

# SSQ

## STRATEGIC STUDIES QUARTERLY

FALL 2015

VOL. 9, NO. 3

CMR  
SPECIAL EDITION

### Commentaries

#### **The Irony of American Civil-Military Relations**

Peter D. Feaver

#### **Best Military Advice**

Gen James E. Cartwright, USMC, Retired

---

#### **Beyond the Resignation Debate: A New Framework for Civil-Military Dialogue**

Maj Jim Golby, USA

---

#### **How Much Is Enough?**

Lindsay P. Cohn

---

#### **Post-9/11 Civil-Military Relations: Room for Improvement**

Thomas Sheppard and Bryan Groves

---

#### **Military Officers: Political without Partisanship**

Mackubin Thomas Owens

---

#### **“Cashing In” Stars: Does the Professional Ethic Apply in Retirement?**

Marybeth Peterson Ulrich

---



**Chief of Staff, US Air Force**

Gen Mark A. Welsh III, USAF

**Commander, Air Education and  
Training Command**

Lt Gen Darryl L. Roberson, USAF

**Commander and President, Air University**

Lt Gen Steven L. Kwast, USAF

**Director and Publisher, Air Force Research Institute**

Allen G. Peck

---

***Editorial Staff***

Col W. Michael Guillot, USAF, Retired, *Editor*

Ernest A. Rockwell, PhD, *Content Editor*

Vivian D. O'Neal, *Prepress Production Manager*

Tammi K. Dacus, *Editorial Assistant*

Daniel M. Armstrong, *Illustrator*

---

***Advisors***

Gen Michael P. C. Carns, USAF, Retired

Allen G. Peck

Christina Goulter, PhD

Robert P. Haffa, PhD

Jay P. Kesan, PhD

Charlotte Ku, PhD

Benjamin S. Lambeth, PhD

John T. LaSaine, PhD

Allan R. Millett, PhD

---

***Contributing Editors***

*School of Advanced Air and Space Studies*

Stephen D. Chiabotti, PhD

James W. Forsyth Jr., PhD

*The Spaatz Center*

Charles E. Costanzo, PhD

Kimberly A. Hudson, PhD

Nori Katagiri, PhD

John C. Schuessler, PhD

Paul J. Springer, PhD

*Strategic Studies Quarterly (SSQ)* (ISSN 1936-1815) is published quarterly by Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, AL. Articles in SSQ may be reproduced free of charge. Notify editor and include a standard source credit line on each reprint.

# STRATEGIC STUDIES QUARTERLY

*An Air Force-Sponsored Strategic Forum on  
National and International Security*

VOLUME 9

FALL 2015

NUMBER 3

## Commentaries

- The Irony of American Civil-Military Relations* ..... 3  
Peter D. Feaver
- Best Military Advice* ..... 13  
Gen James E. Cartwright, USMC, Retired

## Feature Article

- Beyond the Resignation Debate:  
A New Framework for Civil-Military Dialogue* ..... 18  
Maj Jim Golby, USA

## Perspectives

- How Much Is Enough?* ..... 47  
Lindsay P. Cohn
- Post-9/11 Civil-Military Relations: Room for Improvement* ..... 62  
Thomas Sheppard and Bryan Groves
- Military Officers: Political without Partisanship* ..... 88  
Mackubin Thomas Owens
- “Cashing In” Stars:  
Does the Professional Ethic Apply in Retirement?*..... 102  
Marybeth Peterson Ulrich

## Book Reviews

- Congress and Civil-Military Relations* ..... 126  
Edited By: Colton C. Campbell and David P. Auerswald  
Reviewed by: Ronald N. Dains, PhD
- Civil-Military Relations in Perspective:  
Strategy, Structure, and Policy* ..... 128  
Edited By: Stephen J. Cimbala  
Reviewed by: Lt Col Kevin McCaskey, PhD
- Unity of Mission: Civil-Military Teams in War and Peace*..... 130  
Online at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/afri/reviews.asp>  
Edited By: Jon Gundersen and Melanne A. Civic  
Reviewed by: James A. Schear, PhD

# The Irony of American Civil-Military Relations

Even with military and civil-military records that would be the envy of any great power in history, Americans still find things to be concerned about in the field of civil-military relations. Two ironic facts mark the field of American civil-military relations. First is the fact that, since the 1783 Newburgh Conspiracy, American history has never seen a significant coup attempt—let alone a successful coup. Nevertheless, civilian leaders worry that military leaders too often enjoy the upper hand in policy disputes. In fact, nearly every secretary of defense since Richard Cheney in 1989 has taken office believing civil-military relations had gotten out of balance under his predecessor; a high priority for each of them has been tilting the balance back toward one favoring civilian supremacy. Second, despite the fact that the United States has won its major wars decisively and managed to recover fairly quickly from military setbacks without a major breakdown in the political order, each postwar period since World War II has been marked by a societal-wide debate over the proper relationship between the military and civilian society. This debate, dubbed the “civil-military gap,” is as old as the Republic and yet as fresh as last week’s headlines.

The five articles assembled for this special edition demonstrate the irony again, as an interesting mix of scholars and military practitioners assemble to debate issues that would be familiar in broad outline to civil-military specialists of several decades ago—if not to the Framers of the Constitution themselves. Consistent with previous waves of scholarship, most of the articles fit under the rubric of the first concern: how the principle of civilian control applies in certain settings. James Golby analyzes the thorny issue of “resignation,” specifically focusing on the conditions under which a senior military officer should be free (or professionally obliged) to resign when ordered to do something that might be legal but otherwise violates his or her sense of professional duty. Thomas Sheppard and Bryan Groves discuss the high level of friction in the civil-military relationship in the post-9/11 era, focusing on why both Pres. George W. Bush and Pres. Barack Obama have struggled with the military and why policy disputes have taken the form of stormy contests between civilian and military preferences. Mackubin

Owens seeks to parse the appropriate limits for military activity that might be labeled political or partisan, examining how far the military can go without crossing the line and exploring what keeps it on the right side of that line.

The two remaining articles also touch on the civilian control issue but are better grouped under the rubric of the second concern: keeping the societal level civil-military relationship in proper balance. Lindsay Cohn considers how the all-volunteer force operates given the constraints of the US labor market and the demands imposed by prolonged combat deployments. In doing so, she examines whether an implicit civil-military contract between civilian society and its armed protectors can endure in the face of spiraling personnel costs. Finally, Marybeth Ulrich analyzes the norms that should govern military behavior after retirement—specifically the extent to which retired officers should be allowed to leverage the public trust in their expertise for personal financial gain.

Civilian control and the civil-military gap are the hardy perennials of the academic study of civil-military relations, and it is difficult for scholars to produce something truly new and interesting about them. Yet, in my judgment, these scholars succeed, even though each leaves questions hanging for follow-on work.

## **Civilian Control and Military Power**

Golby zeros in on one particularly thorny question of military dissent: should senior military officers practice “resignation in protest” when confronted with policy choices they strongly oppose? He takes a fairly restrictive position on the formal question. Golby examines the case presented by Donald Snider, James Dubik, and James Burk in favor of a limited zone where such resignation might be the appropriate ethic and concludes that the zone might exist in theory but disappears in practice. He is unable to identify plausible cases from the real world that actually meet the Snider-Dubik criteria.

However, Golby goes on to argue that the focus on resignation is misleading, because the real problem concerns the proper military advisory role in the policy-making process leading up to a decision. This is worse than misleading in his estimation, since publicly cultivating a resignation ethic would further undermine the key ingredient to make the

advisory process work: civilian trust of the military. Rather than asking whether the military should resign, better to ask whether the military provided candid expert advice prior to the point of decision. Civilians may have the right to be wrong, Golby seems to be saying, but are military leaders doing what they can to better inform civilians to minimize the number of times civilian leaders might be wrong?

Golby proposes a “new framework” for understanding the proper role of military advice, one drawn from a source that is anything but new: Carl von Clausewitz. Golby argues that there are meaningful distinctions that can be drawn, a priori, to mark what is “military expertise” and what is “civilian expertise.” The former uniquely enables the military to assess the feasibility of options, even though civilians can make choices for other reasons that seem to override such feasibility calculations. By contrast, civilians have expertise in determining the ends of policy, which fall entirely outside of military expertise. There is an area of overlap, Golby acknowledges, and it includes such matters as the assessment of international politics, the ways to integrate the military instrument with other tools of statecraft, and the management of escalation.

This “new framework” is an able update of Samuel Huntington’s effort to draw dividing lines, but I do not find it any more persuasive or successful than Huntington’s effort. As I have argued in *Guarding the Guardians*, new military technologies and doctrines make hash out of old civil-military distinctions. The categories of civilian and military do not disappear, but the lines that mark previously clear zones of expertise do. Civilian leaders themselves get to draw these new lines, which are perhaps better depicted as dotted lines. Put another way, part of the day-to-day playing out of civilian control in the US context is the decision by civilian leaders where to draw the line between “their” zone and the “delegated” zone. Furthermore, wherever civilian leaders draw that dotted line in one case does not tie their hands to where they might draw it in another case.

At first glance, it would seem that Golby’s Clausewitzian framework is not needed. However, while I found the first part of his narrative mostly unpersuasive, the specific prescriptions he offers at the end of his essay, which he claims to derive from his framework, were more convincing. Golby emphasizes the positive duty to advise rather than the negative duty to avoid politics, siding with me against Owens (see below) on the matter of public commentary on policy. Golby is particu-

larly compelling when he talks about the obligation to provide a range of options to civilians—likely a range that is wider than the military would prefer to implement—even as the military also has a responsibility to help civilians “bound possibilities” so as to avoid endlessly paralyzing choices. Golby’s list is a good start, but it is not exhaustive. Surely, there are civilian responsibilities in this area as well, for instance the obligation to hear unwelcome advice and to not misrepresent military advice in public settings. Moreover, what should the military do when civilians violate these obligations, for instance appearing to ask the military to trim their advice to tell civilians what they want to hear? The answers, I suspect, will come in pragmatic assessments that do not fit neatly into the “new Clausewitzian” framework Golby advances.

Sheppard and Groves chart a synoptic course through recent civil-military experience, making the case that the frictions of the current and previous administrations reflect enduring deficiencies in American civil-military relations. Specifically, the authors claim there has been repeated military shirking and endemic deteriorated trust, war-time strategy has been incoherent, and all these problems can be traced to an overall poor decision-making process. The Sheppard-Groves indictment is amply supported in the journalistic record and, more profoundly, is a distinct echo to similar descriptions of the Clinton administration. In fact, while Sheppard and Groves date their discussion to the 9/11 attacks, those attacks seem less a marking of a completely new chapter in civil-military friction and more a passing milestone in an ongoing story of post-Cold War civil-military malaise.

Throughout their essay, Sheppard and Groves emphasize mutual misunderstandings, laying particular blame on civilian ignorance of military culture, while blaming the military for not responding to this ignorance wisely. In their telling, however, the Bush-era problems do not seem grounded in ignorance but rather in President Bush’s failure to rein in Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s alleged rough treatment of senior military officers. Ignorance, or at least unfamiliarity with a novel strategic situation, does seem to have played a bigger contributory role once the global war on terror began, but then, as the authors explicitly discuss, Bush ended his term with a civil-military success—the surge decision—that does not seem to fit the pattern the authors believe the rest of his tenure established. President Obama, in

their telling, has been doing what is his right to do, but the result has been persistent mutual resentment.

The Sheppard and Groves prescriptions are broadly consistent with the others presented in this volume. Yet to my reading, they overly rely on familiarity and personal interactions to foster a greater sense of trust. As Owens (below) and Golby (above) make clear, some tension may simply be hardwired into the relationship. Sheppard and Groves advocate better congressional oversight, which I certainly would not argue against, but this too is probably not going to do much to fix policy-strategy linkage if the problem is that civilian leaders quite naturally want incompatible goals—striving to maintain American global leadership and reduce the burden of the US military on the economy; seeking to retain all military options, including options for unilateral action; and wanting to cut defense. These leaders want other partners to shoulder more of the burden, but they want those partners to act in ways that keep US interests uppermost. Finally, Sheppard and Groves advocate for decision-making processes that give greater voice to dissenting opinions but do not conclusively establish that the underlying problem is absence of internal dissent. Put another way, President Bush's Iraq surge decision and President Obama's Syria-Iraq decisions have all been made in settings with ample dissent. Some decisions have turned out better than others have; however, the opportunity for military dissent does not seem to be the decisive factor.

Owens focuses on a weakness in the grand theories of civil-military relations, which calls for the American military to be above politics—especially partisan politics—even though military policy making is inextricably embedded in partisan politics. If politics is deciding who gets what, when, where, and how, then any decision touching on military affairs will be unavoidably political and, to a certain extent, unavoidably partisan. How can we expect the military to play any role in such a system without the military institution taking on some irreducible politically partisan cast? Owens cites Risa Brooks approvingly and adopts her taxonomy of military-political activity: public appeal, “grandstanding,” politicking, alliance building, and “shoulder tapping.” Yet he does not adopt Brooks's censorious approach to such activities; on the contrary, he views them as unavoidable, essential elements to healthy strategy making.

Owens would instead draw the line between politics and partisanship, allowing the military to engage in the politics of policy making but keeping it on the right side of the partisanship line. Partisanship is often measured in terms of the distribution of party affiliation in the ranks, but Owens rejects this measure as misleading. He agrees there is evidence of a marked distributional skew but claims there exists no additional evidence of corrosive effects on core values like military subordination to civilian control. Indeed, Owens claims there have been other periods in history with a similar partisan skew and yet no evidence of problems. Owens does censure efforts by presidential campaigns to enlist senior military endorsers of candidates and officers' public criticism of an administration's policy.

I agree with Owens on the deleterious effects of retired military endorsements during partisan campaigns, but his conclusion that retired military officers must refrain from criticizing administration policy does not persuade me. Indeed, there seems to be an unbridgeable gulf between Owens's acceptance of the various forms of political activity outlined by Brooks on the one hand and his insistence that retired military keep their views of current policy out of the public eye on the other. Does not the policy-making process require an informed public? Should not retired military have an opportunity to help inform the public? What Owens's article leaves undone is the drafting of a clearer template of what kinds of public criticism are appropriate, or at least tolerable, and what kinds cross a line—and precisely where to draw that line. I would draw a line that distinguishes between acceptable public commentary that suggests a military tool is being used ineffectively and inappropriate public commentary that calls for the firing of senior civilian leaders. Likewise, I would draw a line between inappropriate public commentary that reveals hitherto private information that paints civilian leaders in an unflattering light and acceptable public commentary that only uses the existing public record to make judgments about what policies are working or not working. Owens's article invites, but does not finish the job of, drawing such lines.

## **The Civil-Military Gap**

Cohn sheds new light on the “benefits trap,” the phenomenon of the military offering ever more generous benefits packages in order to attract

and retain properly skilled recruits in the uniform ranks. This problem has been a central preoccupation of defense analysts in recent years and the subject of a major blue-ribbon study. The conventional understanding of this problem is that it is rooted primarily in the nature of an all-recruited force; since citizens are not legally required to serve, they must be persuaded to serve. Attractive pay and benefits are among the most persuasive levers available.

Cohn further demonstrates that, since 9/11, a particular partisan dynamic has taken root. Republicans have traditionally been in favor of higher defense spending overall, and as the “in power party,” Republicans were the direct beneficiaries of the wartime rally round the flag. Democrats, who were seen as more ambivalent on defense spending, saw a political need to present a prodefense posture to the public after the 9/11 attacks. Moreover, although the Iraq War began with strong bipartisan support, as the fortunes of war receded, so too did Democratic Party support. Yet the larger global war on terror persisted, and Democrats were keen not to fall again into the Vietnam-era trap where opposition to the war morphed into opposition to the military. By the mid-2000s, the military was well established as the institution in which the public had the highest degree of trust, and Democrats were keen not to get crosswise with such a popular institution. The solution Democrats adopted was to highlight their support for expanding pay and benefits, even as they highlighted their opposition to the mission the military was being paid to fight. Both parties, in other words, had a partisan incentive to fuel a military compensation race resulting in the benefits trap.

Cohn argues that another factor contributed to this problem: the particular structure of America’s labor market. The United States is what economists call a liberal market economy (LME)—in contrast to the coordinated market economies (CME) prominent on the European continent. Cohn argues that the fluid labor markets of LMEs give countries like the United States an advantage in recruiting highly skilled labor—the sort needed to operate the sophisticated military equipment and complex doctrine on which the US military relies—but puts LMEs at a disadvantage in retaining them. When the threat environment puts a high premium on retention, Cohn posits, LME militaries must respond with generous compensation packages, particularly ones that provide the health and continuing education benefits highly skilled personnel might be able to command in the civilian economy.

In other words, Cohn argues there are no cheap solutions to the benefits trap in an LME country like the United States. Fixing it would require fixing much larger societal problems, such as spiraling health-care costs and problems in higher education. I find her argument persuasive, but then I am left puzzled about an apparent pattern she does not discuss. If one were to rank advanced militaries based on their deployability and effectiveness in dealing with the complex combat situations of the post-Cold War era, the most deployable and effective appear to be those found in LMEs, and the least deployable and effective appear to be those in CMEs. The correlation is not perfect, but it seems strong enough to invite exploration. Perhaps this is an artifact of relying on too few cases and historical circumstance. Germany's hamstrung performance surely owes more to its peculiar twentieth-century history than to its labor market, whereas US military performance seems primarily due to its superpower status—not its domestic labor laws. However, is that all there is to the story? Is there a direct causal line from LME advantages in recruitment to higher military proficiency? Moreover, might not other CME features have implications for the usability of the military in overseas contingencies? One proposed "fix" to the problem Cohn discusses—a return to compulsory military service—is also offered as a solution to the "problem" that the US military is so useful and deployable. Some critics argue that the military is too deployable and it would be better to have a military that was harder to send abroad on missions the critics consider doubtful. For those subscribing to such a stance, a draft-based military would be just the ticket. Put another way, Cohn may be on to more than she states in this one article, and a potentially fruitful larger project would be to bring the argument back to what Huntington called the "functional imperative": does the labor market help shape whether the military is capable of doing what we need it to do?

Ulrich raises the labor question, but in terms of a "second act," focusing on what limits senior military officers should face in their retirement. Even after a long military career, individuals leave the military at a young enough age to imagine second and third acts in the public or commercial arena. Since the end of World War II, the commercial opportunities have been especially lucrative and especially fraught. Ethicists worry about a "revolving door," where senior military officers are tempted to use their final assignments in uniform to prepare a postretirement sinecure from which they would then lobby their former colleagues who

will be facing the same temptations. Pres. Dwight Eisenhower, facing his own retirement from the presidency, warned about this “military-industrial complex,” and Ulrich worries that the transition from “public service” to “private service” constitutes a corruption of the professional ethic—specifically the erosion of the ethic of a “selfless servant.” She urges greater attention to transparency and disclosure and longer “cooling off” periods to reduce still further the perception of feathering one’s own nest.

Ulrich is correct that the activity of senior military retirees can affect public perceptions of the military. The public retains a great deal of trust in the military as an institution, but sensational accounts of military self-dealing surely chip away at that high regard. With that said, the concrete examples of second acts Ulrich narrates do not strike me as particularly corrupting or inappropriate. She shows that defense firms hire senior military officers who have developed a reputation for strategic expertise and then pay those officers well. As far as we know, these senior military officers follow the rules and give their best professional opinion—and get paid for doing so. Yes, they are paid more after retirement than they did before retirement, but they were hardly working on a pro bono basis while in uniform. As Ulrich pointed out, the spike in compensation means that all military personnel are, in some sense, already “cashing in” as members of the all-recruited force. If we accept that defense contractors have a legitimate interest in receiving expert military advice, would we prefer that they receive it from people who have not had substantial careers in uniformed service? If so, why? Ulrich’s analysis raises the important question, but does not yet answer it to my satisfaction: how exacting must the “smell test” be to protect the military profession from perceptions of conflicts of interests?

## **Conclusion**

Individually, the articles make worthy contributions to their respective topics. Collectively, they point to the vitality of the field. It is my impression that more junior scholars are studying American civil-military relations in some form or another than at any other point in my professional career. In contrast to previous waves, the focus is less on grand paradigm/theory creation and more on empirical analysis of specific policy settings. However, consistent with previous waves, the

normative impulse is front and center, focusing on how we can improve American civil-military relations. Perhaps what seems ironic or mysterious—why concerns about American civil-military relations persist when the record is so good—is obvious and explainable when turned on its head. Why does one worry about exercise and diet when one is so healthy? Perhaps one is healthy because one worries about exercise and diet. Viewed this way, the persistent attention to fine-tuning civilian control and re-equilibrating the military's position in society is not an irony to be explained in light of the happy empirical record but rather a partial explanation itself of that very record. Perhaps American civil-military relations will only become most worrisome when scholars stop worrying and writing about them. 

**Peter D. Feaver**

*Professor of Political Science and Public Policy,  
Director Triangle Institute for Security Studies and  
Duke Program in American Grand Strategy  
Duke University*

# Best Military Advice

Since the beginning of the Republic, the guiding premise for the US military is the concept of civilian control. From a civil-military relations perspective, the military is a professional corps, trained and equipped to provide for the defense of the nation's interests. While the US military is sworn to protect and defend the Constitution, its personnel serve at the pleasure of elected and appointed American civilian officials. As such, senior military leaders are charged with providing professional military advice to the civilian leadership. Throughout the American experience, military officers have provided civilian leaders with their best professional judgments on raising, sustaining, equipping, and employing military forces. The provision of what is known as *best military advice* is part process, part professional knowledge and skill, and a healthy dose of art—surrounded by the entire national security policy-making process. What follows is a glimpse into the recent workings and challenges associated with best military advice provided by senior military officers. It is not meant to be a definitive work on how to provide such advice but more as my observations of how that advice was or was not implemented and how it did or did not serve national security objectives.

## The Workings of National Security

US national security is a complex and dynamic necessity, organized to protect the nation's interests. Its power and authority are principally focused in the executive branch and the Congress. These institutions provide the legitimacy for setting policies and objectives. While the Constitution creates the framework for checks, balances, accountability, and authority, the people elect and empower officials. The principal actors in national security are the president, the Congress, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense—each having distinct and important authorities, roles, and functions. These actors, along with various other departments of the government, translate national security objectives into departmental objectives in support of the national security strategy.

The continuum of activities associated with the national security strategy has many diverse narratives. There are political narratives, reflecting the differing views on a particular issue; narratives on priority of

issues to be addressed; and narratives on how issues should be addressed. The competition of differing issues, objective solutions, and resourcing constantly vie for the attention and resources of government. By its very nature this competition creates a highly dynamic environment for any senior military leader.

Of course the military services attempt to cope with this dynamism by doing what they know best: planning. In the military that means a complex, detailed, and time-consuming activity with high regret factors for not being thorough. While the military planning process is methodical, its focus is successful military victory in support of the military objectives. However, history is rich with examples of failed military adventures when the military is used for nonmilitary objectives, is subjected to incremental employment strategies, or suffers mission creep. More often than not, when objectives are not military in nature, the military is not defeated in battle but fails to deliver the desired national objectives. In these cases, some part of the blame must rest with senior military officers in their provision of best military advice. It is the responsibility of senior officers to ensure military planning, capabilities, and resources support the end states of the national security policies and objectives by bridging the gap between these competing narratives and processes. This responsibility carries through to policy development, sequencing and integration of objectives and priorities, and the potential authorization and execution of a military intervention. Senior officers must also focus on the transitions between these processes, because it is in the integration, time phasing, and sequencing that the highest likelihood for consequential error may occur. In formulating best military advice for national security policy makers, four challenges emerge.

### **Challenges to Best Military Advice**

The first challenge, which is one that causes significant disruption within the military, is premature closure on a course of action in support of the military objective without sufficient study of the national security objectives. This inevitably leads to reducing the senior civilian leadership's options or "boxes them in" to a course of action prematurely. Our planning process is good in addressing detail, capturing a broad range of military views and perspectives, and thoroughly translating the ends, ways, and means associated with the objective. However, what we often

fail to consider is our role as a supporting activity in the larger government and national security strategy. In our planning we discard many potential courses of action based on assumptions of resourcing and capabilities that may remain flexible to our civilian leaders. We come to a course of action and attempt to make all other alternatives appear to fall short of the mark. We forget the other elements of national power will be integrated into the objective at the highest levels of government. We fail to recall the use of force is a political decision—part of a larger strategy—and that the end state will not be the political introduction of force; it will be a political settlement. That is, the principal reason for military intervention is to facilitate the political objectives. Expending military resources and winning battles that do not, or will not, lead to a political settlement waste a precious resource.

The second challenge, which is another that causes significant disruption, is to recommend a detailed military plan that does not account for the roles of other agencies. The US military does a great job covering all possible adversary actions. Nevertheless, we again fail to consider the alternatives based on a differing and dynamic set of national assumptions and integration into the larger national security strategy. We introduce a course of action that does not tolerate alternative means, alternative resource implications, and/or adjustments for political dynamics. It is of greater importance for our best military advice to craft a more tolerant set of alternatives that offer the president a range of options to build his integrated strategy across all elements of national power. Good military risk analysis is always wise, but good integration of national objectives with a military plan that both tolerates and complements the national risk analysis is the only path to successfully integrate all elements of national power. Military options that span the national objectives and provide maximum flexibility to civilian leadership are essential. Forcing the president to integrate the elements of power with no flexibility in the form of alternatives is not a recipe for success.

The third challenge is setting boundary conditions, such as roles, responsibilities, capabilities, and resources. This challenge is most evident in the internal planning processes but also manifests itself in the execution of the military intervention. There is a healthy tension within the military organizational structure among those who train, organize, and equip; those charged with regional oversight; and commanders charged to conduct military interventions. Healthy advocacy among these ac-

tors can often layer unnecessary resources or become unresponsive to the assigned mission and to missions directed but of lower organizational priority. Some recent examples of this include the shortfall in capabilities to address reconnaissance, missile defense, and improvised explosive devices. At the same time, agility has its limits across the broad span of military actions, particularly for the uninformed advocate or decision maker. Best military advice should articulate the risks of any investment. Once understood, advocacy and agility must support the national security strategy and objectives of the present conflict—not the one we desire. The frustration many civilian leaders experience is how to get the military to fight the war it is in, rather than the one in which it wants to be.

The final challenge to address is the challenge of the dissenting opinion. Military officers of all ranks learn there is a time to offer alternative approaches and question ends, ways, and means and a time to salute smartly and execute the mission. Dissent can be provided in writing, through conversation, or by requesting reassignment or discharge. Of course the latter is usually reserved for moral or legal disagreements. At the most senior levels, where moral and legal issues can be far less certain, it is the responsibility of those providing best military advice to clearly articulate their concerns early. Concerns over the risks being assumed, the likelihood of achieving the desired result, and/or the level of allocated resources are areas where dissension should be clear and offered at the earliest possible time to allow the system to respond to the concerns. However, simply not getting your way in a choice of ends, ways, and means is not an acceptable reason for dissent. Dissension for moral or legal concerns is much more difficult. The diversity and changing nature of conflict, such as uninhabited vehicles or weapons, have many grey areas associated with moral and legal issues, especially in areas where no declaration of hostilities exist. Interpretations that serve a specific action or context may contradict the assessment of the senior officers and/or expose the force to inappropriate risk. In these cases, thorough analysis, advice of counsel, and legal review will be valuable tools in crafting any dissent. The use of these tools should be in the context of presenting your concerns to civilian leadership. This seems logical but remains challenging, as interpretations of standards—cultural in particular—are in constant flux. Interpretations that serve an action that has a seeming

urgency but when taken in a larger context expose the force to unnecessary risk are particularly vexing.

Human suffering, collateral damage, weapons of mass destruction, and battlefield intelligence gathering are all difficult issues senior officers will have to grapple with in providing best military advice. Addressing these challenges will not guarantee successful execution of assigned tasks, but they are offered as insights and observations on the type of civil-military relations issues senior military leaders face in providing their best military advice. **SSQ**

**Gen James E. Cartwright, USMC, Retired**  
*Former Vice Chairman*  
*Joint Chiefs of Staff*

# Beyond the Resignation Debate

## A New Framework for Civil-Military Dialogue

*Maj Jim Golby, USA*

### **Abstract**

Recent debates about whether senior military officers can offer public dissent or resign in protest have a disproportionate impact on civil-military relations. As a result, many discussions focus primarily on how the civil-military dialogue has broken down and offer little advice to senior officers about how they can—and should—engage properly in effective civil-military dialogue. Scholars should begin a more constructive discussion about how to best integrate military advice into today's policy-making process. Although military expertise is imperfect and only one input policy makers should consider, a forthright, candid civil-military dialogue decreases the likelihood of strategic miscalculation and increases the odds of effective policy making. To complement scholarly discussions that discourage political activity by military officers, this article develops a Clausewitzian framework for introducing military advice into what is always a political context. It offers practical suggestions for military officers and hopes to stimulate further debate about what positive norms could shape the civil-military dialogue.



