. However, as the secretary's staff, it is exactly that individual's responsibility to ensure the secretary's guidance is understood as intended and is promulgated and implemented across the Department of Defense. As scholar Peter Feaver describes, civilians in places like OSD serve as "extensions of the executive branch principals" and operate as "police patrols" who vigilantly keep an eye on their military counterparts.[114] As one senior officer cogently said in an interview, the real question is "who gets to call the shot and at what level?" Senior military leaders believe they "move left or right because of the president or the secretary of defense, not because a deputy assistant secretary of defense would say move left or right . . . so until I

hear that coming out of somebody higher at this organization, I'm not going to change." As one senior officer underscored, "I have never ever heard a four-star [general officer] dismiss civilian control of the military but I know that initial belief—if we were calling this shot or that shot, it does eek away at the idea—hey, the civilian gets to call the shot." This individual then quickly emphasized that even "if they're an idiot . . . they still get to call that shot." In other words, one would be hard pressed to find a senior leader in the U.S. military who seriously opposes civilian oversight or is not a staunch believer that orders come from the civilian president and the civilian secretary of defense. The secretary, however, cannot be expected to exert meaningful oversight if he or she does not have the staff to do so.

To alleviate the crisis of meaningful civilian control, the most senior civilian and military leaders must be willing to do their utmost to make this a reality. Acknowledging the divide, being respectful and empathetic, and emphasizing collaboration are the crucial initial steps.

CIVIL-MILITARY CRISES OVER TWO DECADES OF WAR

The result of the three crises discussed over the last three chapters is that the relationships between the military, the American people, and the civilian overseers of organized violence are increasingly fraught with tensions. These represent a deep and troubling set of legacies from America's post-9/11 wars, many of which manifest in dysfunctional patterns of civil-military affairs.

Unless and until civilian leaders recognize these patterns and deliberately tackle them, the legacies of the post-9/11 wars will grow more acute. Over the past two decades, civilians have not clearly articulated what the role of force should be, which has given the military outsized influence. However, the military, left largely on its own, has been unable to achieve conclusive results in the post-9/11 wars. Society—and many civilian policymakers—nevertheless, give it a pass, because the military is dealing with challenges that most Americans do not understand or want to confront themselves. This lack of accountability inevitably shapes the military in a deeply paradoxical way: while the military is

lauded by many outsiders and subsequently thinks it has the best answers on how to win the post-9/11 wars, it has, nevertheless, been unable to sufficiently understand, prepare for, or execute these conflicts over the past two decades. This paradox, in turn, has a profound impact on civilian control and oversight given that civilian voices are deemed less credible and are, therefore, more easily dismissed. This is a pernicious outcome, not least because civilian voices will be crucial for revitalizing the military. A civil-military maelstrom, ultimately, harms many—above all, American democracy.

Chapter 4

1. The best primer of theories surrounding civilian control of the military can be found in Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 241–64.

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3. Peter Feaver, Conference on Civil-Military Relations, Johns Hopkins Phillip-Merrill Center for Strategic Studies, February 13, 2020, www.merrillcenter.sais-jhu.edu/events.

4. Ibid.; also, Peter Feaver, "Prologue," in *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations: The Military, Society, Politics, and Modern War*, edited by Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, Daniel Maurer (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. viii.

5. Risa Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States," *International Security*, 44, no. 4 (Spring 2020); Lindsey P. Cohn, "The Precarious State of Civil-Military Relations in the Age of Trump," *War on the Rocks*, March 28, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/03/the-precarious-state-of-civil-military-relations-in-the-age-of-trump/; and Eric Edelman, Gary Roughead, and others, "Providing for the Common Defense:

The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission," (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, November 2018).

6. Jim Golby and Peter Feaver, "Biden Inherits a Challenging Civil-Military Legacy," *War on the Rocks*, January 1, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/biden-inherits-a-challenging-civil-military-legacy/.

7. Cohen, *Supreme Command*, p. 233.

8. Readers interested in learning more about either of these examples should refer to Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army* (Ohio University Press, 1956); and George C. Herring, "American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate," *Military Affairs*, 46 (April 1982).

9. Jeffrey P. Kimball, "The Stab-In-The-Back Legend and the Vietnam War, *Armed Forces and Society*, 14 (1988), pp. 433–34.

10. Ibid., pp. 438.

11. See, for example, chapter 4 in Joel Rayburn, Frank Sobchak, and others, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume I: Invasion and Civil War* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2019).

12. Robert Timberg, "A War within James Webb," *Baltimore Sun*, July 2, 1995, www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1995-07-02-1995183135-story.html; and James Webb, "The Draft: Why the Army Needs It," *The Atlantic*, April 1980, www.theatlantic.com/ideastour/military/webb-excerpt.html. Webb's fiction reflects these themes, as well. See Jim Webb, *Fields of Fire* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978); and James Webb, *A Country Such as This* (New York: Doubleday, 1983). A profile of Webb during his time as secretary of Navy also reflects how Vietnam informed his thinking. See John Cushman, "James Webb's New Fields of Fire," *New York Times*, February 28, 1988, www.nytimes.com/1988/02/28/magazine/james-webb-s-new-fields-of-fire.html.

13. Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants* (Harvard University Press, 2003); and Peter Feaver, "The Right to be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security*, 35, no. 4 (2011), pp. 87–125.

14. The memoirs of senior civilian defense leaders like Donald Rumsfeld and Douglas Feith represent spectacular examples of failures, particularly regarding Iraq, Afghanistan, and the broader "war on terror."

15. Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), p. 420–21. As chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Powell penned a *Foreign Affairs* article outlining his doctrine. It was a warning shot to the incoming Clinton administration. General Colin L. Powell, "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1992/1993).

16. Powell, *My American Journey*, pp. 207–08.

17. Tony Lombardo, "Q-and-A: Colin Powell on Vietnam Service, Iraq and Afghanistan, and Black History Month," *Military Times*, January 31, 2017.

18. Colin Powell with Tony Koltz, *It Worked For Me: In Life and Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 202–03.

19. According to Michael Desch, in 1999, Shelton told him, "I firmly believe in [former Secretary of Defense Caspar] Weinberger's doctrine, amplified by General Powell, and I think that we followed that" in the Kosovo operation. Echoing Powell, Shelton argued that military force should be the tool of last resort and proposed what he called "the Dover test" for committing U.S. forces to combat: "When bodies are brought back, will we still feel it is in U.S. interests?" Quoted in Michael C. Desch, "Bush and the Generals," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2007), www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2007-05-01/bush-and-generals. In his memoirs, Myers discussed the lessons that senior military leaders learned from serving in the Vietnam War: "In any conflict, our forces should be committed in appropriate strength with clear objectives, which keep relentless pressure on the enemy to capitulate." Richard Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon—Serving on the Front Lines of National Security* (New York, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2007), p. 60.

20. Mike Jackson, "Is the Powell Doctrine Dead and Gone?" *Modern War Institute*, February 22, 2016, https://mwi.usma.edu/is-the-powell-doctrine-dead-and-gone/.

21. General Anthony Zinni, "Farewell Remarks at the U.S. Naval Institute," March 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20060330163243/http://www.rcaca.org/News-Zinni.htm.

22. Powell, *It Worked For Me*, pp. 202–03.

23. Michael R. Gordon, "Powell Delivers a Resounding 'No' on Using Limited Force on Bosnia," *New York Times*, September 28, 1992.

24. Luke Middup, "The Impact of Vietnam on U.S. Strategy in the First Gulf War," *Comparative Strategy*, 29, no. 5 (November, 2010), pp. 400–01.

25. In Powell's words, his "concept of the Powell Doctrine begins with the premise that war is to be avoided. Use all available political, diplomatic, economic, and financial means to try to solve the problem and achieve the political objective the President has established. At the same time, make it understood that military force exists to support diplomacy and take over where diplomacy leaves off. There is no sharp distinction between the two." Powell, *It Worked For Me*, p. 202.

26. Tony Lombardo, "Q-and-A: Colin Powell on Vietnam Service, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and Black History Month," *Military Times*, January 31, 2017.

27. Powell, *It Worked For Me*, p. 202–03.

28. Eliot Cohen, "Playing Powell Politics: The General's Zest for Power," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December, 1995), www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/1995-11-01/playing-powell-politics-generals-zest-power.

29. Lombardo, "Q-and-A."

30. "Brett Scowcroft Oral History Part II," The Miller Center, recorded August 10 2000, www.millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/brent-scowcroft-oral-history-part-ii.

31. Major Douglas E. Delaney, "'Us' And 'Them': Colin Powell and American Civil-Military Relations, 1963–1993," *Canadian Military Journal* (Spring 2002), p. 51. Delaney is currently a professor at the Royal Military College of Canada.

32. Quoted in J. Kael Weston, *The Mirror Test: America at War in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), p. 523.

33. Peter Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 184. The authors define "elites" as mid-career officers.

34. "The Military-Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era," Pew Research Center, October 5, 2011, www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/10/veterans-report.pdf.

35. Specifically, Golby, Cohn, and Feaver tested the following: "a) Military force should be used only in pursuit of the goal of total victory; b) Use of force in foreign interventions should be applied quickly and massively; c) When force is used, military rather than political goals should determine its applications; d) Public will not tolerate large numbers of US casualties in military operations." James Golby, Lindsay Cohn, and Peter Feaver, "Thanks for Your Service: Civilian and Veteran Attitudes After Fifteen Years of War," in *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military*, edited by Kori Schake and Jim Mattis (Hoover Institution Press, 2016), p. 130.

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49. Stevenson, *SecDef.*

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76. Notably, the Trump White House—almost surely at some of the Defense Department leadership's urging—objected to these aforementioned Title 10 changes, arguing that they "would also overlap with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's existing responsibilities for strategic and contingency planning [in Title 10]." Office of Management and Budget, *Follow-on to Statement of Administration Policy* (June 26, 2018), www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/saps2987s_20180626.pdf. See, also, Chairman: Functions, U.S. Code 10, § 153, www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/153.

77. One example can be found in strategic guidance documents. Karlin and Skaluba, "Strategic Guidance."

78. Those who want to better understand the many flaws in Huntington's approach would do well to read Risa Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States," *International Security,* 44, no. 4 (Spring 2020), pp. 7–44.

79. Sections excerpted from Mara Karlin and James Golby, "Why 'Best Military Advice' is Bad for the Military—and Worse for Civilians," *Orbis*, 62, no. 1 (January 8, 2018), pp. 137–53.

80. Google NGram Viewer shows the increased use of the phrase post-9/11, https://books.google.com/ngrams. Dunford began using it early on as chair. To take one example: Jared Serbu, "Dunford Plans to Trim Joint Staff Workforce after New Year," *Federal News Network*, December 24, 2015, https://federalnewsnetwork.com/defense/2015/12/dunford-plans-trim-joint-staff-workforce-new-year/.

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Chapter 5

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