Although the circumstances in which senior military officers would contemplate resignation are exceedingly rare, debates about whether officers should resign are increasingly common. The latest round in this discussion developed in 2014, following testimony by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Martin Dempsey, US Army, before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). While discussing the

---

Maj Jim Golby is an active duty Army officer, currently serving on the Joint Staff. He holds a PhD in political science from Stanford University and has published numerous articles on American civil-military relations.

campaign to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Dempsey stated that—if necessary—he would recommend to the president that US military personnel accompany Iraqi troops in ground attacks.<sup>1</sup> His qualified statement made immediate news, as it signaled potential disagreement with the president's position to avoid introducing US forces into ground fighting in Iraq.

The response to General Dempsey's statement was swift, with more than a dozen op-eds or blogs published on the topic over the next few days and weeks. Many of these pieces were careless exhortations to resign in a flourish of disagreement; others were explicitly partisan. However, the debate also included thoughtful contributions from several respected voices, including those of Don Snider, emeritus professor of political science at the US Military Academy, and Lt Gen James Dubik, US Army, retired.<sup>2</sup> These scholars are not alone in thinking anew about dissent and resignation; approval for the practice of resignation in protest is on the rise, at least among veterans.<sup>3</sup>

The growing acceptance of resignation as an appropriate tactic during policy deliberations threatens America's tradition of civilian control of the military. It also raises concerns about whether senior civilian and military leaders possess the mutual respect necessary for effective strategic dialogue. More importantly, perhaps, the stalemated debate about whether military officers should resign actually exacerbates mistrust and skepticism among civilian leaders and undermines effective civil-military dialogue.

It is time to move beyond—or at least significantly broaden—this unproductive debate and begin a more constructive discussion about how to best integrate military advice into today's policy-making process. Although military expertise is imperfect and only one input policy makers consider, a forthright, candid civil-military dialogue decreases the likelihood of strategic miscalculation and increases the odds of effective policy making. To complement scholarly discussions that discourage political activity by military officers, a Clausewitzian framework can be used to introduce military advice into what is always a political context. This framework will help stimulate further debate about what positive norms could shape the civil-military dialogue.

This article first discusses the most thoughtful pieces from the recent resignation debate to make the case for a different dialogue. Next, it shows how the resignation debate is emblematic of larger problems in

the broader literature on dissent and civil-military discourse. It then develops a Clausewitzian framework for the civil-military dialogue, building on insights about the unique nature and limitations of military expertise and potential implications of this model in helping military leaders know how to provide advice in a political context. Finally, the article concludes with recommended institutional changes or reforms that could reinforce more productive civil-military relations.

### **The Resignation Debate**

The debate that emerged following General Dempsey's SASC testimony was, in many ways, similar to previous professional discussions about resignation—albeit arguably more robust.<sup>4</sup> Retired officers, former defense officials, pundits, and even sitting members of Congress publicly encouraged Dempsey to resign in protest over what they viewed as the Obama administration's misguided war policies.<sup>5</sup> However, this debate has advanced flawed arguments concerning resignation and has potentially contributed to deteriorating trust between civilian and military leaders.

Drawing inspiration from a misguided reading of Army lieutenant general H. R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty*, these critics generally assert that Dempsey—and other senior military leaders—have the right and even the obligation to resign in protest before they become complicit in failed military strategies.<sup>6</sup> In their view, McMaster's history of the Americanization of the Vietnam War castigates senior military leaders for not resigning and instead “quietly carrying out orders they knew to be wrong.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, some of them assert that even a private resignation threat by Dempsey “might well change a bad policy” and “save this President from himself.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, critics imply that military leaders should take advantage of the fact that no president would want to face the political costs resulting from a high-level military resignation.

The belief that it can be good for legitimately elected civilian leaders to fear threats from their own military is deeply flawed; such sentiments are unequivocally inconsistent with civilian control and American constitutional principles. The military may disagree with civilian decisions, but the Constitution reserves decision making for those in elected office. As scholar Peter D. Feaver has succinctly noted, elected civilian leaders have the “right to be wrong.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the insinuation that military

leaders should view resignation as a tool to influence political leaders' policy decisions is likely to undermine the trust necessary for a healthy civil-military relationship.<sup>10</sup> As a result, scholars like Richard H. Kohn and Peter Feaver worry that the practice of resignation by senior officers would undermine trust, risk politicization of the officer corps, and threaten civilian control of the military.<sup>11</sup> Despite these concerns, these scholars nevertheless strongly agree that officers have the right—in fact, the duty—to resign (i.e., to ask for reassignment or retirement) or to disobey if directed to carry out an illegal order.

However, several respected observers of civil-military relations suggest a slender area of legitimate resignation lies between legal obligation and policy objection. They make a thoughtful case for resignation on carefully drawn moral grounds. Don Snider argues that members of the profession require moral autonomy. Thus, there may be circumstances that demand acts of dissent or disobedience—to include resignation.<sup>12</sup> According to Snider, military officers not only have a Constitutional obligation to carry out the wishes of their client—the American people—but also have a responsibility to ethically apply the profession's expert knowledge. On these grounds, he argues that there is a narrow “protected space”<sup>13</sup> in which military officers can voice dissent or even resign “without insubordination to civilian authority.”<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, General Dubik argues that principled resignation places “neither good order and discipline nor civilian control of the military” at risk.<sup>15</sup> Providing senior officers resign privately without public posturing, he contends the ability to resign on moral grounds protects officers' moral agency by allowing them to remain true to their conscience. It is only when officers act for political reasons and threaten to air their concerns to embarrass or coerce that they undermine civilian control and cross an unacceptable line.

Taken together, Snider and Dubik suggest that there, in fact, may be circumstances under which senior officers could—and perhaps should—consider resignation. Yet neither author fully grapples with the difficult trade-offs their arguments imply. When placed under closer scrutiny, the “narrow protected space” for resignation that Snider and Dubik attempt to defend turns out to be vanishingly small.

Dubik, for example, considers the case of Army chief of staff Gen Harold Johnson, who contemplated resignation during the Vietnam War after he concluded that the president's war policy was “wasting

lives.”<sup>16</sup> Although Johnson ultimately did not resign, Dubik contends the Army chief’s resignation would have been justified if he had done so quietly. Dubik properly criticizes an alleged plan under which the Army chief had intended to hold a press conference immediately after notifying the president that he intended to resign.<sup>17</sup>

What is not clear, however, is if a senior officer can control whether or not a resignation will remain private.<sup>18</sup> As General Johnson’s case of a “near-resignation” implies, there simply is no tradition of resignation in the US military. Thus, it is difficult to know exactly how one could accomplish a “quiet” resignation in practice, especially if a senior officer were to resign in the middle of a controversial war. It is likely that any high-level resignation would prompt significant political consequences.<sup>19</sup> Leaks from staff would be almost inevitable—as would be aggressive questioning from the president’s opponents in Congress. The resulting press coverage and public speculation would be equally aggressive and intense. As the recent Dempsey case suggests, quiet resignation would be extremely difficult—really impossible—in today’s political climate.

Even if a quiet resignation were possible, neither Snider nor Dubik help us tangibly understand what constitutes an immoral policy. In fact, their arguments rely on different moral foundations. For Dubik, resignation is a matter of individual moral conscience; for Snider, it is a matter of the moral autonomy—and hence authority—of the profession. These two approaches suffer from different problems, but both possess the potential to undermine civilian control of the military.

As he illustrates in the Johnson case, Dubik’s standard for an immoral policy is whether it “wastes lives.”<sup>20</sup> At first glance, the application of this standard to General Johnson’s doubts about the Vietnam War seems appealing. However, the issues at stake were almost certainly less clear at the time than they are in retrospect. Other officers and policy makers with recognized expertise had reasonable disagreements with Johnson at the time. Moreover, the logic of “wasted lives” versus “cost in lives” is itself highly subjective. In fact, measured against this standard, any civilian who does not give the military all the resources it requests or who does not pursue the strategy the military recommends wastes lives, at least to some degree. Consequently, there is no room for any civilian restraint on military policy. Who decides where to draw the line in terms of the cost in lives or how many wasted lives? For Dubik, this discretion

resides entirely with the individual's conscience, leaving open a wide loophole for military resignation on myriad policy issues.<sup>21</sup>

Snider's argument is more nuanced, relying on the moral authority of the profession instead of the individual officer's conscience. Yet this approach creates different challenges. First, expert knowledge is, by its nature, uncertain—especially for members of the military profession. Officers have fewer opportunities to practice their craft than members of other professions do. Peacetime is frequent, and officers rarely—if ever—experience war at the same level of responsibility during their careers. Moreover, war—by its nature—is extremely complex.<sup>22</sup> Thus, judgments about the consequences of a policy decision surrounding military conflict will always involve relatively greater levels of ambiguity.<sup>23</sup>

Second, a corporate standard for resignation based on the moral autonomy of the profession must rely, to some degree, on a professional ethic or an objective standard. Yet there is debate about whether an American military ethic can, or should, exist and whether one exists at present.<sup>24</sup> As a result, officers face significant limitations in attempting to rely on the profession's ethic as a standard for judging the morality of a policy decision.

Finally, even if military officers were relatively certain of the consequences of a policy decision and could agree to a professional standard upon which to judge the morality of consequences, this logic itself would preclude individual resignation and instead dictate disobedience by the officer corps as a whole. A judgment based on the collective moral autonomy of the profession, rather than on an individual's conscience, would require general consensus among members of the profession and thus would preclude any form of quiet resignation. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to imagine the circumstances under which an officer could resign on moral grounds without engaging in, as Snider puts it, "insubordination to civilian authority."<sup>25</sup>

Snider is largely silent on the question of disobedience, but his arguments about the profession's requirement for moral autonomy rest on James Burk's concept of "responsible obedience."<sup>26</sup> Burk, a professor of sociology at Texas A&M University, agrees that senior officers share moral accountability for their actions and advice, but that responsibility is constrained and must be channeled appropriately. According to Burk, "obedience to the principle that civilian leaders rule does not necessarily create a world of blind obedience, not so long as the military profession

retains its autonomy to cultivate its expert knowledge and to introduce it into policy deliberations.”<sup>27</sup> Military leaders can neither responsibly disobey nor resign when faced with an immoral order, but they have a clear responsibility to communicate their expertise and advice candidly during policy deliberations.

The effective development of strategy depends on the close integration of civilian and military perspectives.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the Constitution clearly subordinates military prerogatives to the policy decisions of civilians and civilian institutions.<sup>29</sup> Thus, at the most fundamental level, attempts by senior officers to claim the legitimate authority necessary to judge the morality of a policy on behalf of the Republic are inconsistent with civilian control of the military. As Burk argues, “If there is a conflict in judgment between political leaders and military professionals over the wisdom of a policy to use armed force, it is not necessarily the case that the political leader is right and the military professional wrong. Often, the matter will be surrounded by enough uncertainty no one could be sure which judgment should be preferred. Yet, in the end, someone must decide, and . . . these rules are embedded in the Constitution.”<sup>30</sup>

Our republican system of governance presupposes that there will always be moral disagreements about policy outcomes, and it establishes a system of civilian institutions within which to resolve those disputes. Operating in this system does not require senior military leaders to obey blindly, but it does require “responsible obedience.” Officers have a constitutional responsibility to offer expert advice, but they should not resign or disobey a lawful order when their advice is not taken. The status of a profession relies on its ability to *profess*, not on its ability to *dictate*.<sup>31</sup>

## **Larger Problems in Civil-Military Relations**

Although Snider’s and Dubik’s arguments seem compelling in principle, their narrow space of resignation vanishes in practice. Indeed, Dubik and Snider both explicitly state that the Dempsey case came nowhere near meeting their criteria for principled resignation.<sup>32</sup> In addition, unlike many bloggers and pundits, neither Snider nor Dubik support public resignation in protest, nor do they support politically motivated threats by senior officers intended to intimidate or coerce civilian leaders. Yet there is suggestive evidence that the resignation debate itself may be harming trust and the civil-military relationship. Support

for resignation in protest has been on the rise in recent years. In 1999, for example, only 27 percent of all veterans agreed that a senior officer should resign in protest in the face of an “unwise” order. However, by 2014, 59 percent thought so.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the recent round of blog posts and op-eds supporting politically motivated, rather than principled, resignation contributes to skepticism among civilian leaders and general civil-military distrust. While levels of trust among the public remain high, partisan differences have emerged—especially among elites. Currently, 94 percent of Republicans express “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in the military, but only 61 percent of all Democrats and 49 percent of elite Democrats feel the same.<sup>34</sup>

Neither Snider and Dubik nor other thoughtful observers of civil-military relations have caused the trends described above. However, by responding to partisan arguments about resignation in protest during an ongoing policy debate, scholars risk legitimizing flawed arguments about resignation. They make politically motivated resignations seem plausible to civilian leaders. Even when presented with careful analyses, it can be difficult to grasp the nuance involved in these debates. In the age of blogs and social media, continued debate exacerbates civil-military tension in ongoing policy discussions that clearly do not warrant resignation by either set of standards.

Just as important, by focusing on the question of whether officers can resign under extremely rare circumstances, scholars ignore far more pressing questions of greater import to American civil-military relations. For example, Dubik’s analysis of General Johnson’s almost-resignation never considers the Army chief’s role during policy deliberations about whether to mobilize the reserves. Although intelligence analyst and military historian Lewis Sorley argues that Johnson was sharply critical during policy deliberations, other evidence suggests Johnson failed to fully articulate his reservations about the proposed policy to the secretary of defense or the president either before or after a decision was made.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, according to McMaster’s account, Johnson deliberately misled members of Congress and withheld information because—in Johnson’s own words—he owed “allegiance principally to the President.”<sup>36</sup> By asserting that the Army chief had a right to resign, Dubik ignores prior questions about whether Johnson met his basic responsibilities to support constitutional processes as a senior military advisor.

The current debate about resignation and disobedience fuels the narrative that there is a dearth of trust between civilian and military leaders. It also focuses on the rare circumstances in which the civil-military dialogue has completely broken down. Moreover, it ignores a wide range of institutional issues, including decisions about future force structure, resource management, training, recruiting and retention, and assessments of long-term risk. Consequently, this debate offers little guidance that would help senior officers navigate their daily responsibilities during today's policy-making process. In this regard, the resignation debate is emblematic of an existing gap within the broader literature on the civil-military dialogue.

As it stands, the civil-military relations literature is heavy on prohibitions, explaining what officers cannot do, and light on specifics about how officers can be involved in the policy-making process. Beginning with Samuel P. Huntington's model of objective control, officers are told to abstain from political activity of any kind.<sup>37</sup> However, as Burk's model of responsible obedience suggests, there may not always be a clear distinction between political and military spheres. Political leaders often depend on information they obtain from military leaders to weigh their options and make decisions. Thus, senior military leaders must be prepared to operate at the nexus of policy and strategy.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, current Army doctrine stipulates that professionals "confine their advisory role to the policymaking process" but offers no guidance about how to exercise this role. The sole direction given in Army doctrine is that military leaders should "not engage publicly in policy advocacy or dissent."<sup>39</sup> The other military services provide no guidance in doctrine on the matter. Surely, more can be said about the role of military expertise in policy debates. How does one responsibly walk this path?

There have been some signs of progress in recent years. For example, Risa A. Brooks, associate professor of political science at Marquette University, considers the potential costs and benefits of political activity by military officers in a democracy.<sup>40</sup> Brooks recognizes some clear benefits of political activity by military officers but concludes that the costs ultimately outweigh the benefits. Yet Brooks's analysis also fails to recognize that military advice is always delivered in a political context. Although she identifies a typology including different types of political behaviors, she never actually defines what makes a particular act political rather than military.<sup>41</sup> As a result, she offers little guidance to military leaders

about what they can or should say during the policy process or to civilian leaders about how they could obtain any of the benefits of military expertise. Ultimately, the inference is to safeguard civilian control and that military advice must remain only within the confines of private policy deliberations.

While agreeing that military officers should not engage in political activity, other scholars nevertheless leave room for officers to engage in dissent—sometimes even public dissent.<sup>42</sup> Framing military advice and expertise in terms of dissent creates several problems, however. First, it implies that the relationship between the president and senior military leaders is of primary importance, while downplaying the importance of the congressional role in civil-military relations. Yet military leaders have a constitutional obligation to support all branches of government in their policy-making duties. When military leaders fail to provide all relevant information to congressional leaders, as General Johnson did, they undermine the proper functioning of constitutional processes of oversight.

Second, a focus on the dissent side of military advice reinforces the narrative of broader civil-military tension and distrust, undermining the positive role military expertise can—and should—play in policy debates. Rather than encouraging officers to speak candidly and to offer their considered military judgment on topics related to military expertise, framing the strategic dialogue around dissent teaches them to focus on situations in which civilian leaders disagree with them. In a divided republic, the reality is that military advice will frequently dissent from the position of at least some political actors, especially in the current political environment.<sup>43</sup> While officers should be aware of these potential conflicts and exercise some political savvy, they should not be focused primarily on which political actors agree or disagree with them. Instead, they should be concerned with giving the most accurate and candid assessment possible, consistent with their unique military expertise.

Finally, a focus on military dissent reinforces the notion that military advice is a tool to wield against civilian leaders rather than the fulfillment of a constitutional responsibility to support elected leaders in the conduct of their duties. Military leaders should not offer advice to achieve the policy outcomes they prefer; rather, they provide one form of expertise that can help political leaders make more effective policy decisions, typically as part of a broader strategy.

Instead of focusing on the question of whether apolitical military officers can resign or dissent after the civil-military dialogue breaks down, scholars should dedicate more energy toward articulating the positive role professional military officers can play in policy deliberations. Although military officers do not possess the constitutional authority to adjudicate between competing versions of the “common good,” they do have a critical responsibility to inform policy debates and discussions.<sup>44</sup>

Professional officers looking for guidance on how to render military advice in a political context need more guidance than the current literature provides. It is not enough to tell military officers that civilians have the “right to be wrong”; officers need a new framework to help them understand how they can give advice in such a way that will help civilian leaders be right more often but that does not threaten civilian primacy. Military leaders need more robust norms and guidelines that can help them understand how to find their voice in the unequal dialogue. Drawing on the central insights of Carl von Clausewitz, the next section develops a framework for expert military advice in the policy-making process.

### **A Clausewitzian Framework for Military Expertise and Advice**

The search for a new framework turns to an old source for inspiration. Carl von Clausewitz is perhaps best known for his insight that war is always political in nature: “the continuation of politics with the addition of other means.”<sup>45</sup> Yet his dialectical approach offers a much richer and more nuanced view of both the unity and distinctiveness of the military and the political aspects of war. According to Clausewitz, politics establishes the source of war, dictates the available means, and determines the desired ends.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, “war is special activity, different and separate from any other pursued by man.”<sup>47</sup> Within its subordinate sphere, then, war retains the logic of politics, but military expertise has its own “grammar.”<sup>48</sup>

Since political leaders sometimes “may lack a detailed knowledge of military matters,” Clausewitz requires military leaders to provide unique military advice as part of a robust strategic dialogue.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, he is much more concerned about the influence of the political on the military, rather than vice versa. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that the

senior military leader should sit in the cabinet so political leaders may shape his activities.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, Clausewitz expects military expertise may inform political decisions but not dictate political ends.

Clausewitz provides a much more complete account of the nature and limitations of military expertise. This perspective on the military leader's expert knowledge does not suggest that military leaders are always right and civilian leaders are always wrong in matters of war; rather, it suggests that close and continuous dialogue between military and civilian leaders is required to ensure strategic success. Moreover, it places clear responsibility on military leaders to develop special expertise related to military affairs.

### **Military Expertise**

It is within the grammar of war where Clausewitz identifies unique military expertise, or military genius. Whereas civilian expertise lies within the realm of policy, the grammar of war centers on combat.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the military leader must be expert in the conduct of war to include both tactics and military strategy, as well as the "creation, maintenance, and use" of fighting forces.<sup>52</sup> All of these activities ultimately must relate to combat.

Yet military expertise faces significant limitations. Unlike other human activities, war is extremely complex because it "takes place in a unique environment of danger, fear, physical exertion, and uncertainty."<sup>53</sup> It is neither an art nor a science; rather, it is something akin to a duel on a larger scale.<sup>54</sup> The strategic interaction with a human adversary and the complexity of the environment in which war takes place make war inherently unpredictable.

For Clausewitz, it is precisely this capricious nature that provides the basis of military expertise and defines its limitations. Although "everything in strategy is very simple," he maintains that the military leader requires "great strength of character, as well as great lucidity and firmness of mind . . . to carry out the plan."<sup>55</sup> Years of experience and practice provide senior military leaders with the ability to "know friction in order to overcome it whenever possible, and in order not to expect a standard of achievement in his operations which this very friction makes impossible."<sup>56</sup> Clausewitz recognized that combat experience is itself punctuated and rare. Although he advises military leaders to turn to training

and the study of military history to supplement experience, he recognizes that even the best commanders will often get things wrong.

Modern attempts to develop a military science only underscore Clausewitz's perspective about the limits of military expertise. Moreover, the addition of new military and political tools of influence only exacerbates this complexity. As one commentator has noted, "Military science is not normally so exact as to rule out all but one school of thought on the question of how battles are to be fought and wars won. As a result, military planners frequently find themselves uncertain or divided regarding the kinds of preparations necessary to support the foreign policy purposes of the nation."<sup>57</sup>

Despite recognizing these significant challenges, Clausewitz nevertheless devotes a significant amount of time to identifying the skills and characteristics required to develop military genius. Although military officers' understanding will always be limited and imperfect, a grasp of the grammar of war is nevertheless necessary to develop and implement effective strategy. Within the realm of combat, a military expert must be able to identify the military resources required to accomplish a given end and estimate the costs and risks of a campaign.<sup>58</sup> These skills are necessary because of both practical and political constraints. The unlimited application of resources would "result in strength being wasted, which is contrary to other principles of statecraft."<sup>59</sup> It could also undermine domestic support if the means used in a military operation are disproportionate to the ends sought.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, Clausewitz pays close attention to the military leader's need to strive for an optimal balance between the two.

According to Clausewitz, military experts must fully understand the capabilities at their disposal and how long military actions will take. This burden is indeed significant as demonstrated by the level of detail he devoted to tactical and operational questions, and it requires the careful study of military history and theories of war.<sup>61</sup> "Practice and experience dictate the answer [to questions of feasibility]: this is possible, that is not."<sup>62</sup> Thus, military experts possess a keen understanding of both what military force can accomplish and what it cannot.

In addition to understanding the means-ends relationship, military leaders must also possess the creativity and expertise necessary to generate options and develop ways consistent with war's political constraints. Clausewitz acknowledges the potential there is more than one path to

success when he argues, “given certain conditions, different ways of reaching the objective are possible.”<sup>63</sup> Yet military experts must be attuned to the political context when developing military options to support political ends because “questions of personality and personal relations raise the number of possible ways of achieving the goal of policy to infinity.”<sup>64</sup> Political leaders may consider certain military approaches to be off limits for moral or political reasons, or they may request to use military resources in particular ways. Yet Clausewitz suggests that military leaders must be open to allowing political leaders to choose what they consider the optimum path to their political objectives. Military leaders nevertheless have a responsibility to share their expertise on the feasibility of options, but they should recognize that nonmilitary factors may sometimes influence their approach.

Thus, even if they are deeply familiar with the grammar of war, military leaders must not be ignorant of domestic politics. Especially at the highest levels of command, military experts must have a sound grasp of national policy. Again, Clausewitz states, “No major proposal for war can be worked out in ignorance of political factors.”<sup>65</sup> For example, the scale of political purposes will have significant implications for the military means required and myriad other factors: “The political object—the original motive for the war—will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.”<sup>66</sup>

As a result, all military planning must proceed from its political basis. If anyone attempts to separate war from its political aspects, they will be “left with something pointless and devoid of sense.”<sup>67</sup> For Clausewitz, then, the unity of war does not come from the overlapping nature of civilian and military spheres but rather from the primacy of the civilian sphere.<sup>68</sup>

### **Civilian Expertise**

Although Clausewitz identifies the unique nature of military expertise, he identifies certain topics as outside the bounds of the military realm and squarely within the civilian sphere. Most notably, he places the onus for the ends of policy on civilian leaders. In distinguishing the commander and his army from the government, he unambiguously asserts, “the political aims are the business of the government alone.”<sup>69</sup> Civilian leaders alone dictate the ends of policy. Through the establishment

of policy, governments are the arbiters and custodians of the people's interests. Regardless of a nation's domestic institutional arrangements:

It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, civilian leaders alone are responsible for interpreting the "will of the people," identifying national values and interests, and making final judgments about how much risk the government can accept in particular areas. Moreover, since these factors are outside the grammar of war, military experts have no basis upon which to judge them. Instead, they must assume that the outcomes of policy are consistent with the interests of the community.<sup>71</sup>

Domestic politics and political organization also fall outside the military sphere. Civilian leaders bear full responsibility for all domestic political factors and economic considerations. When planning, military leaders must remember "strategy does not inquire how a country should be organized and a people trained in order to produce the best military results. It takes these matters as it finds them."<sup>72</sup> Even on questions of how to mobilize the nation and what level of resources can be provided during times of crisis, Clausewitz places responsibility for domestic political judgments squarely with civilian leaders. He also expects the government to dictate the size of the military and the system of supply.<sup>73</sup> After providing expert advice about the necessary resources, the military commander accepts the means he is given and uses such means as effectively as possible.<sup>74</sup>

Of course, many policy judgments about the ends of policy or domestic organization may be contingent on the required means, costs, or duration. Political leaders may decide that the benefits inherent in some outcomes simply may not be worth the necessary effort. Consequently, they may choose to reduce the ends sought or forego an action altogether. In these cases, civilian decisions about the ends of policy or domestic organization are contingent on military expertise; however, this does not imply that military experts themselves have responsibility over these decisions. Rather, they have a responsibility to provide the

information civilian leaders require to interpret the public's will and to establish it in policy. Political ends must govern, but they must not be a "tyrant."<sup>75</sup>

### **Overlapping Expertise**

However, there are at least several areas where military expertise overlaps with civilian expertise. In these areas, civilian and military leaders share some degree of responsibility. The first area involves assessments of international politics, the security environment, and the opportunity costs of acting in one area while ignoring another. Changes in alliance structures or the international situation can significantly influence military operations. According to Clausewitz, in some campaigns, everything "depends on the existing political affiliations, interests, traditions, lines of policy, and the personalities of princes, ministers, favorites, mistresses, and so forth."<sup>76</sup> Although military leaders may not possess special expertise in all matters of state, they do share responsibility for certain aspects of international politics, such as the preservation of the military components of alliance structures.

The second area pertains to integrating the military instrument with other instruments of state power. In some cases, Clausewitz recognizes that military tools will be only part of the state's overall strategy. In other cases, the use of military power will remain confined to "such minimal wars, which consist of merely threatening the enemy, with negotiations held in reserve."<sup>77</sup> While military leaders do not hold any particular diplomatic expertise, they nevertheless share a responsibility in ensuring military tools complement the other instruments of the state. Additionally, military expertise concerning the consequences and limits of military power is of exceptional importance in this area. Yet even if military power is not actually used or is used only in a limited manner, military expertise plays a role in shaping the state's policies of prevention and deterrence.

The final area of shared expertise relates to the establishment of limiting principles and the management of escalation dynamics. Clausewitz recognizes that states sometimes will find it in their interest to wage limited wars yet sees a potential trap in this approach. In situations involving minimal state interests, "the art of war will shrivel into prudence, and its main concern will be to make sure the delicate balance is not suddenly upset in the enemy's favor and the half-hearted war does not

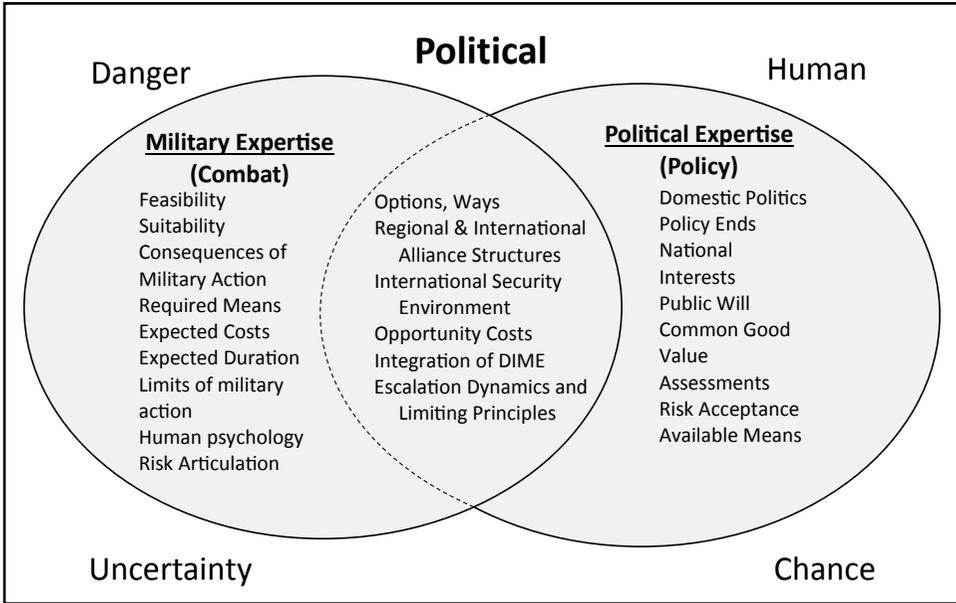
become a real war after all.”<sup>78</sup> In these limited conflicts, the expertise of both civilian and military leaders must influence escalation dynamics. Together, they attempt to avoid a commitment of resources out of proportion with the desired ends.

### **Drawing the Lines**

Although there are areas in which the military sphere overlaps with particular aspects in the civilian realm, there are nevertheless clear limits on military expertise. Clausewitz sees no circumstances under which military expertise will encompass questions regarding the ends of policy. However, he does not draw the same clear line with respect to the encroachment of policy onto combat. He reminds us that policy “is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.”<sup>79</sup> He explicitly states that, at the highest levels, the idea of a purely military opinion or purely military advice is absurd.<sup>80</sup> However, Clausewitz also does not draw a clear line beyond which “operational expertise ought to take over and political control cease.”<sup>81</sup> Although he admits that policy will not dictate “the posting of guards or the employment of patrols,” he does admit that political considerations will be “influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle.”<sup>82</sup> As Suzanne Nielsen, an associate professor of international relations at the US Military Academy, has argued, “If political considerations may also be significant here, then Clausewitz does not establish a clear limitation on political control over military operations.”<sup>83</sup> Clausewitz does not expect military leaders to be involved in politics, but he does anticipate that political leaders will direct military affairs.

Figure 1 depicts the central features of this Clausewitzian framework for military advice. First, it shows the overlapping nature of the military and civilian spheres of expertise and highlights the need for ongoing strategic dialogue. Second, it demonstrates the unique features of military expertise, while also clearly identifying those factors that fall outside the military sphere. Third, it shows there is no clear boundary preventing the encroachment of political factors into the military realm; policy permeates all military operations, and political leaders retain legitimate authority over military decisions. Finally, it illustrates that—despite the development of military expertise—war will remain an unpredictable endeavor because military operations are a form of

human interaction that takes place within an environment of danger, chance, and uncertainty.



**Figure 1: A Clausewitzian framework for the civil-military dialogue**

This framework has several features that make it more attractive than previous models of civil-military interaction. In many ways, it actually subsumes and unifies several of the most-prominent models. For example, it retains civilian leaders' right to be wrong and prevents political activity by military leaders. It also encapsulates the unequal dialogue and recognizes that civilian leaders have a responsibility to ensure military activities support policy goals. Finally, it is consistent with Burk's conception of responsible obedience and suggests ways to operationalize this concept.

However, the Clausewitzian framework also adds new features to these existing models. First, it more carefully identifies the unique nature and limitations of military expertise. It focuses on the collaborative aspects of the civil-military dialogue and provides greater clarity on what role military experts can—and should—play in the policy-making process. In so doing, it takes the focus off issues like resignation and dissent, instead describing the role military experts should play in a successful

civil-military dialogue. Finally, it provides a basis for military competence based on trust. If military leaders do not add value to the policy-making process, this framework suggests that civilian leaders can—and will—withdraw autonomy from the military. Thus, military leaders face incentives to develop expertise and to offer their best advice while recognizing the limits of military expertise.

## **Practical Implications of a Clausewitzian Framework**

There are a number of practical implications that would result from adopting this framework. Although civilian and military leaders both share responsibility, this article focuses primarily on the military side of the dialogue. Below are the most important practical lessons military leaders should keep in mind when engaging in strategic dialogue at the highest levels.

*Senior military leaders provide clear military advice but should avoid commenting on topics that lie beyond the sphere of military expertise.* The Clausewitzian framework developed above identifies some areas of special military expertise, and some areas where military expertise overlaps with civilian expertise. Policy permeates all military operations according to this framework; however, military experts cannot claim inviolable autonomy over any of these topic areas. Rather, military leaders must earn autonomy through expert advice in practice. They do so by providing candid, frank, and accurate assessments on issues within their expertise.

However, as figure 1 illustrates, although there are some areas of overlap between civilian and military spheres, certain aspects of civilian expertise lie clearly outside the military realm. Because the conduct of war is subordinate to the logic of politics, military leaders can claim no expertise in questions about whether the government should pursue a particular policy. They also cannot claim any legitimate basis upon which to assess the national interest, the public will, or the common good. As such, they should refrain from both public and private comments about whether a particular military policy or budget is in the best interest of the United States.

*Senior military leaders should provide appropriate military expertise in private and in public.* Although military leaders do not possess the expertise upon which to assess what policy should be, they nevertheless

have a duty to provide information that can inform civilian policy decisions. Unlike Brooks's focus on prohibited political tactics, however, this Clausewitzian framework instead focuses on content to determine whether military advice is appropriate. In so doing, it recognizes that military advice is always rendered in a political context and always has political implications, regardless of whether it is delivered in public or private. The framework further recognizes that military leaders often will be required to participate in events with extensive media coverage, such as official Department of Defense press conferences or congressional testimony. Thus, not only does this framework allow for public military advice, it actually requires military leaders to participate in the strategic dialogue in public. Yet it limits the topics on which they can engage to those within the clearly identified sphere of military expertise.

However, the logic of this framework is at least partially self-limiting; in addition to restricting the content of military advice, it also places de facto limits on which forums are appropriate for military engagement. For example, since military leaders base their assessments in professional expertise (limited though it may be), they should not write "opinion" articles or advocacy pieces related to policy questions. Army general Colin Powell's articles in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs* violated the framework because they commented on when it is appropriate for civilian leaders to use force.<sup>84</sup> This framework suggests that military leaders should not give policy speeches, since policy is beyond the scope of military responsibility and expertise. Similarly, military experts should not leak information to the press in an attempt to influence policy outcomes. Yet it also recognizes that military leaders have a responsibility to clarify the record if civilian leaders distort their advice in public.<sup>85</sup>

However, this framework does not prohibit senior military leaders from all writing opportunities, speaking engagements, or media events. Yet it does suggest that articles and public engagements, including those with think tanks or civic groups, should remain focused on topics that do not extend beyond the military sphere. In addition, it suggests that senior military leaders will maintain a somewhat limited public profile.

*Senior military leaders should provide the same information and advice to leaders in both the executive and legislative branches.* Consistent with their constitutional responsibilities to serve both branches of government, military leaders have a responsibility to participate in the strategic dialogue with the president and members of Congress. Although military

leaders possess no authority to hold political leaders accountable under a Clausewitzian framework, members of Congress nevertheless rely on military expertise when providing political oversight of the executive branch. When they cannot obtain that expertise, the Clausewitzian assumption that political leaders have access to military information collapses. Because of this lack of information, one also can no longer assume that policy is a repository of the public will or the common good.

Of course, the statutory authority of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service chiefs under Title X, US Code may exacerbate the tendency for military officers to privilege their relationship with the president.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the large number of legislators makes this type of broad sharing of expertise challenging, given current statutory and institutional arrangements. It is beyond the scope of this article to assess whether or not current laws or institutions undermine the civil-military relationship with respect to Congress. However, this framework does suggest that the strategic dialogue will be more effective if political leaders from both branches have ready access to military expertise. At a minimum, then, this framework suggests the need for regular military participation in robust oversight hearings in both public and unclassified settings.

Once again, however, it is worth emphasizing that the Clausewitzian framework does not simply focus on whether senior officers should dissent. Rather, it expects military officers to continually engage with elected civilian leaders from both branches in support of their constitutional duties. While Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki's comments about required troop levels in Iraq are one possible manifestation of this sort of dialogue, members of Congress may also need broader access to military advice to effectively carry out their constitutional duties to authorize the use of force and oversee executive policy implementation. Of course, not all military information can or should be publically communicated. Closed hearings and private meetings with senior military leaders may also improve the quality of the strategic dialogue.

*Senior military leaders should recognize and articulate the uncertainty and limitations inherent in any military advice.* Some pundits suggest that military leaders currently emphasize uncertainty only when it benefits them and their interests and minimize it when it is convenient to do so.<sup>87</sup> However, a Clausewitzian perspective indicates that military leaders must include a dose of humility into their assessments. As such, the

current practice of offering *best military advice* (BMA) is inconsistent with the Clausewitzian framework. In practice, it confers an air of legitimacy that military advice cannot attain.

Military expertise does provide valuable information during the strategic dialogue, and it should be one input into the policy-making process. Nevertheless, it will never be as precise in its diagnoses or prescriptions as expertise in other professions such as medicine and law is. Consequently, one might better conceive of military advice as a “considered military assessment” (CMA) containing significant uncertainty. Regardless of whether military leaders adopt a shift from BMA to CMA, the broader point remains that military leaders must be mindful not only of the friction of war but also of the uncertainty of future outcomes. The Clausewitzian framework sees experience as a lubricant that can partially mitigate uncertainty—not as something that can eliminate the effects of danger, chance, and human interaction in warfare.

*Senior military leaders should render advice grounded in the profession’s expertise, not one professional’s view, and provide the full range of military opinion.* Consistent with the previous point, military experts must also recognize that no one military leader can possess experience in all the aspects of joint warfare necessary to provide military advice. In short, no senior officer will have sufficient combat experience on land, in the air, or at sea. Moreover, even within one’s own experience, there often is considerable disagreement about what professional expertise has to say on the matter. As discussed earlier, this generally implies that there will be a range of opinions within or across the respective service professions.

The Clausewitzian perspective of a strategic dialogue also suggests that senior military leaders have a responsibility to share not only their “own” expert advice but also the broader range of expertise within the profession. Yet cases in which the advice of senior military officers conflict with one another in public have become increasingly rare since the establishment of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986. One notable exception is Gen Eric Shinseki’s testimony during the run up to the Iraq War, which at least partially contradicted the United States Central Command commander on troop estimates.<sup>88</sup>

Although there is a statutory requirement under Title X, US Code for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to present diverging opinions, the law provides significant discretion in practice. Nevertheless, many opportunities for senior leaders to share competing perspectives exist

within the current deliberative process, including meetings of the operations deputies and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, on operational issues, opportunities that would inject diverse military views into the policy process are rarer since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Additionally, there is no formal institutional process to include service perspectives into the National Security Council process, and regional combatant commanders are only included on an ad hoc basis.

*Senior military leaders should provide political leaders with a variety of military options but should work with civilians to bound possibilities.* Although civilian leaders have sole responsibility for determining the ends of policy, the Clausewitzian framework recognizes that cost-benefit analyses and military factors may influence their decisions. As a result, it may be rare that civilian leaders will have identified the ends of policy at the beginning of the strategic dialogue between military and civilian leaders. As Janine Davidson, senior fellow for defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, has noted, civilian leaders are inclined to seek options, while military leaders want end states from which to plan.<sup>89</sup>

The Clausewitzian framework anticipates this conundrum and suggests that military leaders should expect to work with civilian leaders through an iterative strategic dialogue—even when ends are not initially clear. In some—perhaps even most—cases, military leaders may need to be prepared to provide military options for more than one potential end state. Civilian leaders, for their part, should provide some strategic guidance on possible end states. While Clausewitz is silent on what this guidance might look like, it could include a “zone of tolerance” for potential outcomes or suggest multiple end states. Civilians also may direct military leaders to develop particular options. A Clausewitzian perspective of military advice accepts that civilian leaders may include considerations beyond purely military factors into their calculations. Nevertheless, military experts retain their responsibility to assess the feasibility and suitability of military operations as the dialogue matures.

*Senior military leaders should provide well-supported military estimates and provide all information relevant to policymakers' decisions.* The Clausewitzian framework suggests that seemingly self-serving behavior will undermine effective strategy. Since political leaders alone have responsibility for determining policy that serves the political will, military leaders distort strategy by appearing to withhold information or providing erroneous or unsupported estimates. Consequently, they must clearly ar-

ticulate their planning assumptions and defend their recommendations with data when available and with judgment when necessary. Although military experts must account for the friction of war and uncertainty when planning, they nevertheless should strive for optimality—the efficient use of state resources to accomplish political ends. The Clausewitzian framework suggests that, when they do not, they create an ends-ways or an ends-means mismatch.

Thus, military leaders who intentionally distort troop estimates or withhold information can also undermine confidence in military expertise and lead to further civilian encroachment into military autonomy. Since civilian leaders have the authority to dictate policy on all matters within the military sphere, they become increasingly likely to do so if military leaders do not produce results. The Clausewitzian framework depends on reliable and available military advice that allows civilian leaders to determine appropriate policy.

## **Conclusion**

Recent debates about resignation and dissent exemplify a deeper problem in the literature on civil-military relations and the professional education of senior military leaders. Although scholars on both sides of these debates have offered thoughtful arguments about the topics of resignation and dissent, those scholars nevertheless have remained focused on issues that occur after the civil-military dialogue has broken down. This article attempts to widen the aperture of this debate and encourage other scholars to place renewed attention on how to improve the content and quality of the civil-military dialogue before it collapses. Questions about how to respond in the middle of crises are interesting, but focusing solely on crises ensures there will always be more to debate.

The Clausewitzian framework in this article is a starting point for future debate, but this model unifies several previous models of civil-military relations and integrates their insights into a more coherent whole. Perhaps most importantly, it adds additional content to discussions about the nature and limitations of military expertise. Thus, it attempts to help senior military leaders better understand how they can—and should—participate in the policy-making process. While recognizing the subordinate nature that military experts play in the unequal dialogue, this framework nevertheless aims to help military

experts effectively advise political leaders so civilians can exercise their right to be wrong as rarely as possible.

Adopting norms consistent with this model would improve the civil-military dialogue, but several of the implications hint that current institutional arrangements may make some aspects of the framework more difficult to apply than others. In many cases, however, scholars have not yet fully examined the effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Act and changes to Title X have had on the processes that dictate civil-military interactions at the strategic level.

How seriously do senior military leaders take their responsibilities to Congress, and what institutional changes might improve the quality and frequency of military advice? Additionally, are there any noticeable differences in the military consensus or internal dissent between institutional and operational-strategic policy areas? Has the Goldwater-Nichols Act changed the way in which senior military leaders provide advice to the executive and legislative branches in other significant ways?

Civil-military scholars must assess what norms should govern civil-military relations at the highest level and how professional military education has taught and transmitted norms. Are these programs effective in preparing officers for their responsibilities in the policy-making process? While many scholars focus their energy on what norms should be, the field would benefit from greater attention to empirical studies about whether these programs are effective in transmitting norms. To the extent it can, the United States should begin building the foundation and habits necessary for constructive strategic dialogue now. ■■■

## Notes

1. Statement of Martin Dempsey in “Testimony on U.S. Policy towards Iraq and Syria and the Threat Posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),” unclassified testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee (Washington, DC, 16 September 2014), <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/14-66%20-%209-16-14.pdf>.

2. Don M. Snider, “Should General Dempsey Resign? Army Professionals and the Moral Space for Dissent,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (web site), 21 October 2014, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/Should-General-Dempsey-Resign/2014/10/21>; James M. Dubik, “On Principled Resignation: A Response,” *Best Defense Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 14 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/14/on-principled-resignation-a-response/>; and James M. Dubik, “No Avoiding Moral Responsibility in War: Is There Ever a Time to Resign?,” *Army Magazine*, February 2015, <http://www.armymagazine.org/2015/01/13/no-avoiding-moral-responsibility-in-war-is-there-ever-a-time-to-resign/>.

3. In 1999, only 26 percent of elite veterans agreed that a senior officer should resign in protest in the face of an “unwise” order. By 2014, however, 63 percent thought so. See, for example, James Thomas Golby, Peter D. Feaver, and Lindsay P. Cohn, “Thanks for Your Service: Civilian and Veteran Attitudes After Fifteen Years of War,” in *What Difference Does Two Wars Make?*, edited by Kori Schake and James Mattis (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution, forthcoming 2015).

4. It is possible that at least part of this increase is the result of blogs and social media that lower barriers to entry into professional debates of this type and are more accessible.

5. Gary Anderson, “Is It Time for General Dempsey to Resign?,” *Best Defense Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 26 September 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/26/is-it-time-for-general-dempsey-to-resign/>; Seth Cropsey, “The Obama-Military Divide,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/seth-cropsey-the-obama-military-divide-1412033300>; and Andrew Tilghman and Jeff Schogol, “Calls for Brass to Resign Add to Debate over Mideast Policy,” *Military Times*, 30 September 2014, <http://archive.militarytimes.com/article/20140930/NEWS05/309300067/Calls-brass-resign-add-debate-over-Mideast-policy>.

6. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). For a discussion of various interpretations of McMaster’s book, also see Peter D. Feaver, “Should Senior Military Officers Resign in Protest if Obama Disregards Their Advice?,” *Shadow Government Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 7 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/07/should-senior-military-officers-resign-in-protest-if-obama-disregards-their-advice/>.

7. Anderson, “Is It Time for General Dempsey to Resign?”

8. Ibid.

9. Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

10. Richard H. Kohn, “Always Salute, Never Resign,” *Foreign Affairs*, 10 November 2009, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2009-11-10/always-salute-never-resign>.

11. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 465–67.

12. Don M. Snider, “Should General Dempsey Resign?”

13. Ibid.; also see James Burk, “Responsible Obedience by Military Professionals: The Discretion to Do What is Wrong,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 149–71; and Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 55.

14. Snider, “Should General Dempsey Resign?”

15. Dubik, “No Avoiding Moral Responsibility in War.”

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Given that there is no tradition of resignation in the US military, it is difficult to say empirically whether a senior officer’s decision to resign would become politicized in the middle of a contentious war. For further discussion, see Richard H. Kohn, “Always Salute, Never Resign.”

19. Here I follow Kohn’s definition of high-level resignations as only those including four-star officers serving in positions on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in combatant commands, or other ad hoc wartime command positions at that level of visibility.

20. Dubik, “No Avoiding Moral Responsibility in War.”

21. Peter D. Feaver, "Military Resignation in Protest is Still a Bad Idea," *Shadow Government Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 24 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/24/military-resignation-in-protest-is-still-a-bad-idea/>.
22. On the limited nature of military expertise, see Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 258–64; Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68–75; and Risa A. Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 213–38.
23. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976). For a more modern argument, see Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); or Cohen, *Supreme Command*.
24. Frank Hoffman, "A New American Military Ethic," *War on the Rocks Blog*, 6 August 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/08/a-new-american-military-ethic/>.
25. Snider, "Should General Dempsey Resign?"
26. James Burk, "Responsible Obedience by Military Professionals," 149–71.
27. *Ibid.*, 158.
28. Clausewitz, *On War*; and Cohen, *Supreme Command*.
29. Richard H. Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security: The Intent of the Framers," in *The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789–1989* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 61–94.
30. Burk, "Responsible Obedience by Military Professionals," 156.
31. For an alternative to this argument, see Snider, "Should General Dempsey Resign?"
32. *Ibid.*; and Dubik, "On Principled Resignation."
33. Golby, Cohn, and Feaver, "Thanks for Your Service."
34. James Thomas Golby, "Self-Interest Misunderstood: Military Partisanship and Public Trust" (presentation, Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Chicago, IL, October 2013).
35. Lewis Sorley, *Honorable Warrior: General Harold K. Johnson and the Ethics of Command* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); and McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 310–14.
36. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 311.
37. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957).
38. For a more thorough discussion of this point, see Christopher P. Gibson, "Enhancing National Security and Civilian Control of the Military: A Madisonian Approach," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 239–63.
39. Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 1, *The Army Profession*, June 2013, 6-3.
40. Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," 213–38.
41. *Ibid.*, 219. Brooks identifies five types of political activity, including "public appeals, grandstanding, politicking, alliance building, and shoulder tapping."
42. For examples, see Feaver, "Military Resignation in Protest;" Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "Infusing Normative Civil-Military Relations in the Officers Corps," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed., edited by Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2005), 663–65; and Don M. Snider "Dissent and Strategic Leadership of the Military Professions," *Orbis* 52, no. 2 (2008): 256–77.

43. James Thomas Golby, "Duty, Honor, Party: Ideology, Institutions, and the Use of Force" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2011).
44. For a counterargument, see Rob Atkinson, *The Limits of Military Officers' Duty to Obey Civilian Orders* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, forthcoming).
45. Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.
46. Suzanne C. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game? The Weinberger Doctrine and the American Use of Force," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed., edited by Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2005), 632.
47. Clausewitz, *On War*, 187.
48. *Ibid.*, 605.
49. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 636.
50. Clausewitz, *On War*, 608.
51. *Ibid.*, 95.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 632.
54. Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.
55. *Ibid.*, 178.
56. *Ibid.*, 119–20.
57. Warner R. Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950," in *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*, edited by Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 13.
58. For a full discussion of Clausewitz's view of "optimality" maximizing the effective use of one's limited resources, see Suzanne C. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force: A Clausewitzian Perspective*, The Letort Papers (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 21–24.
59. Clausewitz, *On War*, 78.
60. *Ibid.*, 585.
61. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 633. Also, see Clausewitz, 164, for a discussion of the importance of military history as a substitute for experience.
62. Clausewitz, *On War*, 120.
63. *Ibid.*, 93.
64. *Ibid.*, 94.
65. *Ibid.*, 608.
66. *Ibid.*, 81.
67. *Ibid.*, 605.
68. *Ibid.* For a more nuanced discussion of the unity and distinctiveness of the civilian and military spheres, see Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 10–14.
69. Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
70. *Ibid.*, 606–07.
71. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 635.
72. Clausewitz, *On War*, 144.
73. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 28. Also, see Clausewitz, *On War*, 89, 196, and 360.
74. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 28–29.
75. Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.
76. *Ibid.*, 569; but see Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," which argues that Clausewitz places all matters of international politics outside the sphere of military expertise.

77. Clausewitz, *On War*, 604.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 607.
80. Ibid.
81. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 25.
82. Clausewitz, *On War*, 606.
83. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 26.
84. Colin L. Powell “Why Generals Get Nervous,” *New York Times*, 8 October 1992, A35; and Colin L. Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 5 (Winter 1992–1993): 36–41.
85. Peter D. Feaver, “Military Resignation in Protest.”
86. See Title 10, US Code, Chapter 5, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/subtitle-A/part-I/chapter-5>. Title 10 identifies the CJCS as the “principal military advisor” and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) as “military advisors” to the president, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the secretary of defense, but requires the JCS to inform the secretary of defense before making recommendations to Congress.
87. Micah Zenko, “How the U.S. Military Thinks about Complexity,” *Politics, Power, and Preventive Action Blog*, Council on Foreign Relations, 19 March 2015, <http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2015/03/19/how-the-u-s-military-thinks-about-complexity/>.
88. Matthew Moten, “A Broken Dialogue: Rumsfeld, Shinseki, and Civil-Military Tension,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 42–71.
89. Janine Davidson, “Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 2013): 129–45.

# How Much Is Enough?

*Lindsay P. Cohn*

## Abstract

Recent debates in the United States have pitted the fiscal imperative of rationalizing the budget against the social narrative that society has an obligation to take care of its service members and veterans. This civil-military disconnect is a result of the structural necessity in so-called liberal market economies (LME) to focus significant portions of their military compensation on benefits, in addition to pay. These benefits—for example, health care, childcare, education, and retirement—are not broadly provided to all citizens in LMEs and constitute attractive recruiting incentives. However, it is difficult to control their costs and difficult to limit or remove them once implemented. Thus, the United States is caught in a benefits trap with challenging civil-military and policy implications.



In late 2014, the *Military Times* published a series of stories titled “America’s Military: A Force Adrift” in which it reported polling results from service members, veterans, and their family members showing plunging morale, feelings that society does not appreciate service members’ sacrifices, and fears that compensation will not keep pace with needs.<sup>1</sup> These results came hard on the heels of several public debates about the options the military had to cut for its budget to be in line with the requirements of the 2011 Budget Control Act—from which aircraft systems to retire to whether to end the current food subsidy military families receive through the commissary system.<sup>2</sup> Budget experts such as Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and Cindy Williams of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

---

Lindsay P. Cohn, PhD, is a senior assistant professor at the Naval War College, teaching policy analysis and strategy. She spent 2013–2014 as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow working for the deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations and combatting terrorism. Her research focuses on military organizations, particularly personnel policy.

have indicated that military personnel costs are rising at an unsustainable rate.<sup>3</sup> Three secretaries of defense and two chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as most of their service chiefs, have pleaded with Congress to bring military personnel costs under control.<sup>4</sup> However, the backlash from veterans' groups, military retirees, and other groups representing the interests of military personnel and their dependents has been strong.<sup>5</sup> Congress has shown no interest in any of the suggested reforms that could even bear the appearance of cuts.<sup>6</sup> In January 2015, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) published its final report, wherein it expressly argued that the fundamental structure of the compensation system and the level of benefits should be protected.<sup>7</sup>

All of this indicates a problem. On one hand, the United States has a fairly solid consensus among experts and senior military and civilian officials that military compensation costs are skyrocketing and unsustainable. On the other hand, the country has military personnel, dependents, and veterans who feel they are not being adequately compensated and that threats to their pay and benefits represent a violation of the social contract made between the military and society. While it goes without saying that pay and benefits are not the only reasons people join the military, it is also clear that people thinking of joining the military must consider both the material and the nonmaterial costs and benefits of service.

Since very few members of Congress are willing to tackle the task of reconciling defense costs with the budget, the United States is faced with the urgent need to reevaluate the civil-military contract. In the context of a wider discussion about the social contract Americans want to make for themselves and their children, it is crucial to determine how we are to fulfill our promises to those who have served and are serving, continue to recruit high-quality personnel, encourage the right people to stay in service, help those who do not stay to transition into the labor market, and ensure that those who are serving now get the training and equipment they need to do their jobs. This article attempts to contextualize the problem and suggests a cause for this disconnect, while highlighting current efforts to improve the situation.<sup>8</sup>

## **Labor Market Structure and Military Personnel Policy**

There is some evidence indicating that labor market structure affects military personnel policies and human resources management.<sup>9</sup> In my previous research, I observed that comparative economists have identified two basic labor market equilibria: those with high labor turnover and low levels of vocational skills training and, conversely, those with low labor turnover and high levels of vocational skills training. The first is the equilibrium predicted by classical liberal economics—as explicated most fully in Gary Becker’s *Human Capital*.<sup>10</sup> In a labor market free from government regulation, firms can hire and fire at will, and employees can leave at will, making it irrational for the firm to invest in training employees in any skills that could be useful to other firms. If the employees want to make themselves attractive, they must invest their own resources in skills training. Under this equilibrium, it is also irrational for firms to invest in firm-specific skills training—that is, skills that are valuable only to that firm, such as, standard operating procedures—because the employee may leave at any time and the resources invested in training would be wasted.

Scholars discovered the second equilibrium when they noticed that many firms *did* engage in vocational skills training but did so only under less-than-pure market conditions—for example, where government regulation made it more difficult to fire employees or more difficult to leave employment.<sup>11</sup> I have previously argued that militaries require both moderate levels of personnel turnover and significant levels of vocational and firm-specific skills training—a situation that would require off-equilibrium behavior from the military as employer no matter which labor market structure surrounded it. This implied that militaries located in different labor market contexts would face distinct problems of recruiting, retaining, managing, and separating personnel. In effect, militaries would be unable to act like private firms and would have to engage in some market-inefficient behavior in order to manage their personnel appropriately. I showed, though with a very limited sample of countries, that the mode of contracting personnel, the mode of assigning personnel to occupational specialties, and the types and availability of nonspecialty-related further training appear to vary with labor market type. Although no hypotheses relating to recruiting or retention were tested, my analysis suggested that the apparent differences were likely to lead to a situation in which less regulated labor markets with

high turnover and low skills training—such as, so-called liberal market economies (LME)—would find it easier to recruit high-quality personnel but harder to retain them. Conversely, more regulated labor markets with low turnover and high skills training—so-called coordinated market economies (CME)—would have more difficulty attracting high-quality recruits but less trouble retaining them. Indeed, the implication is that militaries in CMEs may have difficulty getting rid of their employees, in general, whereas militaries in LMEs are likely to suffer from the “lemon problem,” wherein the least capable employees want to stay and the most capable have strong material incentives to leave.

LMEs such as the United States is likely to have an easier time recruiting high-quality personnel than the more highly regulated CMEs such as Germany are. This is true because a more flexible labor market allows people who spend a medium term in the military to be able to transition laterally into another career, while the less flexible labor market penalizes any time spent outside of one’s chosen career path and/or on firm-specific training from a nonpermanent employer. Furthermore, the structure of unemployment protection in CMEs is such that unemployment may be more attractive than employment in a temporary job, whereas in LMEs, some job is almost always preferable to unemployment. What was not discussed in my earlier work is that other differences in the larger socioeconomic structure of these two market types may also contribute to recruiting and retention problems. In particular, the role of employer-provided benefits differs significantly across these two market types.

### **The Benefits Trap**

One reason militaries would have trouble recruiting high-quality personnel in CMEs is that potential employees could get skills training, job security, and a close-to-median wage from almost *any* decent employer. Militaries in LMEs, on the other hand, could offer training and job security that most other employers could not promise in the low-regulation environment. Additionally, there are a number of other benefits that matter to employees in LMEs that simply do not figure into employees’ calculus in most CMEs. The cost of higher education, for example, is generally higher in LMEs than in CMEs.<sup>12</sup> Thus, militaries in LMEs have the option of offering tuition assistance as a recruiting incentive,

and such militaries can structure the benefit to shape retention patterns, too. Public pension benefits are more generous in CMEs than in their more liberal counterpart, so that LMEs have the option of offering generous pension benefits to recruit and to shape retention.<sup>13</sup> Childcare is more likely to be more generously, publicly subsidized in CMEs than in LMEs, allowing LME militaries to attract people with the offer of a benefit that may be more difficult to find with other employers.<sup>14</sup> Finally, although health care is generally subsidized throughout the developed world, the United States is an exception, and the military offers a health care system that is far more generously subsidized than what is available to most American employees.<sup>15</sup>

In short, in CMEs, benefits such as health care, childcare, access to higher education, and pensions are provided fairly evenly to all, whereas in LMEs, access to such benefits is more limited and highly dependent on the employer.<sup>16</sup> A military that can provide these benefits—and that, indeed, considers them necessary to readiness—will be a very attractive employer in an LME but will look just like most other employers in a CME.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, in LMEs, these benefits are also not generally available to citizens except through their employers, so the military cannot rely on an existing national infrastructure. This implies that militaries in LMEs will be constrained to offer benefits as a significant part of their compensation packages, and the benefits may cost more in LMEs due to the lack of infrastructure.

This constraint on LME militaries is both an advantage and a disadvantage. On one hand, the situation provides more options and thus more flexibility in recruiting and, to a certain extent, retention. Thus, it may contribute to LME militaries' ability to attract high-quality recruits. On the other hand, benefits, once conferred and justified as being necessary to the functioning of the force, are difficult to take away or modify, and their costs are difficult to control. Thus, while the government can and does control military base pay, it is much harder to tackle the costs of benefits when they rise, and service members are more likely to feel that the civil-military contract is being abrogated when benefits are the focus of cuts. Therefore, LME militaries may find themselves in a benefits trap, where they have used these incentives to recruit and shape their force but are unable to fine tune incentives when it is necessary to downsize. This is especially true because these benefits are significantly different from what the employee could expect from another employer,

making the benefits particularly salient to the employee. Thus, the employee is more likely to mobilize in defense of the benefits than in defense of pay. If it is the case that militaries in LMEs have to rely more heavily on benefits, we have clues to both the skyrocketing costs of military personnel in the United States and to their feeling that any changes to these benefits represent a betrayal.

### Current Efforts to Improve

Deborah Clay-Mendez has noted that, because of the system of in-kind benefits, “one unintended consequence is that military personnel have become unnecessarily costly relative to non-military personnel. This reduces the level of military capability that the United States can provide for any given level of resources and provides an incentive for decision-makers to rely on civilians and contractors even when military ‘boots on the ground’ would be more effective.”<sup>18</sup> Former Secretary of Defense William Perry, relating the conclusions of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel in 2010, recommended that the services begin thinking of converting future benefits into more up-front cash.<sup>19</sup> However, several studies have indicated that military personnel would prefer cash in hand only over some, not all, of their in-kind benefits. For example, Craig C. Pinder argues that pay appears to be an ambivalent factor in job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, a 2012 survey by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) in cooperation with TrueChoice Solutions found that performance-based bonuses were not a popular idea among service members: “In our study, opinions of such a bonus varied most significantly by age groups, with younger service members, ages 18 to 29, preferring it more than older ones. But that young age group valued it at only a fraction of what it would cost to implement. And the 50-and-older age group actually considered it equivalent to a pay cut. This suggests that, contrary to the recommendations of independent panels and scores of experts, a performance-based bonus would not be a good use of resources.”<sup>21</sup>

The same CSBA survey found that service members do not value child, youth, and school services as much as it costs to provide them; instead, they value commissaries and exchanges *over* what it costs to provide such services.<sup>22</sup> Harrison notes, “the preferences of junior personnel—the short-term, non-career volunteers that make an all-volunteer

force possible—are significantly different than the career personnel the compensation system was designed for before the transition to an all-volunteer force. Keeping an all-volunteer force viable without fundamentally reforming the compensation system has proven costly and it is, ultimately, unsustainable.”<sup>23</sup>

Finally, there is the issue of readiness. In-kind benefits really began in the early modern period as a way to ensure that the money spent on the military was going to the things service members actually needed, such as food, kit, and serviceable clothing, rather than alcohol, prostitutes, and other luxuries.<sup>24</sup> To a certain extent, this is still a concern. Militaries are aware that good health, financial security, childcare, and so forth are important readiness factors. Militaries are also aware that young people are not as good at responsible use of their finances as older, more seasoned people are.<sup>25</sup> It may indeed make sense for the military to provide certain benefits in kind instead of cash payments, but the state should carefully review which in-kind benefits truly contribute to readiness and which benefits could be usefully commuted to more flexible cash payments.

The MCRMC has made a number of recommendations on how to make the provision of benefits more efficient, and there appears to be hope that the military may adopt some of those recommendations. The Obama administration has signaled endorsement of some recommendations and contingent approval of others.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the House Armed Services Committee voted overwhelmingly to approve the adoption of a “blended” retirement system.<sup>27</sup> If realized, this change would probably result in some savings to the government (at least, the MCRMC believes it will) and improved recruiting and human resources management. The MCRMC’s detailed modeling indicates that removing the “cliff” vesting system will not result in a significant degradation of the armed forces’ ability to retain personnel; in fact, it may help the services to become more flexible in encouraging some people to leave and in targeting retention bonuses at others. One issue that remains to be addressed is the possibility of increasing the age at which these benefits begin to be paid out. This would require revisiting the current assumption that military retirement pay is not in fact a pension but something more akin to retainer pay, entitling the government to recall retirees to service.

A second recommendation that has the support of the Obama administration but has not yet been addressed by Congress is some reform to the education benefits enjoyed by service members. The MCRMC has recommended sunsetting the old Montgomery GI Bill in favor of the post-9/11 version and raising the requirement for transfer of benefits to dependents from six years of service with an obligation for four more years to ten years of service with an obligation of two more. They also recommended limiting some other forms of tuition assistance to those programs that contribute to service members' professional development. So long as the United States maintains its traditional system of high-cost post-secondary education, this will remain a key benefit the military can offer, but it will also either increase in cost or decrease in worth over time, as the costs of higher education skyrocket.

Another area in which the MCRMC expected to find savings was in consolidating the commissary and exchange systems into a single Defense Resale System, but this has found little support from the administration or Congress.<sup>28</sup> The resistance to change here is curious, since there would be essentially no cost to the main stakeholders. Although the MCRMC found that it would be more economical to do away with the commissary system altogether, after polling many service members, veterans, and dependents, the MCRMC concluded that users value the commissary benefit far above its cost. Thus, it made more sense to look for efficiencies within the system, and this was the crux of their recommendation. It is not entirely clear why neither Congress nor the administration has endorsed this reform.

One area mentioned above, where the MCRMC had recommendations but where it was unlikely the government would find a cost savings, was in the provision of childcare. The MCRMC satisfied itself with recommending that the normal restrictive rules respecting minor military construction be relaxed for the building and refurbishing of childcare facilities, as this was a crucial force-readiness issue. The president signaled his support for this recommendation.

One recommendation that appears to have little support from the administration or Congress is reforming the military health care system. Health care for active and retired military personnel and their dependents is one of the biggest chunks of military personnel spending. In a 2014 report, the Congressional Budget Office noted that

the cost of providing that care has increased rapidly as a share of the defense budget over the past decade, out-pacing growth in the economy, growth in per capita health care spending in the United States, and growth in funding for DoD's base budget. . . . Between 2000 and 2012, funding for military health care increased by 130 percent, over and above the effects of overall inflation in the economy. In 2000, funding for health care accounted for about 6 percent of DoD's [Department of Defense] base budget; by 2012, that share had reached nearly 10 percent.<sup>29</sup>

Part of this spending is because most military retirees prefer to stay on the military's health insurance plan (TRICARE) instead of choosing private insurance.<sup>30</sup> The United States, of course, has a general problem with the skyrocketing costs of health care; one overlooked consequence of our reliance on employer-provided insurance and lack of a standardized national system is a potentially unsustainable burden on the military budget.

In short, the problems we are having with the military budget cannot be fixed without fixing the larger problems—primarily regarding the costs of health care and higher education, in general. Even with downsizing, the military will need to attract high-quality personnel, and society will need to fulfill its obligations to care for retirees and dependents. That means the military will need to offer and pay for substantial benefits. Unless the United States can get those costs under control for everyone, it will have difficulty getting them under control for the military.

## **Conclusions**

Militaries cannot behave exactly like private firms. It is more difficult for militaries to adjust their compensation policies to fluctuating market forces, because of the services' needs to moderate the rate of labor turnover—neither at-will nor lifetime job security—and to invest a significant amount in training their personnel in both vocational and firm-specific skills. In the context of a LME, the job security offered by the military may be attractive, but the unattractive fact that one cannot simply leave the service at will may also offset such an incentive. Many important benefits are dependent on an individual's employment status, and the military is competing for high-quality individuals who will be looking at how their job prospects compare both in terms of how attractive the work is and how appealing the compensation is. In an LME, the military must offer those benefits.

Militaries in other developed, democratic, market-based economies face some of the same problems as the United States, but many of those militaries experience those problems to a significantly lesser extent, because they have systems in which many important benefits are provided to all citizens, regardless of employment status. This helps in several ways. First, it creates economies of scale, where national infrastructure exists to provide health care or education at low cost and does not need to be created by the government just for the military. Second, it means the military cannot or need not provide generous benefits to attract recruits; it can concentrate more on cash pay and quality of work/life issues.

The nature of the labor market in the United States necessitates that the military offer all these benefits, which many other employers—including the federal government, with respect to its civilian employees—do not offer. This is due to the combination of the fact that the military needs to compete for high-quality individuals and that Americans feel a sense of moral obligation to take care of those who have served in the military in a way that is different from the way we feel obligated to take care of other public servants or other people who do dangerous and difficult jobs. It is clear that these benefits, once instituted, are politically nearly impossible to reduce or eliminate—or even limit in terms of their growth. Part of the reason for this is that the government cannot always benefit from an economy of scale that would result from having a national structure for these benefits. Additionally, the government in a low-regulation context cannot limit the growth in how much these services cost. The result is a benefits trap that is difficult to escape.

Because the US government is constrained by the labor market to provide these benefits and because it cannot control their costs, it really has only four options: it could accept the situation and plan on spending significantly more on defense to cover these costs; it could significantly reduce the size of the military; it could tinker around the edges of the costs, which is essentially what all the MCRMC recommendations do; or it could move toward a social model in which these benefits are provided to all citizens. Each of these options has significant drawbacks. What we appear to be doing right now is a combination of reducing the military's size and tinkering around the edges; it remains to be seen whether that can provide a permanent fiscal solution.

The likelihood of the United States moving to a CME model is extremely low. However, the debate over the Affordable Care Act high-

lighted the fact that the United States is the only developed country in the world—whether LME or CME—that relies primarily on a system of employer-provided health insurance, and it is at least possible that Americans may eventually choose to go to a more universal system. There has also been some debate over how to rein in the costs of higher education, but no consensus seems likely to emerge any time soon.

Americans do not like to think of their military personnel as employees, and they are uncomfortable discussing military pay and benefits as a pure market transaction. In the United States, discourse about military personnel tends to emphasize service, sacrifice, and selflessness, and it seems very inappropriate—almost in bad taste—to pose the question of how much members ought to be paid in return for their selfless service and sacrifice. Even worse is the question of how much pay the nation must offer someone to induce him or her to join an organization that involves that service and sacrifice. However, this is a conversation that Americans—including the service members, veterans, retirees, and civilians—must have if they are to reform defense spending in a sustainable way. This is not just because of the absolute amounts of money involved but also because of the trade-offs necessitated by scarce resources and the need to keep the civil-military contract legitimate and widely accepted.<sup>31</sup> While some may argue that the United States could easily spend more on its military to keep up with the ballooning costs of benefits, others will point out that the nature of American politics and the realities of debt will make that difficult. Within a given budget, the more citizens have to spend on pay and benefits, the less they are spending on training, equipment, and readiness, and that is an unacceptable way to treat people whose lives and limbs may depend on that training and equipment. **SSQ**

## Notes

1. Hope Hodge Seck, “Chapter 1: A Worsening Morale Crisis,” in *America’s Military: A Force Adrift* (Springfield, VA: Military Times, 7 December 2014), <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2014/12/07/americas-military-a-force-adrift/18596571/>; Michelle Tan, “Chapter 2: Civilian Support Subsidies,” in *America’s Military: A Force Adrift* (Springfield, VA: Military Times, 7 December 2014), <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2014/12/07/americas-military-a-force-adrift/18596571/>; and Patricia Kime, “Chapter 3: A Big Promise Unfulfilled,” in *America’s Military: A Force Adrift* (Springfield, VA: Mili-

tary Times, 7 December 2014), <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2014/12/07/americas-military-a-force-adrift/18596571/>.

2. Richard Sisk, "Air Force Mourns Likely Passing of A-10 Warthog," *DOD Buzz: Online Defense and Acquisition Journal*, 18 September 2013, <http://www.dodbuzz.com/2013/09/18/air-force-mourns-likely-passing-of-a-10-warthog/>; John T. Bennett, "A-10 Proponents Seek Budget Offset to Keep Attack Planes Funded, Flying," *Defense News*, 10 April 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140410/DEFREG02/304100025/A-10-Proponents-Seek-Budget-Offset-Keep-Attack-Planes-Funded-Flying>; and Amy Bushatz, "Pentagon Proposes Plan to Gut Commissary's Budget," *Military.com* (web site), 22 January 2014, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2014/01/22/pentagon-proposes-plan-to-gut-commissarys-budget.html>. The Budget Control Act's sequestration provisions exempted the military personnel budget, but experts insist that personnel costs are one of the most unsustainable parts of the defense budget. See Todd Harrison, "How Can We Save Money on Troops' Pay and Benefits? Let's Ask the Troops," *Washington Post*, 19 April 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-can-we-save-money-on-troops-pay-and-benefits-lets-ask-the-troops/2013/04/19/8f9f0258-a5d8-11e2-b029-8fb7e977ef71\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-can-we-save-money-on-troops-pay-and-benefits-lets-ask-the-troops/2013/04/19/8f9f0258-a5d8-11e2-b029-8fb7e977ef71_story.html); Todd Harrison, "Defense Cuts Conundrum: Weighing the Hard Choices," *Foreign Affairs* (web site), 29 September 2013, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2013-09-29/defense-cuts-conundrum>; Todd Harrison, "Keeping Faith with the Troops: How Congress Can Fix the Military's Compensation Problems," *Forbes*, 3 February 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/toddharrison/2015/02/03/congress-military-compensation/>; Cindy Williams, "Accepting Austerity: The Right Way to Cut Defense," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 6 (November–December 2013): 54–64, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140158/cindy-williams/accepting-austerity#>; and Cindy Williams, *Making Defense Affordable*, Hamilton Project Discussion Paper 2013-02 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, February 2013), [http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/papers/2013/02/make%20defense%20affordable/thp\\_williamsdiscpaper.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/papers/2013/02/make%20defense%20affordable/thp_williamsdiscpaper.pdf).

3. Todd Harrison, *Rebalancing Military Compensation: An Evidence-Based Approach* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012), <http://csbaonline.org/publications/2012/07/rebalancing-military-compensation-an-evidence-based-approach/>; Harrison "How Can We Save Money?"; Harrison "Defense Cuts Conundrum"; Williams "Accepting Austerity"; Williams *Making Defense Affordable*; Donna Miles, "QDR Panel Calls for More Force Structure Changes," *American Forces Press Service*, 4 August 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60303>; and Matthew S. Goldberg, *Costs of Military Pay and Benefits in the Defense Budget* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, November 2012), [http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/11-14-12-MilitaryComp\\_0.pdf](http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/11-14-12-MilitaryComp_0.pdf).

4. Arnold Punaro, "Tame the Pentagon's Personnel Costs," *Defense News*, 5 December 2011, <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20111205/DEFPEAT05/112050306/Tame-Pentagon-s-Personnel-Costs>; Walter Pincus, "Personnel Costs are a Growing Threat to Defense, Military Leaders Tell Congress," *Washington Post*, 13 November 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/personnel-costs-are-a-growing-threat-to-defense-military-leaders-tell-congress/2013/11/13/016e7c12-4>; Travis J. Tritten, "Over Strong Joint Chiefs Objections, House Moves to Preserve Military Pay, Benefits," *Stars and Stripes*, 6 May 2014, <http://www.stripes.com/news/over-strong-joining-chiefs-objections-house-moves-to-preserve-military-pay-benefits-1.281766>; and Defense Science Board Task Force on Human Resources Strategy, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Human Resources Strategy* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, February 2000), <http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA374767>.

5. Austin Wright and Bryan Bender, "Obama Joint Chiefs Pick's Tough Task: Cut Pay," *Politico*, 5 May 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/joe-dunford-joint-chiefs-cut-pay-pentagon-117665.html>.

6. Donna Cassata, "House Panel Votes against Military Benefits Cuts," *Huffington Post*, 30 April 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/30/house-military-benefits\\_n\\_5242406.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/30/house-military-benefits_n_5242406.html).

7. Commission on Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization, *Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, Final Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 29 January 2015), <http://mldc.whs.mil/public/docs/report/MCRMC-FinalReport-29JAN15-LO.pdf>.

8. This article will not touch on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget, which of course is where much of the cost of in-kind benefits resides. The VA covers benefits primarily for those service members who served less than the 20 years necessary to have the status of a "retiree," including health care, special pensions, education benefits, survivor benefits, disability, and some other subsidized benefits, such as home loans and life insurance. Reforming the VA is another civil-military imperative but is outside the scope of this article.

9. Lindsay P. Cohn, "Who Will Serve? Labour Markets and Military Personnel Policy," *Res Militaris* 3, no. 2 (Winter–Spring 2013): [http://www.resmilitaris.net/ressources/10175/95/res\\_militaris\\_article\\_cohn\\_who\\_will\\_serve.pdf](http://www.resmilitaris.net/ressources/10175/95/res_militaris_article_cohn_who_will_serve.pdf).

10. Gary Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

11. Bruce C. Greenwald, "Adverse Selection in the Labour Market," *Review of Economic Studies* 53, no. 3 (July 1986): 325–47; Margaret Stevens, "A Theoretical Model of On-the-Job Training with Imperfect Competition," *Oxford Economic Papers* 46, no. 4 (1994): 537–62; and Daron Acemoglu and Jörn-Steffen Pischke, "Why Do Firms Train? Theory and Evidence," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 113, no. 1 (February 1998): 79–119.

12. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Indicator B5: How Much Do Tertiary Students Pay and What Public Support Do They Receive?" in *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 2014), 260–76, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>.

13. OECD, *Pensions at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 2014), [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/finance-and-investment/oecd-pensions-outlook-2014\\_9789264222687-en](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/finance-and-investment/oecd-pensions-outlook-2014_9789264222687-en). All LMEs fell below the OECD average pension replacement rate of 54.4 percent for average earners, while only three European CMEs did. However, Japan and South Korea also fell below the average. The LME average was 41 percent, while the European CME average was 61.2 percent. (LMEs: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. CMEs: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. The status of the states of Southern and Eastern Europe is still somewhat contested in the literature, so they were omitted from this calculation).

14. See, for example, OECD, "Chapter 5: Childcare in OECD Countries," in *OECD Employment Outlook 1990* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 1990), <http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/4343133.pdf>; Olivier Thévenon, "Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD" (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 145, OECD Publishing, Paris, France, 2013), 15, <http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DELSA/ELSA/WD/SEM%282013%291&docLanguage=En>; Willem Adema, Nabil Ali, and Olivier Thévenon, "Changes in Family Policies and Outcomes: Is there Convergence?" (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 157,

OECD Publishing, Paris, France, 2014), [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/changes-in-family-policies-and-outcomes-is-there-convergence\\_5jz13wllxgzt.pdf?contentType=%2fns%2fWorkingPaper&itemId=%2fcontent%2fworkingpaper%2f5jz13wllxgzt-en&mimeType=application%2fpdf&containerItemId=%2fcontent%2fworkingpaperseries%2f1815199x&accessItemIds=](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/changes-in-family-policies-and-outcomes-is-there-convergence_5jz13wllxgzt.pdf?contentType=%2fns%2fWorkingPaper&itemId=%2fcontent%2fworkingpaper%2f5jz13wllxgzt-en&mimeType=application%2fpdf&containerItemId=%2fcontent%2fworkingpaperseries%2f1815199x&accessItemIds=); and Michael F. Foerster and Gerlinde Verbist, “Money or Kindergarten? Distributive Effects of Cash Versus In-Kind Family Transfers for Young Children” (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 135, OECD Publishing, Paris, France, 2012), <http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DELSA/ELSA/WD/SEM%282012%296&docLanguage=En>.

15. OECD, *Private Health Insurance in OECD Countries* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 2004), [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/social-issues-migration-health/private-health-insurance-in-oecd-countries\\_9789264007451-en#page1](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/social-issues-migration-health/private-health-insurance-in-oecd-countries_9789264007451-en#page1); Thomas Buchmueller, Colleen Carey, and Helen G. Levy, “Will Employers Drop Health Insurance Coverage Because of the Affordable Care Act?” *Health Affairs* 32, no. 9 (2013): 1,522–30; Christine Eibner, “Employer-Provided Health Insurance: Why Does It Persist, and Will It Continue after 2014?” *New England Journal of Medicine* (25 November 2013), <http://images.nejm.org/editorial/supplementary/2013/hbr18-eibner.pdf>; Hubert Janicki, *Employment-Based Health Insurance: 2010* (Washington, DC: US Department of Commerce, February 2013), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-134.pdf>; Stephen H. Long and M. Susan Marquis, “Comparing Employee Health Benefits in the Public and Private Sectors, 1997,” *Health Affairs* 18, no. 6 (1999): 183–93; Uwe E. Reinhardt, “Is Employer-Based Health Insurance Worth Saving?” *New York Times*, 22 May 2009, [http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/22/is-employer-based-health-insurance-worth-saving/?\\_r=0](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/22/is-employer-based-health-insurance-worth-saving/?_r=0); and Hao Yu and Andrew W. Dick, “Impacts of Rising Health Care Costs on Families with Employment-Based Private Insurance,” *Health Services Research* 47, no. 5 (2012): 2,012–30.

16. Peter A. Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Thomas M. Strawn, “The War for Talent in the Private Sector,” in *Filling the Ranks: Transforming the U.S. Military Personnel System*, edited by Cindy Williams (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 71; and Deborah Clay-Mendez, “Cash and In-Kind Compensation Policies for a Volunteer Force,” in *Service to Country: Personnel Policy and the Transformation of Western Militaries*, edited by Curtis Gilroy and Cindy Williams (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 263–86.

17. See, for example, Commission on Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization, *Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission*, 6; and Strawn “War for Talent,” 82.

18. Clay-Mendez, “Cash and In-Kind Compensation Policies,” 264.

19. Miles, “QDR Panel”; and Clay-Mendez “Cash and In-Kind Compensation Policies.”

20. Craig C. Pinder, *Work Motivation in Organizational Behavior*, 2nd ed. (New York: Psychology Press, 2008), 35.

21. Harrison, “How Can We Save Money?”

22. Harrison, *Rebalancing Military Compensation*, iv.

23. *Ibid.*, vi.

24. David Parrott, *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 162ff.

25. See, for example, the MCRMC’s recommendation for significantly more financial literacy training.

26. Barack Obama, “Message to Congress on the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission,” 30 April 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press>

*How Much Is Enough?*

-office/2015/04/30/message-congress-military-compensation-and-retirement-modernization-comm.

27. Thomas Philpott, "Panel Votes for 'Blended' Military Retirement Plan," *News Tribune* (Tacoma, WA), 30 April 2015, <http://www.thenewstribune.com/2015/04/30/3768295/panel-votes-for-blended-military.html>.

28. Cassata, "House Panel Votes against Military Benefits Cuts."

29. Congressional Budget Office (CBO), *Approaches to Reducing Federal Spending on Health Care*, Publication 4282 (Washington, DC: CBO, January 2014), 1, <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/44993-MilitaryHealthcare.pdf>.

30. Commission on Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization, *Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission*.

31. See, for example, Dave Duffy, "Opinion: No Room for Sense of Entitlement among Veterans and Military Families," *Washington Post*, 16 March 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/03/16/opinion-no-room-for-sense-of-entitlement-among-veterans-and-military-families/>.

# Post-9/11 Civil-Military Relations

## Room for Improvement

*Thomas Sheppard and Bryan Groves*

### Abstract

Civil-military relations between the president and his key military leaders carry significant implications for strategy making and war outcomes. Presidents and their national security team must prioritize properly developing that relationship. Civilian leaders must understand the various biases military leaders may harbor in different scenarios, while military leaders must present the president with genuine options, serving as professional advisors in the “unequal dialogue.” It is essential the next president bridge the civil-military gap—thereby facilitating greater understanding and trust. Stronger bonds of confidence between principals and agents result in more effective organizations, as does the ability to figure out what works, why it works, and how to implement it.



The year 2016 will mark a major transition for the US military. If Pres. Barack Obama sticks to his timetable—and all indications are he will—the last American forces will vacate Afghanistan by the end of that year, ending the longest war in American history. What will follow in Afghanistan is uncertain, but recent events in Iraq and persistent enemy elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan paint a pessimistic picture. It is a real possibility that the blood and treasure poured into Afghani-

---

Thomas Sheppard completed his doctorate in military history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research focuses on civilian control in the early American republic. He was the recipient of the 2013–2014 Smith-Richardson Predoctoral Fellowship through Yale University’s International Security Studies Program.

Bryan Groves is a doctorate student at Duke University and a School of Advanced Military Studies fellow. He served as a Council on Foreign Relations team member, taught at West Point, and worked in the Department of State. He earned a bachelor of science from the US Military Academy and a master of arts from Yale University and has published in various journals including *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Infinity*, *Strategos*, and the *Journal of Strategic Security*.

stan for more than a decade will result only in renewed civil war, the resurgence of the oppressive Taliban government, and the country once again serving as a haven for terrorists.<sup>1</sup> What lessons American policy makers will take away from the long-standing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq—and what the full consequences of those conflicts will be—remain to be seen.

That discussion brings us to the other major transition scheduled for 2016. In November of that year, even as the last American troops depart Afghanistan, the American people will select a new president. Whoever this leader is, he or she will inherit the fallout from America's ventures in the Middle East and South Asia and have to deal with the lessons learned from both wars. Some of those lessons are political, diplomatic, and economic, while others more directly concern the military. Thus, it is essential the next president learn from the predecessors' mistakes to build a more effective civil-military partnership. The next commander-in-chief will have to build on the American experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere to determine how to use American military forces in the future and how to best manage his or her relationship with those forces. The issues of the global war on terrorism to this point relate not only to America's foreign policy but also to the crucial, complex, and often-troubled relationship between the US military and its civilian superiors.

Pres. George W. Bush and President Obama started their tenures as commander-in-chief with somewhat rocky relationships with the military—though for different reasons. Each struggled to understand the issues that were most significant to military leadership and the unique culture of the armed forces. Both further eroded their relationships with the military through strategic mismanagement. To a degree, they learned from some of their mistakes to improve the military relationship, but the damage from unfortunate early missteps could not be entirely undone.

The military was hardly blameless in either administration, but a better understanding of the mentality and culture of those in uniform and more attention to cultivating harmonious civil-military relationships on the part of both presidents would have reduced tensions and averted some of the errors in Afghanistan and Iraq. While these wars have theoretically ended, the next president will inherit the ongoing war against extremist forms of Islam, including renewed hostilities in Iraq against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In this article, we con-

duct a comparative historical analysis of civil-military relations under presidents Bush and Obama. We conclude that the slow start both presidents experienced and the setbacks President Obama continues to experience may not be entirely preventable but can be mitigated by adopting certain policies.

To mitigate these slow starts to presidents' civil-military relationship—especially problematic during wartime—the country should implement a mix of policy prescriptions. First, during military conflicts, Congress should conduct biannual hearings to evaluate progress of policy objectives, military strategy, and the linkage between the two. The president and Congress should also gauge evolving national interests, public support, and prospects for success. Second, the president should adjust policy or strategy throughout military operations, based in part on the biannual hearings' findings. The president should also direct his national security adviser to use a multiple advocacy approach. This structured approach will help ensure the president makes critical decisions with an accurate picture of the related trade-offs. Third, and most important, increased civil-military interactions should become a regular facet of government. Implementation of these recommendations will improve three features of the post-9/11 civil-military landscape that have been lacking. First, it will improve the civil-military principal-agent relationship. Second, it will clarify wartime strategy and insure its connection to a coherent policy. Third, it will provide the best opportunity for successful war outcomes.

## **Contemporary American Civil-Military Relations**

The standard for American civil-military relations has been a thoroughly apolitical military. For much of the past, officers refused to comment on political issues and refused to allow their personal views to interfere with carrying out orders. Gen George Marshall, the epitome of an officer before and during World War II, declined to even vote in elections, for fear of hindering his ability to carry out any and all orders of his commander-in-chief, regardless of political party or stance.<sup>2</sup> Gen John J. Pershing, Marshall's mentor in the service, wrote to Gen George Patton that he “must remember when we enter the army, we do so with the full knowledge that our first duty is toward the government, entirely regardless of our own views . . . [the latter of which] are in no sense to

govern our actions.”<sup>3</sup> Such sentiments did not long outlive World War II. With the creation of a permanent military establishment at the outset of the Cold War, the military evolved into one of many interest groups, vying for government funds and public support.<sup>4</sup> Never completely the ideal apolitical arm of the executive branch, the military leverages its expertise, prestige, and usefulness not only with the president but also with Congress and the American people to secure its goals. Military leaders openly compete for funds and use the media and congressional testimony to press for their vision of what American strategy and military policy should be.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in sharp contrast to Marshall’s studied apoliticism, the officer corps of the military now largely identifies with the Republican party; therefore, the president’s party affiliation cannot but affect the health of the civil-military relationship.<sup>6</sup>

In the last two decades, another factor has exacerbated these problems: the willingness of military officers—usually retired but sometimes still in uniform—to publicly criticize the administration or seek to bypass the president and appeal directly to Congress or the American people in lobbying for their causes.<sup>7</sup> At worst, such behaviors can force a president’s choice or leave him feeling “boxed-in” by undermining alternatives. None of this portends the slightest threat of a coup or suggests a presidential candidate needs the military’s blessing to reach the White House. What it means is that, at this stage, the relationship between the president and the military is now particularly strained. This is not to say that harmonious civil-military relations are impossible. However, presidents must pay particular attention to asserting their authority while cultivating mutual respect with the officer corps.<sup>8</sup> This was a reality that, by all appearances, both Bush and Obama failed to fully appreciate. The activism of some senior military leaders caught both presidents off guard.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, both presidents failed to properly manage their relationship with the military and left their officers floundering with vague mandates, flawed strategies, and a lack of necessary resources to complete assigned missions.<sup>10</sup> Future presidents would do well to assert their authority as commander-in-chief while taking a much more active role in planning and executing military operations, but they must also relate to the military in such a way as to engender respect and trust.<sup>11</sup>

## **Civil-Military Relations in the Bush Administration**

There was ample reason for optimism when George W. Bush took the oath of office, if for no other reason than he was unlike his predecessor. Bill Clinton began his presidency with a disastrous relationship with the military and enjoyed only minor improvement during the next eight years. Perceiving him as a draft dodger and a representative of the worst of the 1960s' culture, military officers viewed their commander-in-chief with distrust. His ostentatious disinterest in all things military- and foreign policy-related only worsened the situation—as did his moral shortcomings.<sup>12</sup> The officer corps responded by publicly challenging President Clinton's policies, particularly on the question of homosexuals in the military, and few in the American public doubted their distaste for the man in the White House.<sup>13</sup> Over time, Clinton's skill at managing foreign affairs improved, but it came too late to make any real dint in the civil-military discord his administration cultivated.<sup>14</sup>

Senior military officers, with considerable justification, felt certain that President Bush would build a more harmonious civil-military relationship. His father had enjoyed a remarkably agreeable relationship with the military, and the younger Bush espoused deep respect for those in uniform and their service to the country. Bush openly touted his high regard for America's men and women in uniform on the campaign trail and promised increased funding for national defense under his administration.

Given such statements, few in the military could have been prepared for their treatment at the hands of Bush's secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Even in selecting Rumsfeld for the post, Bush set the precedent of avoiding personal oversight of the Department of Defense (DOD), seeming to have largely deferred to Vice President Dick Cheney in naming Rumsfeld—after his first two choices, FedEx founder Frederick Smith and former Senator Dan Coates of Indiana, proved undesirable. Bush even deferred to Cheney in spite of Rumsfeld's earlier strained relationship with Pres. George H. W. Bush.<sup>15</sup> Rumsfeld took over the DOD convinced—not without cause—that it was mired in the past and wasting the resources entrusted to it by the American people. He sought to build a more modern, more efficient, and—above all—more subordinate military establishment. Unfortunately, his demeanor and refusal to recognize that the military was working to implement the very changes he desired, even as he publicly and privately berated officers, poisoned

civil-military relations under the Bush administration.<sup>16</sup> At one point, he tactlessly called the bureaucracies at the Pentagon “a threat, a serious threat, to the security of the United States of America.”<sup>17</sup> While many in the military concurred that the Pentagon’s bureaucracy needed improvement, the implication that America’s own military posed a security threat needlessly tainted civil-military relations and prevented a partnership between Rumsfeld and reform-minded officers that could have been far more effective in restructuring the Pentagon.<sup>18</sup>

For his part, President Bush brought a hands-off approach to the White House and did little to defend the military from Rumsfeld’s attacks.<sup>19</sup> The first president to come into office with a master of business administration degree, Bush preferred to focus on the big picture and grant his subordinates incredibly broad latitude in managing their own departments. Moreover, he preferred to put individuals of starkly contrasting attitudes and viewpoints in positions of authority so he could receive advice on all sides of an issue. His attitudes in this regard were not unprecedented; arguably, the two most successful presidents of the twentieth century, Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, both appointed people with ideologically contrasting viewpoints into their administrations and tended to delegate generously to their subordinates. However, Bush seems to have lacked either of these predecessors’ abilities to manage leadership conflict effectively or to minimize internecine bickering. Stronger personalities tended to dominate in the administration, silencing opposition and, thus, arguably negating the whole point of bringing a variety of perspectives to the table. Nowhere was the Bush administration’s internal dysfunction more apparent than the DOD, where Rumsfeld quickly came to “dominate the formulation of national security policy.”<sup>20</sup>

If these issues were deeply troubling to those in uniform, in Bush’s mind they were of secondary concern, for the simple reason that he entered office just as committed to a primarily domestic policy as his predecessor had. Bush began his presidency with an agenda of cutting taxes, promoting “compassionate conservatism,” and generally maintaining domestic harmony. The events of 11 September 2001, changed all that.<sup>21</sup> Bush instantly became a wartime leader, a mantle that would endure throughout his administration and be passed to his successor for the entirety of his eight years in the White House as well.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Americans demanded a strong response. Bush heartily shared this mind set, vowing to track down al-Qaeda operatives and dismantle the organization. However, this would obviously be a different kind of war than any the United States had engaged in before. Historically, the US Army greatly preferred conventional wars against states, waged in specified territorial areas. The exceptions—numerous wars against the Native Americans, the Filipino insurrection, and the Vietnam War—had occasioned loud complaints from military officers and were usually forgotten in institutional memory as soon as the conflicts ended. The enemy in this contest sprawled across numerous states and had no identifiable central location. The closest thing was Afghanistan, where the Taliban government harbored al-Qaeda's shadowy leader, Osama bin Laden, and offered safe haven to terrorists.

Senior leaders, civilian and military, failed to grasp the complexities this new kind of enemy presented. Moreover, these leaders did not take time to consider the potential difficulties of waging war on states to defeat stateless organizations. Afghanistan posed problems: the country's lack of infrastructure and the fact it had endured decades of warfare created few good targets for bombing campaigns. Nevertheless, after an initial attempt at bombing the Taliban into submission, the United States turned its attention to an invasion that it assumed would be relatively easy. Although some estimates called for 60,000 troops, the initial invasion consisted of 110 Central Intelligence Agency operatives and 316 special forces personnel, working in conjunction with the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.<sup>22</sup>

The initial invasion of Afghanistan succeeded beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Vast technological superiority—and heavy use of Northern Alliance forces—enabled the United States to topple the Taliban and seize control of the country in a matter of days and without a single American death.<sup>23</sup> In the heady atmosphere that followed the invasion, civilian and military leaders alike assumed their role in that often-troubled country was complete and prepared to move on to the next mission.<sup>24</sup> Even as American troops tracked al-Qaeda figures in Afghanistan, the administration's attention was already focused elsewhere. Within days of the 9/11 attacks, key members of the Bush administration, including Rumsfeld and apparently President Bush himself, began looking to topple Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The seemingly easy victory in Afghanistan convinced administration officials that Iraq would likewise be an easy

target and that the military could oust Hussein quickly and then step aside to allow a liberal democracy with a strong pro-American foreign policy to rise in Bagdad.<sup>25</sup>

From a civil-military relations standpoint, the build up to the invasion of Iraq was an unmitigated disaster. President Bush himself remained aloof from the planning process, and Rumsfeld—with his allies in the administration—consistently disregarded advice that challenged their vision of winning the war on the cheap. Officers who pressed for more troops for the invasion were silenced. Military and civilian leaders alike invaded the country with no plan for postwar Iraq, assuming Iraqis would be too ecstatic at their liberation to cause trouble for American forces and that an orderly, law-abiding society would flourish even in the temporary absence of a government. Although American troops never found the promised weapons of mass destruction, Americans might have forgiven Bush except for the total lack of planning in the postwar nation.<sup>26</sup>

As in Afghanistan, the initial ease of victory belied serious problems that awaited the US-led coalition in the aftermath of regime change. Although the Army had plans on file for the overthrow of Hussein's regime, senior Bush administration officials declined to consult these, instead favoring their own, more optimistic, expectations of how the end of the war would play out.<sup>27</sup> Disaster followed in the form of a vicious insurgency. Most of the blame for this has been laid at the feet of Bush's civilian appointee in Iraq, Paul Bremer. In disbanding the Iraqi army, Bremer created a ready supply of well-trained young men to fight against American troops while eliminating potential guards for vast stockpiles of weaponry—making such stockpiles easy pickings for new enemies in the country. Moreover, Bremer's efforts at de-Ba'athification destabilized the country, denied the Iraqi people essential services, and created a mass of unemployed, angry citizens who might otherwise have helped establish an interim government.<sup>28</sup>

Military and civilian leaders alike bear responsibility for the miserable state of planning prior to the Iraq invasion, but the military as a whole is somewhat absolved in light of Rumsfeld's practices throughout his tenure at the DOD. Rumsfeld never indicated any real desire to hear unfiltered advice from the military, even behind closed doors. All indications point to his preference for "yes-men" who would back him on whatever he had already decided to do. He largely disregarded the

Joint Chiefs of Staff—supposedly the primary source of military advice for the DOD—and ostentatiously excluded senior military leaders from the planning process.<sup>29</sup> Officers who challenged Rumsfeld's views saw their careers come to a halt. Gen Eric Shinseki, when directly asked how many troops would be needed in Iraq while under oath before Congress, gave the number of “a few hundred-thousand.” Rumsfeld very publicly blasted Shinseki and reduced him to a lame duck for the remainder of his term as Army chief of staff. Marine lieutenant general Greg Newbold saved the Pentagon the trouble of giving him a similar treatment; Newbold resigned, forfeiting an almost certain appointment as Marine Corps commandant rather than oversee the invasion of Iraq as Rumsfeld and Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz planned to run it.<sup>30</sup> Practices such as these gutted the effectiveness of the civil-military relationship under Rumsfeld. The DOD—and, by extension, the president himself—lost the ability to receive expert advice from the military, since officers feared to challenge what Rumsfeld wanted to hear, and those officers who could have critiqued Rumsfeld's plans were systematically shut out.

President Bush continued his practice of ignoring relations between Rumsfeld and the military, but the rapidly deteriorating situation in the DOD was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Meanwhile, the easy victories in both Afghanistan and Iraq had given way to vicious insurgencies, and American forces teetered on the edge of disaster in both countries. Still, Bush felt it was politically inexpedient to oust his secretary of defense during his first term, and Rumsfeld remained with the administration through the 2004 election. Very early in his second term, Bush wisely, if belatedly, decided it was time for a change. His choice to take over DOD was as inspired as Rumsfeld's appointment had been ill advised. Robert Gates was serving as president of Texas A&M University at the time of his appointment, but he came into office with an extensive background in government. A former Air Force officer and director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Gates was also well aware of the situation on the ground in Iraq, having been part of the Iraq Study Group that evaluated the state of the conflict.<sup>31</sup>

Gates enjoyed a far more harmonious relationship with the military than his predecessor had, though, crucially, this relationship did not come at the expense of the new secretary's willingness to assert his authority. Gates routinely overruled the military on a host of issues, espe-

cially when it came to transitioning from conventional war to counter-insurgency (COIN) and curbing out-of-control spending in the DOD. However, Gates asserted his authority in the midst of an entirely different relationship than had Rumsfeld. Gates consistently communicated his tremendous respect for the military and worked in collaboration with them to implement reforms. While he ordered the transition to a more COIN-focused strategy—and fired one officer who stood in the way—he did so on the basis of the advice and experience of a cohort of officers led by Gen David Petraeus.<sup>32</sup>

His improved relationship with the military notwithstanding, Gates came into office without any illusions about his responsibility: he was to salvage the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which teetered on the brink of defeat.<sup>33</sup> Although he had been part of the Iraq Study Group that recommended a reduction of American forces in the region, once he joined the Bush administration he became an outspoken champion for what may well have been its defining moment: the *surge*.

In 2007, generals continued to insist that Iraq would stabilize soon enough if they stuck to their current strategy. President Bush again chose to discount the military's advice, though this time with much more promising results. Overruling key officers, notably several on the ground in the theater of war, Bush ordered a surge in Iraq.<sup>34</sup> In addition to a substantial increase in troops, he ordered a shift in strategy that included a much heavier focus on protecting Iraqi civilians—even at risk of heavier US casualties—and drew troops out of (relatively) safe bases to interact with the population.<sup>35</sup> The crucial takeaway from the surge, however, is not that Bush overruled his officers but the way he overruled them. He listened carefully to their advice, weighed the various options, and made clear decisions. There was no question in what he was ordering and what direction he was taking the conflict. That should not detract from the reality that Bush based his decision on the advice of those within the military; it was a civilian decision to back the views of some military commanders over others.<sup>36</sup> With the surge came a change in command, as Gen David Petraeus assumed full authority over American troops in Iraq. Petraeus oversaw not only a change in strategy in Iraq but also a dramatic change in the American military's understanding of its future. Backed by Bush and Gates, he spearheaded a revolutionary focus on COIN as a core aspect of Army doctrine, giving it equal weight to waging conventional interstate war.<sup>37</sup>

The Bush administration's backing of Petraeus and his allies within the armed forces did not negate the fact that the surge and shift to COIN was a result of civilian supremacy. There was a significant faction within the military that hotly opposed Petraeus's strategic vision and elements of the surge. However, the military as a whole dutifully fulfilled its orders. Fred Kaplan dubbed Petraeus and his allies "The Insurgents," but it is also worth noting there was no effective COIN within the ranks of the military. In part, this is a reflection of genuine professionalism of the armed forces, but it is also worth noting that President Bush acted in the context of a relationship managed by Robert Gates—not Donald Rumsfeld—and that while his final decision did not please everyone, he did include the senior ranks of the officer corps in the decision-making process. Moreover, in time, the surge proved remarkably successful.<sup>38</sup> For all its false starts and open tensions, the Bush administration ended with fairly strong civil-military relations. It fell to Bush's successor to pick up where he left off.

### **Civil-Military Relations in the Obama Administration**

From the first shots in 2003, Obama was an opponent of the Iraq War, and he won the election of 2008 in part on promises to end the conflict.<sup>39</sup> That said, like Bush, President Obama came into office more concerned with domestic issues than foreign affairs. His primary focus was on the financial crisis that struck just weeks before the election and on implementing his promised health-care reform program. Nevertheless, having inherited two ongoing wars, Obama could only distance himself from foreign affairs so much. His main desire seems to have been to end both conflicts as quickly as possible—even against the judgment of the military. In retaining Robert Gates at the DOD and appointing Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, Obama included two decidedly hawkish leaders in his cabinet, and both secretaries voiced perspectives amenable to the military in Obama's first term.<sup>40</sup> For his part, Obama has consistently demonstrated a willingness to respect and maintain amicable relations with those with whom he disagrees, and partisan claims that he snubs and demonstrates hostility toward the military are, at best, greatly exaggerated.

Nevertheless, severe strains on the civil-military relationship, nearly rivaling those at the nadir of Rumsfeld's tenure, have marked the Obama

administration's tenure. Robert Gates paints an unflattering picture of a divided administration, with himself and Secretary Clinton constantly clashing with cabinet members hostile to their—and the president's—foreign policy agenda and deeply mistrustful of the military. President Obama has had ample reason to feel frustrated by the military as well. He felt undermined by officers who went public with the debate over what to do in Afghanistan and, not without reason, felt that many in uniform have undermined his authority throughout his administration. Conflicting ideologies and cultures have tainted civil-military relations under Obama, making the relationship an especially difficult one to manage.

On the campaign trail, candidate Obama cast the war in Iraq as particularly detrimental to the country because it drew precious resources away from the ongoing fight in Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> Upon taking office, however, President Obama proved equally reluctant to pour resources into the Afghan war. In a marked shift from 2007, the military now enthusiastically pushed for a surge, while the new president sought any alternative he could find to increasing troop strength in the region.<sup>42</sup> The military ultimately got its way; Obama ordered an increase in troop strength of 30,000, while requesting an additional 10,000 from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. However, the whole affair had a deleterious impact on civil-military relations. Obama forever after believed he had been boxed-in by the military, which failed to provide him with the series of options he believed it was their duty to give. More seriously, repeated leaks by the military made the entire debate a public one, undermining the president's ability to give the military anything less than its full demands. Obama and his civilian advisers felt betrayed by the whole affair, tainting subsequent interactions between the White House and senior military leaders.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the president's insistence that there would be a full review of the situation in Afghanistan one year hence, and his decision to dilute US goals from the destruction of al-Qaeda to simply stabilizing the nation clearly signaled to the military that he intended to get out of that country as quickly as reasonably possible. Of course, this message was not primarily intended for military consumption; Obama wanted the American people, and especially congressional Democrats, to know he was committed to ending the war in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that he has been largely stymied in this goal for his entire ad-

ministration, at the time it soured relations with senior military leaders early on in his administration. Troops in Afghanistan have felt pressure from the White House and believe the president is rushing them out of the country, while jeopardizing gains made at great sacrifice.<sup>45</sup>

Calling an end to any war is, of course, the president's decision, and the military by and large accepted its mandate to stabilize Afghanistan as quickly as possible. However, the entire affair fed an underlying resentment—by the administration and the military—in civil-military relations that has only grown in Obama's response to repeated crises in the Middle East and South Asia. There is a culture clash between the Obama White House and the military that has made healthy civil-military relations extremely difficult. At best, Obama has worked to keep his options open on a variety of foreign policy issues.<sup>46</sup> At worst, he has demonstrated a lack of any coherent strategy and an unwillingness to make decisions.<sup>47</sup> Neither of these shortcomings is particularly appealing to those in uniform. Military officers overwhelmingly tend to prefer clear, well-defined strategic goals and sufficient resources to achieve those ends. Military culture values clear objectives, a plan for pursuing them, and clarity on what actions US forces can and cannot take to carry out that plan. Civilian leaders, Obama in particular, prefer to have a variety of options on the table and to take their time evaluating a host of political factors before making a final decision; in fact, civilian leaders generally prefer not to make any "final" decision but to keep options open to adapt strategy and tactics.<sup>48</sup>

These differing cultures need not always lead to alienation, even if friction will always be present. Constant dialogue and genuine trust between civilian and military leaders can mitigate these tensions.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, mutual trust and sympathy have been sorely lacking in the Obama administration. Many senior military leaders are predisposed to resent or doubt President Obama due to party affiliation and ideological disagreements. It does not help that the administration coincides with sequestration, creating deep and devastating budget cuts in the DOD budget. Although sequestration resulted from congressional inaction, Obama said and did precious little to avert the crisis, injuring his standing with the military.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the top brass has doubts about Obama's strategic vision, and there seems to be a significant set of officers who question his competence as commander-in-chief.<sup>51</sup> Obama has made a number of public political promises, notably not committing US troops against

ISIL, that have left the military feeling constrained, unable to form a strategy for confronting the threat amid their commander-in-chief's increasingly restrictive public statements.<sup>52</sup>

On a deeper level, too many military leaders sense a lack of respect from the president and reciprocate his perceived disdain. President Obama has further suffered from a substantial contingent within the military that bitterly resent him and dislike many of his civilian appointees. Gen Stanley McChrystal, the senior commander in Afghanistan, lost his job after a *Rolling Stone* article detailed a pattern of rampant disrespect among McChrystal's inner circle for several civilian leaders, including Vice President Joe Biden. McChrystal does not seem to have personally participated in this behavior, but he made no effort to quash it, which his subordinates seem to have interpreted as tacit approval.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, prominent officers continue to try to shape policy outside the White House through congressional testimony and well-timed leaks, actions that can only strain the president's trust in his officer corps.<sup>54</sup> Just before his recent resignation, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel enjoyed only a 26-percent approval rating among the military and civilians in national-security related posts.<sup>55</sup> In the final days of 2014, one poll found that only 15 percent of active-duty members of the military approve of their commander-in-chief.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, retired officers have a ready audience in the news media to critique the president and his policies.

A lack of communication has exacerbated the strained state of civil-military relations, for which President Obama must bear a good deal of the blame, given his failure to communicate his trust in the military and willingness to allow many in his administration to openly perceive the military as the enemy. The feeling is too often mutual. Obama, according to Gates, can feel ill at ease around military officers.<sup>57</sup> His initial resentment toward those in uniform for boxing him in on the surge in Afghanistan never fully dissipated; many civilian appointees within the Obama administration continue to see all branches of the armed services as hostile entities bent on undermining the president's authority.<sup>58</sup> Seemingly trivial missteps, like failing to set aside a latté to salute a Marine, seem to imply a lack of regard for military protocol and men and women in uniform in general.<sup>59</sup> The reaction to such incidents is overblown and mostly partisan, but a president with a strained civil-military relationship should at least seek to minimize avoidable slights.

Even when President Obama and the military concur, differing expectations of what the civil-military arrangement should look like have led to tension. While Secretary Gates and a majority of the officer corps favored the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” legislation, the manner in which Obama handled the repeal left the military feeling rushed to implement a major change without adequate time to prepare or to identify potential difficulties. While both the president and the military pursued and achieved the same goal of allowing homosexuals in the military to serve openly, the situation still left feelings of mutual frustration and resentment and a sense that the other side was the enemy.<sup>60</sup> Clashes when goals differ are inevitable, but clashes where both parties are pursuing the same goal indicate a serious communication issue. Whatever shortcomings the military is guilty of in respecting civilian control, it is the president’s job to facilitate communication, and Obama has struggled in this regard.

Despite all the tensions, the essential acceptance of the reality of civilian authority has never been overtly challenged under the Obama administration, nor has the president allowed his differences with the military to taint his personal interactions with leading officers. Obama has consistently pressed his military advisers to give him candid advice—behind closed doors, not via the media—and continues to treat every officer he engages in person with courtesy, respect, and even warmth. For all the criticism he has received in the media, his tenure as commander-in-chief includes notable accomplishments, not least of which was the wildly successful raid that killed Osama bin Laden.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Obama’s handling of foreign policy, while by no means masterful, has succeeded well beyond the military’s fears.<sup>62</sup> Although he was maligned in the media for his supposedly weak response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, American sanctions are now beginning to take a serious toll on Vladimir Putin’s government. Obama has likewise proven more flexible than the military realized by adapting his strategy to now include boots on the ground against ISIL. In addition, the tensions aroused by repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and lifting the ban on women in combat have largely dissipated.

## **The Future of Civil-Military Relations**

Given the cross-case analysis presented above, there appear to be three major problems affecting civil-military relations since 2001. First, civil-

ian micromanagement and military shirking have led to problems in the principal-agent relationship, deteriorating trust and weakening military autonomy, compliance, and effectiveness.<sup>63</sup> Second, wartime military strategy has often been ill-formed or incoherent. Third, a lack of proper decision making strains the civil-military relationship. Of course, there are ways to address each of these problems, mitigating—if not solving—the adverse effects the problems pose for American civil-military relations in future administrations.<sup>64</sup>

### **Addressing Principal-Agent Problems**

To address principal-agent problems, the next president can start fresh, resetting the civil-military relationship. The next president should meet with senior military officers and clearly outline his or her views on civil-military relations. The president should communicate, both publicly and behind closed doors, respect for the men and women in uniform. The president must insist on unfiltered advice from the military and promise to respect that advice even if it is not always followed. Crucially, the next president should not follow Secretary Rumsfeld's example in discouraging contrary advice or President Bush's example of allowing such practice within the new administration. Such adversarial behavior alienates the service and prevents civilian principals from receiving sound advice. Rewarding officers for *privately* speaking their minds—even if their advice is ultimately rejected—will enhance the autonomy, professionalism, and effectiveness of the military.

A strategic, generational program to provide greater opportunities for civil-military interactions would also be helpful in improving principal-agent issues. Trust cannot be established overnight, once a national emergency has occurred. Therefore, such a program should facilitate regular contact and collaboration between incoming and potential future presidents and generals. The idea would be for a deliberate outreach from the executive and legislative branches across the senior levels of civilian and military sectors. Doing so in a proactive manner, instead of after years of war, would foster better understanding and cooperation during crisis—when it matters most.

One approach would be to introduce current and rising military leaders to the president-elect during the transition period. While this could be a productive start, if it were the only solution, it would be too late in the process to be effectual. Another method would involve extend-

ing to general officers and select colonels regular congressional and executive branch invitations to various functions—not just committee hearings or interagency planning groups. Constructive areas for greater civil-military joint participation include team-building exercises, crises simulations, and war games/planning. The military regularly conducts the latter, but the number of civilians participating is minimal to none and could be increased significantly. Formal interactions are best for learning each other's strengths and weaknesses, while informal relationship building reinforces formal interactions and solidifies bonds of trust. Thus, a combination of these activities would be best.

These proactive strategies, taken to scale, would be very helpful should an ambitious congressman or senator be elected president. He or she would be better equipped to select military leaders not solely based on recommendations or reputation but also on personal knowledge. Had President Obama had the right mix of these interactions with the military, perhaps he would have had a greater reservoir of relationships from which to pick his general for Afghanistan. If so, he may have chosen differently, and that might have made a critical difference in preventing the principal-agent problems he later faced. Alternatively, perhaps he would have resolved not to go along with the military's scheme for a surge and COIN strategy had he interacted with some rising military officers who saw Afghanistan in a different light than those whose legacies were riding on achieving military victory at any cost. If Obama had benefited from these types of exposure repeatedly and early enough in his political career, he might have had a more realistic impression of the reality on the ground and avoided casting Afghanistan as "the good war" during the 2008 presidential campaign. Doing so opened the door for the military to leverage him for its preferred option. Of course, these are counterfactuals and one cannot know the outcome for certain, but given the implications, it is worth considering these as among a menu of appropriate interventions. Increased trust-building opportunities between military leaders and politicians are necessary, but they are not the only relationship of import. Military leaders, for instance, often have strained relationships with congressional and executive branch staff, including the National Security Council.<sup>65</sup>

Given this, a third way to address principal-agent problems is to increase exchange assignments across the public sector. These are typically opportunities in which officers and career civil servants swap places for

a year at a time, but stints of several months at a time could also be undertaken. Military officers serve in interagency positions, while civil servants attend military staff or war colleges or serve in the Pentagon. Conceivably, civilians could also serve in an operational- or strategic-level military headquarters, anywhere between division and combatant command level. These cross-fertilization opportunities have increased in the last few years, yet they are encouraged more for military officers than for civilians, are still relatively few in number, and do not include civil servants being afforded opportunities at military headquarters—arguably more valuable in gaining military appreciation than attending a formal school for 10 months.

Cabinet secretaries, congressional leaders, and military officers should create more such opportunities and incentivize them for civilian progression—as they are for military advancement. Pegging such experiences to promotion, choice assignments, or service in congressional leadership and professional staff is a related way to incentivize participation. A similar model designed to encourage joint perspectives and overcome interservice rivalry derives from the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, which requires a three-year joint assignment for promotion to general officer or flag rank. Legislation could require a similar type cross-sector experience for civil servant advancement to the senior executive service.

Additionally, while the post-9/11 environment has facilitated increased opportunities for mid-level officers and civilians to work together to accomplish common objectives, senior-level interactions are generally of a different nature. The latter tend to be a discussion that ends in civilian direction and military compliance or shirking. Ultimately, that is a large part of the fixed dynamic at that level. However, systematic interactions where public servants from civilian and military domains share common hardships, goals, and equal footing would break down barriers and bridge gaps that do exist—such as those demonstrated by Rumsfeld's and Obama's leadership of the military. The Bridging the Gap project, led by Duke University professor Bruce Jentleson and others, is one model in this regard. It hosts short conferences of a few days to a week in length. Likewise, the Program for Emerging Leaders run by National Defense University's (NDU) Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction facilitates such interactions. At NDU, the interaction involves repeated workshops over a three-year span. Bridging the Gap brings academics and policy makers together, while the Emerging

Leaders Program brings mid-level officers and civilian leaders together. Both use crisis simulation to bridge gaps and to prepare current and future leaders for American foreign policy contingencies. Proliferating these types of programs should translate into greater civil-military understanding and cooperation for the next generation of our country's leadership. In the meantime, greater supply of and participation in shorter, three-day to weeklong engagements that target current senior leaders on both civil and military sides would be useful.

Two-way exposure and learning are necessary and will help future leaders understand the language and culture of the other side. Similar institutionally driven solutions, like the examples described above, are necessary to drive a common national security perspective instead of one dominated by being a member of the civilian or military realm. Broad, deep, varied, and repeated civil-military interactions will help create the requisite political savviness necessary for future military leaders. Meanwhile, such experiences will also inculcate civilians with a better understanding of the military's roles and its limits.

### **Closing the Gap between Policy Aims and War Strategy**

Helping to solve the strategic gaps between policy aims and war strategy, Congress should require a formalized biannual review of all ongoing conflicts by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Each review would require an accompanying presidential report. The idea would be to give an opportunity for the administration to make its case for the current and proposed strategy (if different) and for Congress to seek testimony and ask questions, fulfilling its broad advice and consent role. By requiring such biannual reviews, the United States could avoid going down the wrong path for too long. Although some sessions could be closed door to allow for classified discussions, this mechanism would provide a transparent process in which the media and the American public could play their respective roles. General Petraeus and Amb. Ryan Crocker's congressional testimony about the Iraq surge and new COIN strategy and their related progress reports could serve as a model for this biannual review.

This paradigm would be particularly helpful given the challenges outlined here: principal-agent problems leading to mismatches between policy and strategy. Having the top general responsible for the war strategy and the top diplomat charged with in-country implementation of

American policy appear before the congressional committees would be a forcing function to produce a unified civil-military effort. The hearings would afford the president additional means by which to coordinate efforts among his military and civilian wartime leaders. Collectively the president (through his report), the commanding general, and the ambassador would have to convince the Congress, the press, and the American public that the endeavor was worthwhile, success was possible, and the strategy was the appropriate one to achieve the intended goal.<sup>66</sup> The more *real*, not simply pro forma, the hearings are, the more helpful they would be to the president.

Getting the policy-strategy linkage correct is important for utilizing the nation's resources in the most efficient and effective ways possible. This is vital since there are always significant opportunity costs associated with national choices about how to use national resources, including domestic and international political capital and prestige. Getting decisions wrong can lead to unnecessary mission creep and adversely affect the national debt and public opinion, souring the citizenry for future uses of force that might be more important. Fundamentally, the policy-strategy linkage in war gives the military the best chance for winning the war. Thus, it is crucial for the country to ensure its military endeavors are nested properly within the nation's broader political goals—not working at cross-purposes.

### **Addressing Poor Decision-Making Structures**

Addressing the sometimes poor decision-making cycle of the civil-military dialogue, future presidents could stand to gain by implementing certain measures. When presented with a recommendation, it would be useful for presidents to understand how many, who, and how strong were the dissenters; what were the strengths and weakness of the alternative recommendations relative to the recommended approach, or a standardized metric; and what new information or “game-changer” dynamics would shift dissenters and “majority-opinion” policy advocates to supporting another approach.<sup>67</sup> This information would prevent presidents from wrongly assuming that they were being presented with a unanimous recommendation. Instead, presidents should be privy to the dissent, the reasons for it, alternative options, and trade-offs. Some of the debates will occur before they reach the president, but some should occur in front of the president. Requiring national security advisers to

be the honest brokers and custodians of this process could work well, as he or she typically sets the parameters on many of these interactions. A presidential decision-making process that formally incorporated these techniques and considered long-term implications may have led to better decisions, a synched policy and strategy, and better outcomes with regard to the Iraq War.

For instance, President Bush's initial judgment was based on heuristics of what was necessary in a post-9/11 world to protect the United States—namely preemptive strikes. Perhaps through better decision-making processes Secretary of State Colin Powell and others could have persuaded the president not to invade Iraq in the first place, leveraging the threat of American military action to build greater international pressure for a diplomatic solution similar to the Russia-US brokered accord on Syria. Perhaps if the invasion went forward, more troops could have been apportioned up front. A thorough dialogue might have overcome personal agendas to better incorporate the Department of State's post-invasion planning, including deliberating about how nuanced de-Ba'athification and disbanding processes could have culled only those loyal to the Hussein regime. While nearly impossible to prove, the contextual history suggests differently, and likely better outcomes were possible. At a minimum, it was within America's grasp to connect its policy aims with its war strategy if President Bush had better led and controlled his military and civilian agents—as occurred later in his presidency with the surge.

The histories of the Bush and Obama administrations make clear that civil-military relations between the president and his key military leaders carry significant implications for strategy making and war outcomes. Therefore, it is imperative presidents and their national security teams prioritize getting that relationship right.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, it is important for this group of civilian leaders to understand the ramifications of using force and various biases military leaders may harbor in different scenarios.<sup>69</sup> For their part, military leaders must present the president with genuine options, serving as professional advisers in the unequal dialogue.<sup>70</sup> It is essential the next president bridge the civil-military gap, thereby facilitating greater understanding and trust. Doing so will pay important dividends—even for peacetime defense policies and deterrence. The nation will reap the greatest payoff, however, during wartime. Stronger bonds of confidence between principals and agents results in

more effective organizations, as does the ability to figure out what works, why it works, and how to implement it.

## Conclusion

Our recommendations carry the potential to mitigate the primary problems of the post-9/11 civil-military landscape. They can foster the relationship necessary to eliminate most instances of shirking by the military agents, serve to link policy and strategy, and ensure a sound civil-military decision-making process. Together, they may or may not prevent the next US foreign policy debacle. However, they will pay important dividends—for peacetime defense policies, readiness, and deterrence and for wartime effectiveness. **SSQ**

### Notes

1. Gopal Ratnam, “Afghanistan Going off the Rails as U.S. Withdrawal Speeds Up,” *Foreign Policy*, 30 October 2014, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/30/afghanistan\\_us\\_poppy\\_taliban\\_SIGAR\\_troops\\_withdrawal\\_opium\\_heroine](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/30/afghanistan_us_poppy_taliban_SIGAR_troops_withdrawal_opium_heroine); and Rick Brennan, “Withdrawal Symptoms: The Bungling of the Iraq Exit,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (November–December 2014): 25–36.

2. Mark Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman of the American Century* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989).

3. Richard H. Kohn, “The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today,” *Naval War College Review* 55, no. 3 (Summer 2002), 23, <https://usnwc.edu/getattachment/c280d26a-9d66-466a-809b-e0804cbc05f4/erosion-of-civilian-control-of-the-military-in-the.aspx>.

4. Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presidency: Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1–3.

5. Kohn, “Erosion of Civilian Control.”

6. James A. Davis, “Attitudes and Opinions among Senior Military Officers and a U.S. Cross Section, 1998–1999,” in *Soldiers and Civilians*, edited by Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 104–05; and Jason K. Dempsey, *Our Army: Soldiers, Politics, and American Civil-Military Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 103–05.

7. Kohn, “Erosion of Civilian Control;” Peter D. Feaver, “The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision,” *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 87–125; and Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2014), 574.

8. Richard H. Kohn, “Building Trust: Civil-Military Relations for Effective National Security,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 264–89.

9. Sidney Blumenthal, “Revolt of the Generals,” *Guardian* (UK), 20 April 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/apr/21/comment.usa>; Fred Kaplan, “The Revolt against Rumsfeld,” *Slate*, 12 April 2006, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/war\\_stories/2006/04/the\\_revolt\\_against\\_rumsfeld.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2006/04/the_revolt_against_rumsfeld.html); Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 194; and Husna Haq, “Pentagon Backlash: Why Are Top Military Leaders Attacking Obama’s Foreign Policy?” *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 October 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2014/1014/Pentagon-backlash-Why-are-top-military-leaders-attacking-Obama-s-foreign-policy-video>.

10. Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 133–62; and Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 158–66. These works describe in detail the Bush administration’s failure to provide adequately for the war in Iraq and its hesitance to revisit flawed strategies—discussed later in this article. For a similar discussion of the Obama administration, see Kenneth Pollack, “Iraq after the Fall of Ramadi: How to Avoid another Unravelling of Iraq,” *Markaz* (blog), Brookings Institute, 22 May 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/05/22-iraq-ramadi-isis-islamic-state-washington>. In this work, Pollack criticizes the “half-hearted current approach” to Iraq and the administration’s weak efforts at implementing what strategies it is giving the military. See also, Mackubin Thomas Owens, “The Obama Administration’s Strategic Black Hole,” *Providence Journal*, 4 March 2015, <http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150304/OPINION/150309747/13960/NEWS>. Owens is much harsher, rebuking the administration for failing “to apply a coherent strategic framework to its actions.” As with President Bush, this article will discuss President Obama’s inadequate support and guidance of the military in more detail.

11. Kohn, “Building Trust.”

12. Herspring, *Pentagon and Presidency*, 373–76.

13. Kohn, “Erosion of Civilian Control.”

14. For a very good summary of Pres. Bill Clinton as commander-in-chief, see Richard T. Sale, *Clinton’s Secret Wars: The Evolution of a Commander-in-Chief* (New York: Thomas Dunn Books, 2009).

15. Peter Baker, *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House* (New York: Doubleday, 2013), 81–82.

16. Feaver, “Right to Be Right,” 97–98; and Herspring, *Pentagon and Presidency*, 380.

17. Donald H. Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, “DOD Acquisition and Logistics Excellence Week Kickoff—Bureaucracy to Battlefield” (speech, Washington, DC, 10 September 2001), <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=430>.

18. Rowan Scarborough, “Pentagon Staff to Be Trimmed by 15 Percent,” *Washington Times*, 11 September 2001.

19. Derek S. Reveron and Judith Stiehm, *Inside Defense: Understanding the U.S. Military in the 21st Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Herspring, *Pentagon and Presidency*, 378.

20. Herspring, *Pentagon and Presidency*, 378–80.

21. John Kraus, Kevin J. McMahon, and David M. Rankin, eds., *Transformed by Crisis: The Presidency of George W. Bush and American Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

22. Herspring, *Pentagon and Presidency*, 387–88.

23. Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 304. For an excellent account of the US mission in Afghanistan, see pages 303–20.

24. *Ibid.*, 327–28.

25. Ricks, *Fiasco*, 110–11.
26. *Ibid.*, 109–11.
27. *Ibid.*, 158–66.
28. *Ibid.*, and Allawi, *Occupation of Iraq*, 133–62.
29. Herspring, *Pentagon and Presidency*, 381–82.
30. Kaplan, “Revolt against Rumsfeld.”
31. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary*, 28–34.
32. Fred M. Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 302–03.
33. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary*, 25.
34. Feaver, “The Right to Be Right.”
35. The best resource for the surge in Iraq is Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009). See also: Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 223–43.
36. Feaver, “The Right to Be Right.”
37. US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, December 2006. See Sarah Sewall’s introduction for a discussion of the revolutionary nature of the field manual, as well as Kaplan, *The Insurgents*.
38. Feaver, “The Right to Be Right,” 88–89.
39. Don Gonyea, “The Spector of Iraq Haunts the Political Life of Barack Obama,” *NPR.org*, 18 June 2014.
40. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary*.
41. Mackubin Thomas Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations after 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 59–60.
42. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 140–41.
43. Ernesto Londoño and Craig Whitlock, “Syria Crisis Reveals Uneasy Relationship between Obama, Nation’s Military Leaders,” *Washington Post*, 18 September 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syria-crisis-reveals-uneasy-relationship-between-obama-nations-military-leaders/2013/09/18/752bb828-1ca5-11e3-a628-7e6dde8f889d\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syria-crisis-reveals-uneasy-relationship-between-obama-nations-military-leaders/2013/09/18/752bb828-1ca5-11e3-a628-7e6dde8f889d_story.html).
44. Robert Singh, “Continuity and Change in Obama’s Foreign Policy,” in *The Obama Presidency: Appraisals and Prospects*, edited by Bert A. Rockan, Andrew Rudalevige, and Colin Campbell (Los Angeles: SAGE/CQ Press, 2012).
45. Leon Panetta and Jim Newton, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 356–57; and Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 351–54.
46. Elise Labott, Laura Smith-Spark, and Ray Sanchez, “Kerry: U.S. Not at War with ISIS,” *CNN.com*, 11 September 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/11/world/meast/kerry-mideast-visit-isis/>.
47. Londoño and Whitlock, “Syria Crisis Reveals Uneasy Relationship;” Panetta, *Worthy Fights*, 450; and Owens, “Obama Administration’s Strategic Black Hole.”
48. Janine Davidson, “The Contemporary Presidency: Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making; Explaining the Broken Dialogue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 2013): 129–45.
49. *Ibid.*, 140.
50. Panetta, *Worthy Fights*, 440–42 and 460–63.
51. Seth Cropsey, “The Obama-Military Divide,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/seth-cropsey-the-obama-military-divide-1412033300>.

52. Londoño and Whitlock, "Syria Crisis Reveals Uneasy Relationship;" Craig Whitlock, "Rift Widens between Obama, U.S. Military over Strategy to Fight Islamic State," *Washington Post*, 18 September 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/rift-widens-between-obama-us-military-over-strategy-to-fight-islamic-state/2014/09/18/ebdb422e-3f5c-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/rift-widens-between-obama-us-military-over-strategy-to-fight-islamic-state/2014/09/18/ebdb422e-3f5c-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f_story.html); David Gergen, "ISIS War Rollout Resembles Launch of Obamacare Site," *CNN.com*, 21 September 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/21/opinion/gergen-isis-war-launch-obamacare/>; and Elise Labott, Smith-Spark, and Sanchez, "Kerry: U.S. Not at War."

53. Marybeth P. Ulrich, "The General Stanley McChrystal Affair: A Case Study in Civil-Military Relations," *Parameters* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 86–100, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/2011spring/Ulrich.pdf>; Thom Shanker, "Pentagon Inquiry into Article Clears McChrystal and Aides," *New York Times*, 18 April 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/19/us/politics/19military.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/19/us/politics/19military.html?_r=0); and Michael S. Child Sr., acting deputy inspector general for administrative investigations, Department of Defense, to Inspector General, Department of the Army, memorandum, subject: Review of Army Inspector General Agency Report Investigation (Case 10-024), 8 April 2011, <http://www.dodig.mil/foia/ERR/ROI-508.pdf>.

54. Craig Whitlock, "Dempsey Raises Possibility of Involving U.S. Combat Troops in Fight against Islamic State," *Washington Post*, 16 September 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dempsey-raises-possibility-of-involving-us-combat-troops-in-fight-against-islamic-state/2014/09/16/8e13a742-3da1-11e4-b0ea-8141703bbf6f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dempsey-raises-possibility-of-involving-us-combat-troops-in-fight-against-islamic-state/2014/09/16/8e13a742-3da1-11e4-b0ea-8141703bbf6f_story.html).

55. Gordon Lubold, "Hagel Approval Rating Just 26 Percent among National Security Workers, Troops," *Defense One*, 7 November 2014.

56. David Jackson, "Military Gives Obama Low Approval Marks," *USA Today*, 22 December 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2014/12/22/obama-military-times-survey-low-approval-ratings/20759451/>.

57. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary*, 574.

58. *Ibid.*, 338–39.

59. Ashley Killough and Eric Weisbrod, "Obama Coffee Cup Salute Draws Criticism," *CNN.com*, 24 September 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/23/politics/obama-coffee-cup-salute/>.

60. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary*; Gergen, "ISIS War Rollout;" and Whitlock, "Rift Widens between Obama."

61. Panetta, *Worthy Fights*, 289–31. It is worth noting that President Obama made finding and eliminating bin Laden a priority for his administration, where President Bush had shifted his attention to Iraq so thoroughly he had seemingly given up hope in that manhunt.

62. Alan J. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (March–April 2015): 66–77, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/2015-02-16/obamas-libya-debacle>.

63. For "shirking" and an excellent discussion of principle-agent problems in civil-military relations, see Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

64. Bryan Groves, "Principal-Agent Problems: Why War Strategy Doesn't Always Match Policy Aims," *International Journal of Political Science and Development (IJPSD)* 3, no. 2 (February 2015): 63–78, <http://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJPSD/Content%202015/February/Content.htm>. The recommendations included in the current *SSQ* article are in a revised and expanded version of those included in the *IJPSD* article.

65. A retired three-star general described this dynamic at a speaking engagement at Duke University in spring 2015. In summer 2014, a military officer who has worked in the Army's Pentagon Office of Congressional and Legislative Liaison shared similar stories during a summer military education session at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

66. A policy-strategy match occurs when the strategy fits logically with the policy and has a chance for successful achievement of the intended political objectives.

67. For a discussion of good and bad decision-making processes, including some of these recommendations, refer to Alexander L. George, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review* 66, no. 3 (September 1972): 751–85; Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 156; Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, vol. 2 (New York: Longman, 1999), 379–405; Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 14–47; Graham Allison, "The Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy Today," *Foreign Affairs* (July–August 2012), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/cuba/2012-07-01/cuban-missile-crisis-50>; and David Patrick Houghton, *The Decision Point: Six Cases in U.S. Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 96–116.

68. Regarding some of the dynamics related to getting the civil-military relationship right through presidential appointments of military generals, see James Thomas Golby, "Duty, Honor . . . Party? Ideology, Institutions, and the Use of Military Force" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2011).

69. For potential biases of civilian and military leaders, see: Christopher Gelpi and Peter D. Feaver, "Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick? Veterans in the Political Elite and the American Use of Force," *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 4 (2002): 779–93.

70. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 12.

# Military Officers

## Political without Partisanship

*Mackubin Thomas Owens*

### Abstract

The US military should refrain from seeking political power and avoid partisan politics. However, to insist that officers should remain apolitical ignores the fact that in the American system policy making and the development of strategy cannot be easily separated from the political process. Yet such a separation is what many scholars suggest. For officers to avoid the *world of politics* would mean removing them from the debates about policy and strategy that require their input. Military leaders must contribute to the policy process and navigate the shoals of politics while maintaining trust between the civilian and military sides of policy formulation.



It is a pillar of American civil-military relations that military officers are expected to remain apolitical in the performance of their duties. As Risa Brooks writes in a chapter for a recent collection of essays on American civil-military relations, “When individuals join the armed forces, they commit to act in service of the country as a whole and to forego political activity. Military personnel are charged with protecting the security of the country and with performing their functional responsibilities with efficiency, commitment, and skill. Officers are socialized to believe that the world of politics is exclusively a civilian arena.”<sup>1</sup>

But what does *political* mean in the context of policy making in a democratic republic? Is it possible for an officer to avoid involvement

---

Dr. Mackubin Thomas Owens is the dean of academics at the Institute for World Politics in Washington, DC; editor of *Orbis*, the quarterly journal of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, PA; and author of *US Civil-Military Relations after 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain* (New York: Continuum, 2011). He recently retired as professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College after 29 years.

in the political arena and still do his or her job? The answer depends on how one defines *political*. The term has three meanings in the context of civil-military relations. The first definition is seeking power at the expense of other government institutions. Samuel Finer's *The Man on Horseback* is the classic study of this meaning of the word.<sup>2</sup> The term's second meaning is participation in the policy-making process. This is the sense in which many contemporary writers use the term.<sup>3</sup> While Brooks has previously used the term in the same sense as Finer,<sup>4</sup> she has recently adopted this second definition.<sup>5</sup> The third meaning of *political* is involvement in partisan politics.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, the US military—as an institution and as individual service members—should refrain from seeking political power and avoid partisan politics. This political refrain should be a cornerstone of military professionalism. However, to insist that officers should remain apolitical in the second sense of the word ignores the fact that in the American system, policy making and the development of strategy on the one hand and the political process on the other cannot be easily separated. Yet such a separation is what Brooks and many others suggest, concluding that, although there are some benefits arising from the military's political activity, the costs of that activity outweigh the benefits. The most important cost would be that such activity “threatens conventions of democratic accountability and decision making in the United States,” leading to a lack of trust in civil-military relations.<sup>7</sup> For officers to avoid the world of politics would mean removing them from the debates about policy and strategy that require their input. Thus, senior military leaders must be involved in the policy-making process. The argument is predicated on the belief that policy and strategy are processes that require constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty, and ambiguity dominate.<sup>8</sup> This article will first consider the problem of objective control of the military before discussing reasonable ways officers can participate in the political process. Finally, it examines some of the perils of partisanship.

## **The Problem of Objective Control**

One can trace the belief that officers should remain apolitical to Samuel Huntington's watershed study of civil-military relations, *The Soldier and the State*, in which he sought a solution to the dilemma that lies at

the heart of civil-military relations: how to guarantee civilian control of the military while ensuring the ability of the uniformed military to provide security. He uses *political* in Finer's sense—those seeking power at the expense of other government institutions.

Briefly, Huntington identified two broad approaches to achieving and maintaining civilian control of the military: *subjective* and *objective* control.<sup>9</sup> The first approach controls the military by maximizing the power of civilians—be it by means of authority, influence, or ideology. In this system, there is a trade-off between civilian control and military effectiveness. Government institutions, social class, or constitutional form can achieve subjective control. Many writers contend that democracy is the best constitutional form for achieving the combination of civilian control and military effectiveness, but totalitarian regimes have successfully controlled the military by pitting one part against another, for examples the Schutzstaffel (SS) versus the Wehrmacht in Nazi Germany and “political officers” versus other personnel in the Soviet Union. While civilian control is maximized, the military may be weakened to the point that its effectiveness is adversely affected.

Huntington advocated the second approach, which maximizes military professionalism. His solution was a mechanism for creating and maintaining a concept he called *objective control*. Such a professional, apolitical military establishment would focus on defending the United States but avoid threatening civilian control. On the one hand, civilian authorities grant a professional officer corps autonomy in the realm of military affairs. On the other, “a highly professional officer corps stands ready to carry out the wishes of any civilian group which secures legitimate authority within the state.”<sup>10</sup> Eliot Cohen calls this the “normal” theory of civil-military relations but notes that this approach is by no means the norm in American history—even in recent times.<sup>11</sup>

The problem with strict adherence to objective control, as understood by most military officers, is that it presumably obliges them to focus their expertise on the management of violence rather than on the policy and strategy debates that guide the application of force. After all, as Carl von Clausewitz reminds us, wars are not fought for their own purpose but rather to achieve political goals.

The following example can illustrate the danger of religiously adhering to the normal—apolitical—theory of civil-military relations. Beginning in the late 1970s, the US Army embraced the operational level of

war—the level focused on the conduct of campaigns to achieve strategic goals within a theater of war—as its central organizing concept. As Hew Strachan has observed, “the operational level of war appeals to armies: it functions in a politics-free zone and it puts primacy on professional skills.”<sup>12</sup> And herein lies the problem for civil-military relations: the disjunction between operational excellence in combat and policy that determines the reasons for which a particular war is to be fought. The combination of the dominant position of the normal theory of civil-military relations in the United States and the US military’s focus on the nonpolitical operational level of war has meant that all too often the military conduct of a war has been disconnected from the goals of the war. As an essay published by the US Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute puts it, the operational level of war has become an “alien” that has devoured strategy.

Rather than meeting its original purpose of contributing to the attainment of campaign objectives laid down by strategy, operational art—practiced as a *level of war*—assumed responsibility for campaign planning. This reduced political leadership to the role of *strategic sponsors*, quite specifically widening the gap between politics and warfare. The result has been a well-demonstrated ability to win battles that have not always contributed to strategic success, producing “a way of battle” rather than a way of war.

The political leadership of a country cannot simply set objectives for a war, provide the requisite materiel, and then stand back awaiting victory. Nor should the nation or its military be seduced by this prospect. Politicians should be involved in the minute-to-minute conduct of war; as Clausewitz reminds us, political considerations are “influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle.”<sup>13</sup>

The task of strategy is to bring doctrine—concerned with fighting battles in support of campaigns—into line with national policy. However, as Richard H. Kohn observed in the spring 2009 issue of *World Affairs*, “Nearly twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the American military, financed by more money than the entire rest of the world spends on its armed forces, failed to defeat insurgencies or fully suppress sectarian civil wars in two crucial countries, each with less than a tenth of the U.S. population, after overthrowing those nations’ governments in a matter of weeks.”<sup>14</sup>

Kohn attributes this lack of effectiveness to a decline in the US military's professional competence with regard to strategic planning: "In effect, in the most important area of professional expertise—the connecting of war to policy, of operations to achieving the objectives of the nation—the American military has been found wanting. The excellence of the American military in operations, logistics, tactics, weaponry, and battle has been manifest for a generation or more. Not so with strategy."<sup>15</sup>

Here Kohn echoes the claim of Colin Gray: "All too often, there is a black hole where American strategy ought to reside."<sup>16</sup> This strategic black hole exists largely because the military has focused its professional attention on the apolitical operational level of war, abdicating its role in strategy making.

Of course, just as soldiers should not be excluded from the policy arena, civilians should not be excluded from the realm of strategy. Strategy, properly understood, is a complex phenomenon comprising a number of elements—among the most important of which are geography; history; the nature of the political regime, including such elements as religion, ideology, culture, and political and military institutions; and economic and technological factors. Accordingly, strategy consists of a continual dialogue between policy and these other factors. However, it is an interactive and iterative process that must involve both civilians and the uniformed military.

### Officers in the Political Process

In one of her excellent essays on political activity by the military, Brooks argues that for officers to engage in such activity is inconsistent with the norms of professional military behavior. However, as suggested above, some of the activities she sees as inappropriate are part of what officers must do to fulfill their professional responsibilities. For instance, she identifies several political strategies militaries employ to influence the outcome of policy debates: public appeal, "grandstanding," politicking, alliance building, and "shoulder tapping."<sup>17</sup>

A *public appeal* is an attempt to go outside the chain of command to influence public opinion directly. Examples of such strategy include Gen Colin Powell's 1992 editorial in the *New York Times* counseling second thoughts on getting involved in the Balkans and retired Maj Gen Robert Scales's editorial in the *Washington Post* criticizing Pres. Barack

Obama's Syria policy on behalf of what he claimed was a majority of active duty officers.<sup>18</sup> *Grandstanding* is the threat to resign in protest of a given policy. Many argue the Joint Chiefs of Staff should have resigned to protest US strategy in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> *Politicking* refers to retired officers' endorsements of political candidates or organization of service member voter drives. *Alliance building* is the attempt to build civilian-military coalitions on behalf of a policy or program. *Shoulder tapping* refers to attempts by military officers to set the agenda by bringing issues to the attention of politicians and then lobbying on behalf of those issues. An example of this latter strategy took place in 1993, when military officers mobilized key members of Congress to oppose Pres. Bill Clinton's proposal to lift the ban on military service by open homosexuals. However, this list seems to conflate appropriate military participation in the policy process with partisanship. There is no question the first three activities Brooks describes are partisan in nature, and military officers should avoid such behavior. However, the last two strategies are reflective of reasonable features of American civil-military relations.

Brooks's inclusion of alliance building on her list ignores the fact that historically, US civil-military disputes usually have not pit civilians per se against the military. Instead, these disputes have involved one civilian-military faction against another.<sup>20</sup> For instance, shortly after World War II, the debate between the Navy and the newly established US Air Force (USAF) enflamed civil-military tensions regarding long-range airpower—in particular, strategic bombers. On the one hand, Pres. Harry S. Truman, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, and certain members of Congress favored the USAF's long-range B-36 Peacemaker strategic bomber. On the other hand, the Navy, its supporters in Congress, and the press advocated on behalf of the Navy's proposed supercarrier, the USS *United States*. Johnson told Adm Richard L. Connelly in December 1949, "Admiral, the Navy is on its way out. There's no reason for having a Navy and Marine Corps. [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] General [Omar] Bradley tells me that amphibious operations are a thing of the past. We'll never have any more amphibious operations. That does away with the Marine Corps. And the Air Force can do anything the Navy can do nowadays, so that does away with the Navy."<sup>21</sup> This particular battle culminated in the "revolt of the admirals" that same month, when a number of high-ranking naval officers, including the chief of naval operations, Adm Louis E. Denfield, were

either fired or forced to resign in the wake of the cancellation of the USS *United States* project.<sup>22</sup> Even the “textbook” case of a civil-military crisis, President Truman’s firing of Gen Douglas MacArthur, is more complex than it appears at first sight. In fact, there was military support for the firing. Both Gen George Marshall and Gen Dwight Eisenhower urged Truman to fire MacArthur, while Republicans in Congress supported MacArthur.

Another force structure debate involved Adm Hyman Rickover and his congressional allies versus the rest of the US Navy regarding nuclear propulsion. Rickover’s single-minded dedication to a nuclear Navy and his emphasis on engineering oversight resulted in a spectacular safety record, but according to his critics, it also led to an unbalanced and more expensive naval force structure. One of Rickover’s harshest critics was John Lehman, who became Pres. Ronald Reagan’s secretary of the Navy in 1981. Lehman was able to retire Rickover, a feat none of his predecessors had been able to achieve, but Rickover’s legacy, especially in terms of the Navy’s personnel system and shipbuilding, raised many obstacles to Lehman’s effort to create a Navy force structure driven by strategic considerations. Nonetheless, Lehman was able to create and maintain a “navalist” civilian-military coalition—including powerful congressional members—to overcome resistance to his vision within the Navy, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and the Joint Staff.<sup>23</sup>

The creation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) also occurred, despite strong opposition from the services and OSD. It was an alliance between an assortment of “guerrillas” within the Department of Defense and some very dedicated congressional advocates that saw the reorganization come to fruition.<sup>24</sup> A similar situation arose in the case of the Marine Corps’s V-22 Osprey aircraft, with the Marines, the Department of the Navy, and several congressional delegations arrayed against very powerful opponents within the OSD. These sorts of factional debates have persisted into our own time. For instance, the choice of the USAF’s A-10 Warthog land-attack aircraft over its competitors pitted the congressional delegations of several states and both the civilian and uniformed leadership of the three military departments against one another.

Regarding shoulder tapping, one must remember that in the American system, civilian control involves not only the executive branch but the legislative branch as well. These two branches vie for dominance

in the military realm. While the president has constitutional authority as commander-in-chief of the military, Congress retains the power of the purse and is therefore the “force planner of last resort.” Nonetheless, the decentralized nature of Congress gives the president and the executive branch an advantage when it comes to military affairs. Ironically, Congress further strengthened the executive’s hand by enacting the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, it seems perfectly acceptable for military officers to be able to bring their concerns to Congress.

This is especially true in light of one of Huntington’s most important insights. In *The Soldier and the State*, he argued that a major source of American civil-military tension is the clash between the dominant liberalism of the United States, which tended toward an antimilitary outlook, and the “conservative” mind of military officers.<sup>26</sup> Part of this conservative mind-set is a focus on military effectiveness, or what Huntington calls the *functional* imperative, which stresses virtues that differ from those that are favored by liberal society at large. He called these latter virtues the *societal imperative*.

Huntington further argued that while during wartime American liberalism accepted the need for an effective military, it tended to turn against the military during peacetime, trying to force it more into line with liberal values. He contended that in peacetime the dominant liberalism of the United States sought *extirpation* of the military but that liberal civilians, recognizing that even liberal society needs a military, would settle for *transmutation*, which seeks to supplant the functional imperative with the societal one.<sup>27</sup> It seems logical that if soldiers believe either extirpation or transmutation is threatening the integrity of their profession, as in the cases of service by open homosexuals or the opening of infantry and special operations fields to women, the uniformed military has a right to make its case. After all, the other professions in the United States set their own standards.

Of course, as I have argued elsewhere, civil-military relations can be seen as bargaining, the goal of which is to allocate prerogatives and responsibilities between the civilian leadership on the one hand and the military on the other.<sup>28</sup> There are three parties to the bargain: the American people, the government, and the military establishment. Periodically, these parties must renegotiate the civil-military bargain to take account of political, social, technological, or geopolitical changes. Thus, at

some point, the desires of the third party to the civil-military bargain—the people—may override the demands of the military profession. This was the case with service by open homosexuals, and it may become true of women in combat specialties as well.<sup>29</sup>

Should the services have been prohibited from making the case for their roles and missions after World War II? Were postwar efforts by the Marine Corps and the other services to mobilize allies in Congress and the media to protect them from being downgraded or even abolished acceptable?<sup>30</sup> How about efforts to create a special forces command in the face of resistance on the part of the Pentagon bureaucracy and the services? Brooks would seem to argue these efforts were political and therefore illegitimate. Many commentators view these episodes as merely organizational and bureaucratic infighting. However, they reflected important strategic questions, arising from a strong belief in the efficacy of the services' strategic importance—what Huntington called the *strategic concept* of the service. According to Huntington, a service's strategic concept constituted "the fundamental element of a military service . . . the statement of [its] role . . . or purpose in implementing national policy."<sup>31</sup> A service's strategic concept answers the "ultimate question: what function do you perform which obligates society to assume responsibility for your maintenance?" A clear strategic concept is critical to the ability of a service to organize and employ the resources Congress allocates to it.<sup>32</sup> For instance, the naval services (the Navy and Marine Corps) have tended to embrace "strategic pluralism," which "calls for a wide variety of military forces and weapons to meet a diversity of potential threats." The Army and Air Force, in contrast, have remained wedded to "strategic monism," which places primary reliance on a single strategic concept (long-range strategic bombing), weapon (airpower), service, or region (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization during the Cold War).<sup>33</sup>

The fact is, as Andrew Bacevich has argued, "the dirty little secret of American civil-military relations, by no means unique to the [Clinton] administration, is that the commander in chief does not command the military establishment; he cajoles it, negotiates with it; and as necessary, appeases it."<sup>34</sup> Richard Kohn has echoed this point: "In theory, civilians have the authority to issue virtually any order and organize the military in any fashion they choose. But in practice, the relationship is much more complex. Both sides frequently disagree among themselves. Further, the military can evade or circumscribe civilian authority by fram-

ing the alternatives or tailoring their advice or predicting nasty consequences; by leaking information or appealing to public opinion . . . or by approaching friends in Congress for support.”<sup>35</sup>

This is the reality. Although one can argue about the wisdom of military support for this or that program or policy, civil-military relations are an ongoing debate that requires military participation in debates over policy, strategy, and the health of the military instrument itself. But as noted earlier, policy cannot be divorced from politics. Therefore, officers must understand both the political environment and the policy process and be able to participate in debates over policy without becoming swept up in partisan politics.

### **Perils of Partisanship**

Many commentators have expressed concern about the “Republicanization” of the US military.<sup>36</sup> By the 1990s, most active duty officers self-identified as Republican. A comprehensive study discovered that the percentage of officers calling themselves independents had declined during a 20-year period while those identifying themselves as Republicans increased. In 1976, the figures were 46 percent identifying as independents and 33 percent as Republicans. Two decades later the numbers had changed dramatically, with only 22 percent identifying as independents, while 67 percent were Republicans.<sup>37</sup> A more recent survey looking at veterans shows that those self-reporting as Republicans have remained relatively stable from the 1990s to the present (36.95 percent to 33.06 percent respectively), while the percentage of Democrats has fallen (31.03 percent to 18.55 percent) and the number of independents (27.59 percent to 39.52 percent) has increased in the same period.<sup>38</sup> Political leanings aside, there does not seem to be any evidence, even anecdotal, that the political preferences of officers has had any impact on their fidelity to constitutional subordination of the military. And even such concerns fail to note that the US military was far less partisan even in the 1990s than it has been at other times in American history. Indeed the idea of a nonpartisan military arose only as the US military came to view itself as a profession in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Before that, military partisanship was rampant.

For example, after the American Revolution there was a spirited debate between Federalists and Republicans regarding the desirability of

a permanent military establishment. Prominent Federalists, including Washington, Hamilton, and Knox, favored a standing army or at least a uniform militia, but the “genius” of the people made such an establishment impossible. It was a matter of faith for Americans that standing armies were a threat to liberty and that the militia in the form of a “people numerous and armed” was the only acceptable way to defend a republic. This vision of the militia’s capabilities was never completely true, but it took the debacle of the War of 1812 to disabuse the American people of their attachment to a militia.<sup>39</sup>

Until the election of Pres. Thomas Jefferson in 1800, the Army was a Federalist stronghold. Its few Republican officers were barred from high command. Jefferson was able to reverse the situation by reducing the size of the Army, thereby eliminating many Federalists while commissioning Republican officers. The establishment of the US Military Academy at West Point was an important tool in Jefferson’s enterprise.<sup>40</sup>

During the Mexican-American War, Pres. James Polk, a Democrat, feuded constantly with his generals in the field, both of whom were Whigs with presidential aspirations. Maj Gen Zachary Taylor and Maj Gen Winfield Scott did not hesitate to very vocally criticize the president’s policy, strategy, and leadership while conducting the military operations in Mexico.<sup>41</sup> Such behavior on the part of general officers would be unthinkable today. Their public criticism of Polk adumbrated Maj Gen George B. McClellan’s similar public denunciations of Pres. Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.<sup>42</sup> Even with the rise of military professionalism, partisanship did not disappear completely. For instance, during the presidential campaign of 1920, Maj Gen Leonard Wood, an active duty officer—who had formerly been Army chief of staff and who was, at the time, a military district commander—campaigning for the Republican Party nomination while wearing his uniform.

Political activity from which officers should be expected to refrain are those acts of partisanship, including attempts by political parties to enlist soldiers—including retired officers—to endorse candidates, as happened during the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections, or public criticism by an officer of an administration’s policy. Adm William “Fox” Fallon’s criticism of the George W. Bush administration’s policy regarding Iran, the “revolt of the generals” against Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the Gen Stanley McCrystal *Rolling Stone* interview, and the Robert Scales *Washington Post* op-ed criticizing Obama’s Syria policy are

examples of this.<sup>43</sup> Brooks and others are correct to criticize political partisanship on the part of officers. While it is possible for the military to gain some short-term advantages by engaging in partisan politics, the costs of doing so are potentially very high. For one, the American people think very highly of the US military today. However, this could change rapidly if the people come to see the military as little more than another interest group or political party constituency helping to elect individuals who then accede to the demands of that constituency. The military will lose not only its legitimacy in the eyes of the American people but also its ability to help craft national strategy if it acts as if it were merely a public sector union.

*Policy* refers primarily to such broad national goals as interests and objectives. Although civilians should dominate this arena, they must involve the military as well—for not to do so leads to a potentially fatal disconnect between ends and means. The uniformed military must provide advice regarding such questions as to whether the military resources and the military instrument itself are sufficient to achieve the goals of foreign policy in general or the objectives of a war in particular, what alternative courses of actions exist to achieve those goals, what the likely costs and risks are, and how those costs and risks match up against the likely benefits. Policy and strategy are inextricably linked, and officers must be involved in the policy-strategy debate to ensure there is no mismatch between the two.

The key to healthy civil-military relations is trust between the civilian and military sides of the policy formulation process. Civilian leaders must trust military leaders to provide their best and most objective advice and offer a fair hearing to that advice rather than reject it out of hand—especially for transparently political reasons. At the same time, military leaders must trust civilian policy objectives, respect policy choices, and carry out legal policy decisions. While the military should eschew the quest for political power and avoid partisan politics, it must contribute to the policy process and navigate the shoals of politics. It can do so only if trust exists on both sides of the civil-military divide. ■■■

## Notes

1. Risa A. Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 213.

2. Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (1962; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006). Finer identifies four levels of military intervention—*influence, blackmail, displacement, supplantment*—and six methods or modes of intervention: normal constitutional channels, collusion or competition with civilian authorities, intimidation of civilian authorities, threats of non-cooperation with civilian authorities, failure to defend civilian authorities against violence, and the use of violence by the military itself.

3. Richard Kohn, “The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today,” *Naval War College Review* 55, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 8–59.

4. Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

5. For further insight into Brooks’s thinking, see Risa A. Brooks, “The Perils of Politics: Why Staying Apolitical Is Good for Both the US Military & the Country,” *Orbis* 57, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 369–79.

6. Andrew J. Bacevich and Richard Kohn, “Grand Army of the Republicans: Has the US Military Become a Partisan Force?” *New Republic*, 8 December 1997.

7. Brooks, “Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies,” 237.

8. Indeed, a major component of intermediate and top-level professional military education is focused on the policy-making environment and policy process. At my former institution, the Naval War College, one subcourse of the National Security Affairs Department is specifically dedicated to the study of policy. It includes sessions on decision-making models (rational actor, organizational, bureaucratic, etc.), the Departments of Defense and State, the executive branch, Congress, the intelligence community, the interagency process, and so forth.

9. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 80–85.

10. *Ibid.*, 84.

11. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 4.

12. Hew Strachan, “Making Strategy: Civil-Military Relations after Iraq,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 2006), 60.

13. Justin Kelly and Michael James Brennan, *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: US Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), viii.

14. Richard H. Kohn, “Tarnished Brass: Is the U.S. Military Profession in Decline?” *World Affairs* 138, no. 4 (Spring 2009), 73.

15. *Ibid.*, 76.

16. Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London, UK: Orion, 2005), 111.

17. Brooks, “Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies,” 218–24.

18. Colin L. Powell, “Why Generals Get Nervous,” *New York Times*, 8 October 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/08/opinion/why-generals-get-nervous.html>; and Robert H. Scales, “U.S. Military Planners Don’t Support War with Syria,” *Washington Post*, 5 September 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/us-military-planners-dont-support-war-with-syria/2013/09/05/10a07114-15bb-11e3-be6e-dc6ae8a5b3a8\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/us-military-planners-dont-support-war-with-syria/2013/09/05/10a07114-15bb-11e3-be6e-dc6ae8a5b3a8_story.html).

19. See, for instance, the discussion in H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper, 1997).

20. I am indebted to Donald B. Connelly for this observation. See his book, *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), xii.

21. Quoted in George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890–1990* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 190.

22. Thomas D. Boettcher, *First Call: The Making of the Modern US Military, 1945–1953* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1992), 177–86; and Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945–1950* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994).
23. John F. Lehman, *Command of the Seas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988).
24. Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Congress and the Creation of USSOCOM" (Naval War College faculty paper, May 2013).
25. Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Force Planning: The Crossroads of Strategy and the Political Process," *Orbis* 59, no. 3 (Summer 2015), forthcoming.
26. Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 153.
27. *Ibid.*, 155–57.
28. Mackubin Thomas Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations after 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain* (New York: Continuum, 2011).
29. Colton C. Campbell and David P. Auerswald, ed., *Congress and Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 1.
30. On the Marine Corps's fight for survival in the postwar years, see, Gordon W. Keiser, *The Marine Corps and Defense Unification, 1944–1947: The Politics of Survival* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1982); and Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999).
31. Samuel Huntington, "National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* 80, no. 5 (May 1954), 483.
32. *Ibid.*, 488 and 491–92.
33. On strategic pluralism and strategic monism, see Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 400 and 418–27, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 264; and Keiser, *U.S. Marine Corps and Defense Unification*, 121–22. Compare these perspectives with Mackubin Thomas Owens, "The Hollow Promise of JCS Reform," *International Security* 10, no. 3 (Winter 1985–86), 106–08, Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Goldwater-Nichols: A Ten-Year Retrospective," *Marine Corps Gazette*, December 1996; and Mackubin Thomas Owens, "The Use and Abuse of Jointness," *Marine Corps Gazette*, November 1997.
34. Andrew J. Bacevich, "Discord Still: Clinton and the Military," *Washington Post*, 3 January 1999, C1.
35. Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control," 15–16.
36. Bacevich and Kohn, "Grand Army of the Republicans."
37. Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap Between the US Military and Civilian Society? Some Evidence, 1976–1996," *International Security* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1998–99): 5–42.
38. YouGov poll, November, 2013, Civil-Military Tab 2.
39. Lawrence Delbert Cress, *Citizens in Arms: The Army and Militia in American Society to the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).
40. Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783–1802* (New York: Free Press, 1975); and Theodore Crackel, *Mr. Jefferson's Army: Political and Social Reform of the Military Establishment, 1801–1809* (New York: New York University Press, 1987).
41. John C. Pinheiro, *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and Civil Military Relations during the Mexican War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007).
42. Mackubin Thomas Owens, *Abraham Lincoln: Leadership and Democratic Statesmanship in Wartime* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2009), 30–33.
43. David Margolick, "The Night of the Generals," *Vanity Fair*, 13 March 2007, <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2007/04/iraqgenerals200704>; Scott Wilson and Michael D. Shear, "Gen. McCrystal Dismissed as Top US Commander in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, 24 June 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/23/AR2010062300689.html>; and Scales, "US Military Planners Don't Support War with Syria."

# “Cashing In” Stars

## Does the Professional Ethic Apply in Retirement?

*Marybeth Peterson Ulrich*

### Abstract

A successful career for top senior leaders increasingly features employment in the defense industry. This situation presents a challenge to the service professional ethic. It concerns the trend to offer professional expertise in such a way that it exploits active duty experience to support the private interests of the military-industrial complex. Particularly worrisome are those retired members of the profession who play more than one “national security influencer for profit” role, such as being on the payrolls of a defense firm, a media outlet, and the government simultaneously. Should retired senior officers remain full members of the profession once they start “cashing in” their stars? When do they stop serving? The choice marks a transition from service to the nation to service for self-interest. Such a choice marks the difference between serving the American people and taking advantage of their relationship to influence the expenditure of tax dollars in ways that favor corporate gain over national security. The implications of this behavior have the potential to create harmful effects on the military profession, civil-military relations, and US national security.



*High-ranking generals and admirals earn their stars. They earn their stripes. Then, they earn their cash.*

—Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington  
“Strategic Maneuvers”

---

Marybeth Peterson Ulrich is a professor of government in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the US Army War College. She received her PhD in political science from the University of Illinois and a bachelor of science degree from the US Air Force Academy. She is a retired USAF colonel.

The US military has amassed an unsurpassed level of professional expertise, which is available and applicable to many parts of society once a Soldier, Sailor, or Airman retires from active duty. They are extremely valuable national assets whose leadership can be drawn upon to contribute to any number of sectors: education, business, nonprofits, and government. Among those who make the military a career and then seek reentry into civilian life is an elite subset, those who earn flag ranks of admiral and general. These individuals committed fully 25–40 years of service during which they made personal and financial sacrifices to uphold their commitment to the service ethic that puts the nation first. Those who continue to apply the service ethic in private life earn kudos for the military’s institutional stature. Those who lapse into misconduct or conduct inconsistent with the professional ethic negatively affect the public’s perception of the military.

Given the gap in military expertise between the civilian and military spheres, it is natural that some at the top of the military profession will seek avenues to continue to influence national security outcomes beyond their years of active service. One aspect of this activity is the revolving door between active military service and the defense sector—a situation that presents a challenge to the service ethic. Specifically it concerns the trend to offer professional expertise in such a way that it cashes in active duty experience to support the private interests of the military-industrial complex. This article explores the problem of the revolving door, or “second act,” of retired senior military officers and why the situation matters. The implications of this behavior have the potential to create harmful effects on the military profession, civil-military relations, and US national security. However, certain remedies could be adopted to address the issue.

## **The Problematic Second Act**

Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s farewell address is most memorable for its reference to the military-industrial complex. He warned his fellow citizens against overinvesting in defense and urged caution when weighing where to place the national treasure:

Each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs—balance between the private and the public economy, balance between cost and hoped for ad-

vantage—balance between the clearly necessary and the comfortably desirable; balance between our essential requirements as a nation and the duties imposed by the nation upon the individual; balance between actions of the moment and the national welfare of the future. Good judgment seeks balance and progress; lack of it eventually finds imbalance and frustration.<sup>1</sup>

The president added that up to that point “our people and their government have, in the main, understood these truths and have responded to them well, in the face of stress and threat.”<sup>2</sup> The “good judgment” he deemed as necessary to achieve a balanced approach to the national welfare was largely present in those engaged in public service. However, Eisenhower was concerned that the military establishment was becoming too vast and those in its employ may gain too much influence:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.<sup>3</sup>

Eisenhower’s taking on of the military-industrial complex was a remarkable occurrence for the retired five-star general. However, could he have predicted that his fellow comrades in arms, members of the American military profession in the generations to succeed him, would become integral players in the “industrial and military machinery of defense” whose actions should be surveyed for unwarranted influence?

Military retirement in the twenty-first century bears little resemblance to that of President Eisenhower or his peers. Gen Omar N. Bradley spent 28 years in retirement before his death in 1981. He served as chairman of the board of Bulova Watch Company, a position that paid him \$20,000–30,000 a year, and acted as a senior military statesman representing the United States at various ceremonies and frequently visiting units and schools.<sup>4</sup> After his military retirement in 1945, Gen George C. Marshall served as Pres. Harry Truman’s special envoy to China, sec-

retary of state, president of the American Red Cross, and secretary of defense. Marshall refused membership on boards of corporations and turned down generous offers from publishers to write his memoirs. He finally agreed to cooperate with an official biographer but insisted that all royalties go to the Marshall Foundation.<sup>5</sup> President Eisenhower, himself, retired to his farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In the postwar era, there were no major debates on whether retired generals still merited inclusion in the profession of arms. They remained available to mentor the generation still actively serving. They made their expertise available to inform the national debate, but compensation for such participation was not necessarily expected. No one questioned the motives behind their commentary on national security. Some entered politics, as Eisenhower did. Others went on to successful careers in business. Most lived comfortably on the federal pension earned through decades of military service.<sup>6</sup>

Today, a successful career for the top senior leaders increasingly features a second act—employment in the defense industry. Particularly worrisome are those retired members of the profession who play more than one “national security influencer for profit” role, such as being on the payrolls of a defense firm, a media outlet, and the government simultaneously. As one retired two-star remarked, “80 percent of my peers turn around and try to sell stuff back to the military.”<sup>7</sup> Pursuing such revolving-door employment may conflict with a retiree’s continuing obligation to uphold the ethic of the military profession for life.

The *revolving door* refers to leveraging the networks and know-how acquired while working in the public sector to advance the goals of private-sector firms.<sup>8</sup> Specialized public-sector expertise and connections are maximized for private firms’ financial gains. Of course, it is also possible that the public-sector expertise could be appropriately and ethically leveraged to help companies provide the capabilities most needed for national defense. At issue is not postservice employment itself. Rather, the concern centers on the possibility of conflicts of interest that may arise in such a second act and the targeting of three- and four-star retired flag officers to exploit their “influencer” role with active duty personnel, civilian leadership, and the public at-large in scenarios that do not place primary emphasis on the national interest.

The revolving door between the Department of Defense (DOD) and the defense industry blew wide open in the wake of 9-11. Between

1994 and 1998 50 percent of three- and four-star generals took jobs in the defense industry upon retirement.<sup>9</sup> This would seem to be an extremely high rate of placement; however, the rate zoomed to 80 percent by 2008.<sup>10</sup> Bryan Bender, a *Boston Globe* journalist who reported on the phenomenon, explained that the numbers alone do not tell the whole story: “More interesting was the sort of blurred lines between the role of these senior officers in the defense industry and their continuing role as official or unofficial advisers to the military.”<sup>11</sup> The *Boston Globe* also reported that the recruitment for postretirement positions may occur well before retirement, raising questions about the independence of such senior officers while still in uniform.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that the revolving door refers to all senior government officials. The DOD classifies such senior officials as those who served as flag and general officers and civilians whose pay is near the top of the Executive Schedule, Level II pay scale (approximately \$158,000 in 2015).<sup>13</sup> Government ethics rules require only a one-year “cooling off” period before retired flag and general officers can return to their former agencies and attempt to influence official actions there.<sup>14</sup> *Agency* refers to an officer’s military department and designated entities of the DOD such as the Defense Information Systems Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and National Security Agency. For example, if an Army general served in a senior position in DLA in his last two years of active duty, he would be prohibited from attempts to represent corporate interests before the DLA and the Army for one year. However, the Army general would not be prohibited from attempting to influence another military department or the other agencies listed above, excluding the DLA (his former agency).<sup>15</sup> These regulations do not prohibit the acceptance of employment. They merely restrict returning to one’s previous agency or department to represent one’s new employer. Behind the scenes, efforts to influence are not restricted.

The feeder system from some commands to certain defense firms is so powerful that successive generations of commanders have been hired by the same firms or into the same field. For example, the last seven generals and admirals who worked as DOD gatekeepers for international arms sales are now helping military contractors sell weapons and defense technology overseas.<sup>16</sup> While the extension of such capabilities to coali-

tion partners may be in US interests, it is critical that such decisions are the result of objective deliberations that do not privilege private-sector interests over national interests. Without such assurances of objectivity, the trust society has in the military to pursue the national interest versus the individual interests of those belonging to the military profession, active or retired, may be undermined. The interaction of the various roles and the consequential effects these conflicts of interest pose deserve further study. In that regard, it is instructive to review some current second acts, the influence-for-profit scheme, and the power of deference.

### **Some Representative Second Acts**

The complexity and potential insidiousness of the undisclosed commercial ties of retired military officers acting as paid consultants for defense-industry enterprises is encapsulated in *New York Times* journalist David Barstow's Pulitzer prize-winning investigation of retired US Army general Barry McCaffrey. While McCaffrey arguably represents an extreme example, the range and potential conflicts in his commercial enterprises and media consultancies illustrate the internecine ties that develop between military officers' private lives as business people and their past public service and insider ties as former esteemed military leaders.<sup>17</sup> According to the *New York Times* investigation, in addition to lobbying for contracts for the defense industry McCaffrey earned five-figure paychecks as a consultant to a private equity firm involved in buying military contractors and has been chairman of an engineering and construction firm, for whose advantage he used his national stature and personal networks. In addition, he maintained contracts with news and media organizations through which he provided allegedly impartial analysis on military- and war-related topics. As such, he is one of the most visible retired generals to "have had a foot in both camps of influential network military analysts and defense industry rainmakers."<sup>18</sup>

Retired US Army general Jack Keane, former vice chief of staff of the Army, is another high-profile retiree who has cultivated his roles as media analyst and defense industry rainmaker to amass a fortune in retirement. Keane heads the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a neoconservative think tank that has the backing of some leading defense contractors.<sup>19</sup> He makes frequent appearances in various media outlets to include *Fox News*, the *New York Times*, and the *BBC*. Simultaneously,

Keane is in the employ of various defense industry clients, including Academi (formerly known as Blackwater) and AM General—the latter of which manufactures Humvees. Furthermore, the retired general is on the board of General Dynamics, a tank and airplane manufacturer, which paid him \$250,000 in 2010 for his services.<sup>20</sup> Keane was featured in the *Boston Globe's* investigation that reported he used his active duty network to sell Humvees to the Army at the same time he held a seat on the Defense Policy Board. The *Globe* reported, “Keane contacted Army General Peter Chiarelli, as vice chief of staff the Army’s second-ranking officer, to make the case that the service should continue buying new Humvees, Keane confirmed in an interview. He said he told Chiarelli that he believes the Army needs to maintain a ‘strategic partnership’ with AM General, whose relationship with the military dates back to building Jeeps during World War II.”<sup>21</sup> In addition to Keane, several other retired generals, including a former chief and deputy chief of Army acquisitions, lobbied Congress to reject the Army’s preference to invest limited resources in refurbishing Humvees in favor of buying new ones. These direct lobbying efforts paid off when Congress overturned the Army plan to refurbish Humvees and directed the purchase of new ones.<sup>22</sup> This was an interesting example in that it pitted the judgment of the active duty leadership against the lobbying efforts of retired generals who previously held key acquisition positions but were now in the employ of the firm trying to keep its production line open. One could argue that the generals without the ties to the defense industry were more likely to represent the national interest.

Marine Corps general Anthony Zinni retired in 2000 as the commander of United States Central Command. He then became chairman of the board of BAE Systems, a large US defense contractor, before landing a job as an executive vice president with Dyncorp International. *USA Today* reported Zinni made \$946,000 in a single year at Dyncorp.<sup>23</sup> He also served as president of international operations for M.I.C. Industries, Inc., a company focused on the construction of mobile buildings in postconflict areas.<sup>24</sup> The company’s “inner circle advisory board” is composed exclusively of a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS); a former secretary of defense; a former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe and national security adviser; and a former deputy secretary of state.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to several investigative journalism efforts, public watchdog organizations have also taken note of the revolving door from the Pentagon to the private sector. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) found that 76 of 108 (70 percent) three- and four-star generals who retired between 2009 and 2011 took jobs with defense contractors either as full-time employees or as highly paid part-time consultants.<sup>26</sup> CREW focuses on ethics and accountability in public life and targets government officials who sacrifice the common good to special interests.<sup>27</sup>

Another example is Lt Gen David Deptula, who retired from the US Air Force (USAF) on 1 October 2010. His last assignment was as the deputy chief of staff for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). CREW reported Deptula signed on as the chief executive officer and managing director of Mav6, an aerospace and defense-technology company, a few months after retirement. Mav6’s founder, chairman of the board, and president is retired US Army major general Buford Blount, who commanded the Third Infantry Division at the time of his retirement in 2005.<sup>28</sup> In March 2011 Mav6 won an \$86.2 million contract to develop an unmanned aircraft to conduct persistent ISR missions. However, the USAF cancelled the program in 2012 due to schedule delays and accumulated cost overruns. CREW reported Deptula is also a consultant at Burdeshaw & Associates, a firm comprised mostly of part-time retired generals who advise private companies—mostly in the defense industry—on how to do business with the military.<sup>29</sup> In addition, he has consulted for Northrop Grumman and served on the strategic advisory council of the SI Organization, which was rebranded as Vencore in 2014.<sup>30</sup>

Recruitment to serve on corporate boards is another avenue available to retired flag officers. Increasingly companies are recruiting retired flag officers to serve on boards of directors. In 2012, the National Association of Corporate Directors launched a program aimed at recruiting retired generals and admirals to serve on corporate boards.<sup>31</sup> Service on corporate boards enables retired flag officers to draw hefty compensation for appearing at a few events, assisting the company to leverage the retiree’s connections to enhance its business.<sup>32</sup>

For instance, according to the CREW report, Gen James Cartwright, who retired from the Marine Corps in 2011, was elected to the Raytheon Company board of directors soon thereafter—a post that paid an

\$85,000 annual retainer. He received a \$1,500 speaker fee for each appearance, even if he spoke via teleconference—in addition to \$120,000 in stock options.<sup>33</sup> That same year, the Pentagon paid Raytheon \$14 billion. Cartwright is also a member of the board for TASC and is on the advisory board of Accenture Federal Services, which are both federal contractors.

Companies, interest groups, labor unions, and single-issue organizations all together spend billions every year to lobby Congress and federal agencies to shape legislation and regulatory policy. Some organizations employ lobbying firms, while others have their own in-house lobbyists.<sup>34</sup> Retired senior military officers are employed in both categories, and some are registered lobbyists subject to the laws governing that vocation. However, most who reach back to influence decision makers still in the active forces bear the label “consultant” or part-time adviser. For example, General Keane, who lobbies Congress on behalf of his defense industry clients, explained that he is not required to register as a lobbyist because he does not spend more than 20 percent of his time lobbying.<sup>35</sup> Some have pointed out that it is virtually impossible to enforce rules governing this situation.<sup>36</sup>

CREW reports that the top five defense corporations increased their spending on lobbyists 40 percent between 2007 and 2011, from \$44.6 million to \$62.3 million. The vast majority of lobbyists for the top five defense corporations have passed through the revolving door of previous public-sector employment. However, retired flag officers prefer the term “consultant” rather than lobbyist. General McCaffrey characterized his lobbying efforts on behalf of Defense Solutions as “strategic counsel.”<sup>37</sup> Such *counsel* may influence outcomes similarly through the counselor’s special access. In fact, the consulting firm Burdeshaw Associates is known as the “go to” firm to “rent a general” available to *consult* in support of the objective of gaining defense contracts.<sup>38</sup>

At issue are the effects on national security when the interests of private companies intersect with individual interests and conflict with national interests.<sup>39</sup> The hiring habits and compensation policies of the major defense corporations indicate they increasingly value well-connected lobbyists and retired senior military personnel to influence the fight for defense resources in the long-term austere budget environment.

## **Influence for Profit**

While there are significant issues to discuss associated with retired generals using their status to assist defense business interests, the situation is compounded when this activity occurs simultaneously with employment by the military for their expert knowledge—the main credential for certification as a member of the military profession. Retired generals have long informally mentored their active duty counterparts, often their own protégés, passing on the wisdom of senior leaders to the rising generation of commanders and military leaders. However, in recent years the Pentagon established a formal “senior mentor” program that paid retired generals what many regarded as excessively large fees for helping to run war games and advising their former colleagues. *USA Today* made the program widely known in 2009 with a front page story reporting that 158 admirals and generals had participated in the program; their pay was well beyond what their active duty pay had been. Mentors were not subject to government ethics rules since they were hired by defense contractors and not directly by the government. Furthermore, as contractors they were not subject to public scrutiny. Most troubling was the fact 80 percent had ties to defense contractors and 29 were full-time executives at defense companies.<sup>40</sup>

The recent growth in the use of mentors has created a new class of individuals who enjoy even more access than a typical retired officer, and they get paid by the military services while doing so. Most are compensated both by taxpayers and by industry, with little to prevent their private employers from using knowledge these employees obtain as mentors to gain government contracts for their respective companies.<sup>41</sup>

Congress and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates looked into the program, noting deviations from previously held professional norms and expectations. Gates’s press secretary passed on the secretary’s concerns about the program: “He fundamentally believes that the money is obscene for government work, and that those participating in this valuable program should be motivated to do so out of a sense of patriotism and service rather than out of monetary gain.”<sup>42</sup> Pentagon spokesperson, Geoff Morrell, called for a balance between leveraging the expertise of retired senior military leaders and compensating them “in a way that most people would expect government employees and government consultants to be paid.”<sup>43</sup>

In response to pressure from the Senate Armed Services Committee to address the issue, in April 2010 the Pentagon issued new rules requiring mentors to convert to the more tightly regulated “highly qualified expert” (HQE) position. This subjected mentors to federal conflict of interest laws, capped pay at active duty general pay, and—most importantly—mandated the filing of public financial disclosure documents detailing their employers, earnings, and stocks. The new rules also restricted HQEs who annually worked more than 60 days for the government from representing private-sector clients to the DOD for one year after their military contract.<sup>44</sup> Because of these regulations, 98 percent of the retired senior officers left the program.<sup>45</sup> As one government watchdog tracking the program noted, “It appears that, for at least some of the former military officers who dropped out of the mentors program, it’s clear which choice they made when it came to patriotism or money.”<sup>46</sup>

## The Power of Deference

One reason the defense industry prefers retired senior officers to represent its interests is because senior military officers are considered to be “above reproach” and the “moral exemplars” of those coming up the ranks.<sup>47</sup> The “general-turned-businessman” is treated with deference as if still in uniform, which can greatly increase effectiveness as a rainmaker for industry. Most expert civilian colleagues are not. Some have dubbed this the “bobblehead effect,” referring to the military’s ingrained hierarchy and deference to authority, wherein those junior in rank defer to those senior.<sup>48</sup> While civilians in the employ of Congress or the executive branch have long left their jobs to do the bidding of the industries they used to oversee, the military’s culture brings a unique element to the phenomenon: “Once a general, always a general” is a well-known adage in military circles. Bryan Bender elaborates, “When you talk to some of the people who sit in some of these meetings of advisory panels and the sort of mind-numbing number of these commissions and other bodies that advise the military, if there’s a retired four-star general in the room, he’s going to get a level of respect. People are going to hear him out in a very real way—as if he’s still a general and he didn’t leave the military.”<sup>49</sup>

Former Congressman and current Senate candidate Joe Sestak, who is a retired three-star admiral, made note of the deference to one's prior military status when retirees are brought in to interact with active duty personnel in an advisory capacity: “Rank did mean something. The principal guy in the room really drove the thing. There is a hesitancy to question them.”<sup>50</sup> The lasting impact of rank in national security circles also plays out when former superior officers pitch their products and firms to their previous subordinates. As retired Army general William Kernan noted, “I didn't like people doing it to me when I was a four-star, a three-star, even a two-star—using a previous relationship as an entree to selling me something.”<sup>51</sup>

These factors help explain why the rent-a-general and its potential for conflicts of interest fly below the radar of both the oversight committees in Congress and the public at large. As Melanie Sloan, executive director of CREW, mentions, the political and public apathy is attributed to the high esteem the military now occupies in the American psyche: “People have been very hesitant to criticize high-level military officers. They have an aura around them, unless they are involved in personal wrongdoing [such as retired Army general David Petraeus]. . . . There are very few people who command that high level of respect.”<sup>52</sup> However, this level of respect could change if the appearance of the conflict of interests becomes more well-known.

## **Why It Matters**

Some may argue that senior military professionals who achieved the highest ranks possible in their professions should be able to cash in their expertise for the tangible compensation that eluded them on active duty. These opportunities may allow retired senior military professionals to earn substantially more than the pay grades of three- and four-star generals, which currently ranges from \$164,221 to \$179,700 a year.<sup>53</sup>

This is where the question of whether or not the most accomplished members of the profession, entrusted with the most responsibility related to practicing their profession, remain full members of the profession once they start cashing in their stars. The question then becomes, when do they stop serving? The choice marks a transition from service to the nation to service to self-interest. However, is it more than that? Does such a choice mark the difference between serving their client, the

American people, and taking advantage of their relationship to influence the expenditure of their client's tax dollars in ways that favor corporate gain over national security? Furthermore, what is the unique nature of military retirement? What does it mean to retire? Should one's full stature in the profession be diminished with the resultant loss of some professional benefits? What is the opportunity cost to society of senior leaders heading to K Street and the military-industrial complex rather than continuing to serve the nation in other ways? What is the impact on the active forces' concept of "a life-long calling" and their expectations for what really constitutes a "successful career"? Each of these issues will be discussed in turn.

### **The Officer Retiree: Professional for Life?**

What renders retired officers distinctive from other classes of retired professionals? To start, one must begin with the premise of military officers as "professionals." As students of civil-military relations are aware, Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* made expertise a foundational pillar in his case for advancing the military as a profession. Huntington argued that the armed forces of modern states should be afforded the status of profession because they are expert in a specialized skill crucial to the sustainment of society, the "management of violence."<sup>54</sup> A singular responsibility to the client, the state, along with the armed forces' "powerful corporate tradition and organization" comprised the remaining two pillars of the profession.<sup>55</sup>

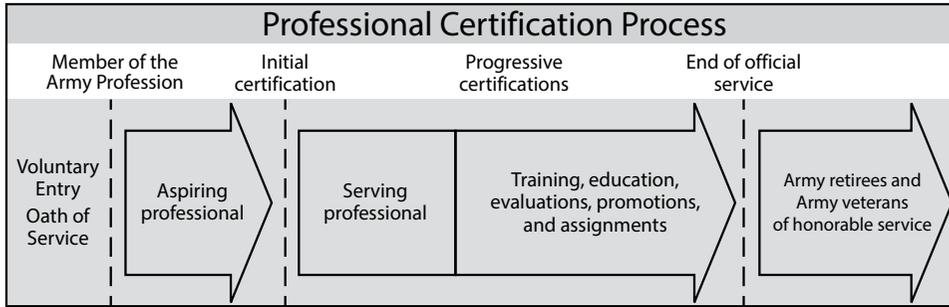
Unlike most professions, however, military leaders retire while they are still in their peak working years. Limits on length of service tied to rank force out those who make full colonel in their early fifties; general officer is the only rank in which more than 30 years of commissioned service is possible. Length of service as a flag officer varies depending on the number of stars earned, but even these most-senior military leaders have some working years available when they retire. While doctors and lawyers can practice into their later years and make choices about their retirement age, the military professional no longer "officially practices" once he or she retires. The stewardship of the profession is relinquished to those remaining on active duty, while the retired military professional transitions to other societal roles and the unofficial practice of expert

knowledge. However, it is important to note that, unlike other retirees who only return to a profession on their own volition, retired military officers can be recalled to service.<sup>56</sup>

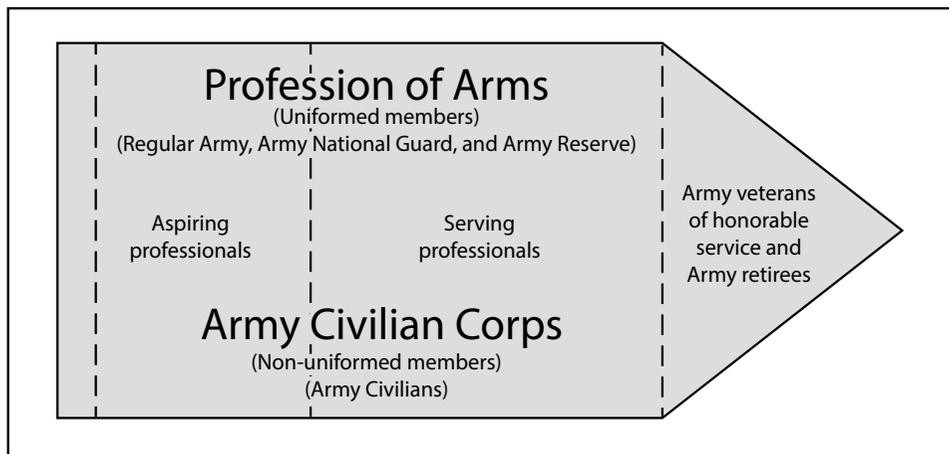
While the stewardship of the profession is passed to the successor generation, those retiring from the active forces assume their new status as retired professionals. The Army took on the issue of the status of retired service members in a three-year review of the Army profession after survey research "revealed a lack of common understanding throughout the Army on what it means to be a profession or a professional."<sup>57</sup> The review culminated in 2013 with the publication of Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1, *The Army Profession*, which took on a variety of issues that had been debated in the Army, including who should be included as members of the profession—and consequently be subject to professional norms—and who should be left out.<sup>58</sup> For instance, the Army civilian corps was included, but contractors were excluded.<sup>59</sup> A contractor who is a retiree would be expected to adhere to the service ethic as a retired professional. The new doctrine specifically addressed the role of retirees, placing them squarely in the profession for life:

Individuals may exit the Army before a full career, moving into the category of an Army veteran of honorable service or serve a full career and honorably retire. In both categories (veteran and retiree), they remain influential members of the profession and assimilate back into civilian life and live among the citizens the Army serves. Army veterans and retirees extend their involvement and contributions to the Army profession by volunteering in veteran support operations. These organizations educate the public on the significance of the Army Profession and the service it provides to the Nation. Whether retiree or veteran, these men and women are Soldiers for life and should consider themselves as a living part of the profession and apply their service ethic throughout the remainder of their lives.<sup>60</sup>

Figures 1 and 2, taken from ADRP-1, depict retirees' place in the profession. Both figures include retirees as members of the profession. Figure 1 notes when official service ends and unofficial service begins in retirement. ADRP-1 makes clear that the perks of retirement (continued use of rank, privileged status, and various benefits available only to military members) come with the expectation of continued honorable service and a continuing obligation to the profession.



**Figure 1. Army professional certification process.** (ADRP-1, *The Army Profession*, June 2013, 3-4, [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP\\_1.html](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP_1.html).)



**Figure 2. Membership in the Army profession.** (ADRP-1, *The Army Profession*, June 2013, 3-6, [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP\\_1.html](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP_1.html).)

### Which Interests Served?

When Huntington laid out the case almost 60 years ago in *The Soldier and the State* that the military profession should be among those afforded special societal status, such as medicine and law, responsibility related to the practice of professional expertise was central to his argument. Doctors must render aid and “do no harm.” Lawyers must not compromise the tenets of justice. In each case, there is a singular focus on who the client is—the society which ultimately may revoke or elevate the profession’s status.

If one continues to *practice*, in the sense that professional expertise is being applied to national security issues, and the source of one’s op-

portunity to practice is one’s retired flag officer rank, then, as ADRP-1 clearly lays out, the norms of the profession still apply. Chief among these is continuing to embrace the idea that the American people are the central client and their interests must be prioritized above others. Retired flag officers applying their professional expertise have an obligation to support the national interest above institutional interests—including their former military department—and above corporate interests if these interests should come into conflict. Those who can keep these interests prioritized in ways consistent with the service ethic may continue to serve honorably in the private sector. However, those who place corporate and individual interests first will be seen as straying from their professional obligation. Those who advise the Pentagon without making their defense ties known may compromise the interests of the American people through recommendations that national treasure be diverted to unnecessary defense expenditures. At issue is the effect on national security when the interests of private companies intersect with individual interests and conflict with national interests.

### **Implications for the Profession**

One significant impact on the profession is the erosion of the image of the elite military professional as a selfless servant. Some are beginning to question the effect that the trend is having on the officer corps and the military profession. As Bender questions, “If everyone sees this conveyor belt that goes from the Pentagon to the private defense world, and a lot of it is not very public and it’s not very transparent, the big question that some of them have is, does this erode what traditionally it’s meant to be an officer in the United States military?”<sup>61</sup> Some elite retirees see this as problematic as well. Below is a sampling of perceptions found in the blogosphere:

“He’s cashing in, and telling the world he’s ethical, and getting away with it because he’s a retired 4-star. If he can look himself in the mirror, it only shows he has no compunction about retiring one day and tripling his pay the next, all in the name of national defense. It’s really all in the name of his bank account.”<sup>62</sup>

“I don’t buy that. That’s baloney,” counters Maj. Gen. Waldo Freeman, an analyst at the non-profit Institute for Defense Analyses who mentors part time. “I think it’s absolutely wrong for somebody to have one foot in both camps. I don’t see how somebody can be on some (corporate) board, and then be a

senior mentor—whereby he is learning information that could advantage his company—and say that’s ethical.”<sup>63</sup>

“So, is it really any surprise that someone who’s being paid so handsomely by some of the nation’s biggest defense contractors is going on television and pitching more war and military conflict?”<sup>64</sup>

## **Opportunity Cost to Society at Large**

Some retired senior officers may be able to keep the national interest at the forefront and may infuse an ethic that might be lacking in business environments that elevate profits over all else. However, the more retired officers pursue multiple roles, the probability of conflicting interests increases. Retired officers seeking to maintain their status as a retired member of the profession of arms must also keep in mind their continuing obligation to the profession.

The opportunity cost to society when the nation’s retired flag officers overwhelmingly choose the defense sector over other second acts is also worthy of exploration. This is relevant with regard to the present nature of the civil-military experience gap—in particular the lack of uniformed military expertise in the civilian sphere. Flag officers who choose to do the bidding of the defense sector in retirement severely compromise their ability to engage objectively in the national security discourse. With the vast majority of senior flag officers choosing the defense sector over other postretirement pursuits, the national security discourse tilts in the direction of the defense industry. The national security debate would look much different if just as many retired flag officers lent their expertise to the public good unencumbered by ties to the defense industry.

Civil-military relations are also affected. A pool of the most accomplished retired flag officers made available to critique sales pitches emanating from the defense industry with a singular focus on the national interest would be of great value to the president’s administration and Congress. Such retired professionals would also be useful to provide objective insights in policy matters, as long as their advisory roles as stewards of the profession with the statutory role of military advisers are not circumvented.

Adm James Stavridis, who retired as the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) in 2013 and currently serves as the dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, is among those pushing back against the trend. He states, “Given that

so many senior military evidently retire and take full-time jobs in the defense sector, I am saddened to see their talents not more broadly applied—above all in education at all levels in the US, a critical need for our nation. Additionally, these leaders could have enormous impact in technology, justice, transportation, international relations, governance, and many other segments of our national life.”<sup>65</sup> As Admiral Stavridis noted, society would benefit if the leadership and vast experience of retired flag officers were applied toward solving the vexing problems of the day—education, poverty, racial relations, health and fitness, civic mindedness, and mitigating the civil-military experience gap. Such pursuits would contribute to sustaining the military profession’s privileged status—a status currently threatened by the behaviors outlined in this article and undermined by other behaviors such as the growing political activism and partisanship described in complementary pieces.<sup>66</sup>

### **What Is to Be Done?**

The main tools for policing the ethics of working for a company in the defense sector while also engaging in other influential roles are “self-policing” and a less than robust disclosure process. Some complain that self-policing is insufficient and recommend rules requiring retired senior officers to disclose their defense industry ties when performing other roles such as media analyst or DOD adviser or mentor or when testifying before Congress. Others familiar with the disclosure process report that ethics questionnaires requesting information related to conflicts of interests between advising DOD and working in the defense sector are used inside DOD. However, the services do not seem to limit access to retired senior officers with feet in multiple camps after collecting that data.<sup>67</sup>

Tightening up the government ethics rules outlined above may also have some effect. Cooling off periods could be lengthened, and the rules prohibiting going back to one’s agency to influence could be extended to cover all agencies. This is particularly reasonable in the case of three- and four-star flag officers, who would seem to have influence across the DOD enterprise. Stricter rules calling for disclosure of defense industry ties while serving as advisers and government consultants are also in order.

Finally, some call for the active duty stewards of the profession, the CJCS and the service chiefs, to weigh in and try to influence the behavior of the high-ranking influencers as Adm Mike Mullen did when he admonished retired flag officers from endorsing presidential candidates when he was CJCS. The USAF chief of staff, Gen Norton Schwartz, took such a step when he spoke at the Air Force Association's annual conference in the middle of the 2008 tanker scandal: "I'm speaking of the unfortunate deterioration of the relationship between the Air Force and industry that of late has manifested a hyperbole of insensitivity and a lack of proper communication," he said. "My personal view is that military professionals, including those who have retired from active service, have an obligation to refrain from taking sides in public debates on key acquisition programs."<sup>68</sup> The *Air Force Times* reported that following the speech there was "awkward applause from the crowd, packed with current and retired Air Force generals."<sup>69</sup> The service chiefs and the CJCS could play a greater role instilling the norm that the service ethic applies in retirement and conveying the message that failing to do so damages the civil-military relationship.

Another recommendation comes from Maj Matt Cavanaugh, an Army strategist and assistant professor of military strategy at the US Military Academy. Major Cavanaugh founded *WarCouncil.org* to facilitate the debate on issues of modern warfare and strategy.<sup>70</sup> In one forum, Cavanaugh addressed the issue at the heart of this article:

I'm uncomfortable with the notion that senior members of the Profession of Arms, who have been granted access and privilege in order to perform service to the American public while on active duty, are then able to monetize this access in retirement to significant personal benefit. I don't think there's anything wrong with making money, but when the money becomes a windfall and particularly when they continue to publicly represent the military profession—that's where I have a problem.<sup>71</sup>

He suggested a simple test for all retired officers: "If post-retirement private sector work involves national security (i.e., defense contractor, public commentator), broadly construed . . . and when income from that work exceeds double the amount of military retirement pay, then . . . the individual[s] should relinquish their commission, as private financial interests have clearly impaired their (mostly dormant) obligation to act on behalf of the nation's interest."<sup>72</sup>

When the above criteria are met, Major Cavanaugh suggests the title “General (former)” should replace the title “General (retired).” Cavanaugh argues this would enable the retired officers to maintain their titles, while indicating that the official commission is no longer held. Consequently, the same expectations to adhere to the norms of the profession would be eliminated. Cavanaugh noted that the downgrading of the official title would have no impact on military retirement pay or financial benefits, but the commission as a symbol of the military profession would be withdrawn.<sup>73</sup> However, some experts warn that formally resigning one’s commission would lead to the forfeiture of the pension and other benefits associated with holding a commission. Finally, the DOD 5500.07-R, *The Joint Ethics Regulation (JER)*, states that retired military members may use their titles in connection with commercial enterprises if they clearly indicate their retired status, but such usage is prohibited if use of the title gives the appearance of endorsement or DOD approval.<sup>74</sup>

## **Conclusion**

One specific phenomenon that is eroding the profession’s status is the growing trend to cash in stars for personal and corporate gain. President Eisenhower warned of the threat of overinvestment in defense that could occur if there ceased to be a distinction between the DOD and the corporations that resource it. The military-industrial complex Eisenhower feared has arrived. It is the responsibility of all in the profession of arms to reflect on this growing phenomenon and recommend remedies to ensure the much-heralded tradition of selfless service to the American people endures. On this point, Major Cavanaugh has the correct idea: “We don’t allow active duty officers to profit from their access and privileges—to simultaneously represent private and public interests—why shouldn’t the self-policing Profession of Arms set some reasonable boundaries for retired members?”<sup>75</sup>

Many retired senior officers do respect the service ethic by serving in philanthropic and defense-related positions without a conflict of interest. Some continue to straddle the ethical line, and still others cross it with abandon. One can only hope that by focusing attention on the challenges posed by the revolving door, the ethics of the profession can

be maintained and strengthened in the eyes of the profession's client, the American people. **SSOQ**

## Notes

1. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Address" (speech, Washington, DC, 17 January 1961), [http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/farewell\\_address.html](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/farewell_address.html).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Clay Blair, "Collaborator's Afterword," in *A General's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 665; and Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *General Omar Nelson Bradley: The Centennial* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1992), <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/bradley/bradley.htm>.

5. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman 1945–1959* (New York: Viking Press, 1987), 494–95 and 498.

6. It is important to note that as five-star generals, Bradley, Marshall, and Eisenhower did not officially retire. They remained in "active" status and drew small salaries along with such benefits as an office and a military aide.

7. Maj Gen Paul D. Eaton, US Army, retired, interview by the author, Washington, DC, May 2015.

8. See Risa A. Brooks and Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "The Political Activism of Retired Officers in the United States: What Is the Impact?" (paper, presented at the International Security and Arms Control (ISAC)–International Security Studies Section (ISSS) annual conference, Austin, TX, November 2014).

9. David Francis, "DOD Retirees: From 4-Star General to 7-Figure Income," *Fiscal Times*, 5 June 2013, <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/articles/2013/06/05/dod-retirees-from-4-star-general-to-7-figure-income>.

10. Amy Goodman, "From the Pentagon to the Private Sector: *Boston Globe* Analysis Finds Large Numbers of Retiring Generals Entering Defense Industry," *Democracy Now!* (web site), 27 December 2015, [http://www.democracynow.org/2010/12/27/from\\_the\\_pentagon\\_to\\_the\\_private](http://www.democracynow.org/2010/12/27/from_the_pentagon_to_the_private).

11. Ibid.

12. Bryan Bender, "From the Pentagon to the Private Sector," *Boston Globe*, 26 December 2010, [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2010/12/26/defense\\_firms\\_lure\\_retired\\_generals/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2010/12/26/defense_firms_lure_retired_generals/).

13. Standards of Conduct Office, Department of Defense, "Senior Employee Post-Government Employment Restrictions," January 2015, [http://www.dod.mil/dodgc/defense\\_ethics/resource\\_library/pgser\\_senior.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/dodgc/defense_ethics/resource_library/pgser_senior.pdf).

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Bryan Bender, "From the Pentagon to the Private Sector."

17. Brooks and Ulrich, "The Political Activism of Retired Officers."

18. David Barstow, "One Man's Military-Industrial-Media Complex," *New York Times*, 29 November 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/washington/30general.html>. The

term *rainmaker* refers to a member of the firm who brings a great deal of profitable business to the firm.

19. Major contributors to ISW include Dyncorp International, CACI International, and General Dynamics. For more information, see “Institute for the Study of War,” *Right Web* (web site), 17 September 2013, [http://www.rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/institute\\_for\\_the\\_study\\_of\\_war#sthash.yGLLXhD1.dpuf](http://www.rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/institute_for_the_study_of_war#sthash.yGLLXhD1.dpuf).

20. Lee Fang, “Who’s Paying the Pro-War Pundits?,” *The Nation* (web site), 16 September 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/181601/whos-paying-pro-war-pundits>.

21. Bryan Bender, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”

22. Ibid.

23. Tom Vanden Brook, Ken Dilanian, and Ray Locker, “Retired Military Officers Cash In as Well-Paid Consultants,” *USA Today*, 18 November 2009, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-11-17-military-mentors\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-11-17-military-mentors_N.htm).

24. “Anthony C. Zinni,” Middle East Institute (web site), no date, <http://www.mei.edu/profile/anthony-c-zinni>.

25. “Chairman’s *Inner Circle* Advisory Board,” M.I.C. Industries (web site), 2013, [http://www.micindustries.com/inner\\_circle.htm](http://www.micindustries.com/inner_circle.htm). This inner circle advisory board consists of William S. Cohen, 20th secretary of defense; James L. Jones, national security advisor to Pres. Barack Obama, SACEUR, 32nd commandant of Marine Corps; Peter Pace, 16th CJCS; and Richard L. Armitage, 13th deputy secretary of state. All their titles are featured prominently on the company’s web site.

26. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), *Strategic Maneuvers: The Revolving Door from the Pentagon to the Private Sector* (Washington, DC: CREW, 2012), [http://www.citizensforethics.org/page/-/PDFs/Reports/CREW\\_Strategic\\_Maneuvers\\_Pentagon\\_Generals\\_Revolving\\_Door\\_11\\_15\\_12.pdf?nocdn=1](http://www.citizensforethics.org/page/-/PDFs/Reports/CREW_Strategic_Maneuvers_Pentagon_Generals_Revolving_Door_11_15_12.pdf?nocdn=1).

27. CREW, “About Us,” *CREW* (web site), 2015, <http://www.citizensforethics.org/pages/about>.

28. CREW, *Strategic Maneuvers*, 3; and “Executive Profile: Buford Blount,” *Bloomberg Business*, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/person.asp?personId=62219748&privcapId=62213092>.

29. Burdeshaw Associates, “The Power of Our Associate Base,” no date, [http://www.burdeshaw.com/associates/Our\\_Associates.pdf](http://www.burdeshaw.com/associates/Our_Associates.pdf).

30. “Executive Profile: David A. Deptula,” *Bloomberg Business*, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/person.asp?personId=126942523&privcapId=62213092>.

31. Stuart Gittleman, “Corporate Boards Looking for a Few Good Generals,” *Financial Regulatory Forum* (blog), Reuters, 12 January 2012; <http://blogs.reuters.com/financial-regulatory-forum/2012/01/12/corporate-boards-looking-for-a-few-good-generals-directors-group-says-in-seeking-military-members/>.

32. David Francis, “DOD Retirees: From 4-Star General to 7-Figure Income.”

33. Ibid.

34. Center for Responsive Politics, “Influence and Lobbying,” *Opensecrets.org* (web site), no date, <http://www.opensecrets.org/influence/>.

35. Bryan Bender, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”

36. Michael M. O’Brien, “The ‘Military-Industrial Complex’: Revolving Door for Retired Generals,” *Warfare Inc.* (web site), 5 January 2011, <http://www.warfare-inc.com/2011/01/05/the-military-industrial-complex-revolving-door-of-retired-generals/>.

37. David Barstow, “One Man’s Military-Industrial-Media Complex.”

38. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), *Strategic Maneuvers*, 2.

39. Ibid., 1.
40. Vanden Brook, Dilanian, and Locker, “Retired Military Officers Cash In as Well-Paid Consultants.”
41. Ibid.
42. Tom Vanden Brook and Ken Dilanian, “Gates Orders Review of Military Mentor Program,” *USA Today*, 17 December 2009, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-12-16-gates-mentor-review\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-12-16-gates-mentor-review_N.htm).
43. Ibid.
44. Jack Moore, “IG: Steep Decline in Pentagon Senior Mentors after New Rules,” *Federal News Radio*, 9 November 2011, <http://www.federalnewsradio.com/412/2625711/IG-Steep-decline-in-Pentagon-senior-mentors-after-new-rules>.
45. Dana Liebelson, “98 Percent of Former Military Officers Drop Out of Pentagon Program after Financial Disclosure,” *Project on Government Oversight Blog*, 9 November 2011, <http://pogoblog.typepad.com/pogo/2011/11/98-percent-of-former-military-officers-drop-out-of-pentagon-program-after-financial-disclosure-.html>.
46. Ibid.
47. Bryan Bender, interviewed in Amy Goodman, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”
48. Ibid. The *bobblehead effect* is derived from the bobblehead toys, which feature oversized heads that are affixed with a spring and bob up and down. A retired general or admiral when speaking with authority at a table populated by military officers and civilians—who may have worked for that general or at least knew of the officer when he or she was in uniform—will sit around the table and nod their heads as the general speaks, emulating to some degree the aforementioned toy.
49. Ibid.
50. Bryan Bender, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”
51. Quoted in Bryan Bender, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”
52. David Francis, “DOD Retirees: From 4-Star General to 7-Figure Income.”
53. Ibid.
54. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (New York: Belknap Press, 1957).
55. Ibid.
56. See 10 USC 371, “Retirement for Length of Service”; and George R. Smawley, *Stewardship and the Retired Senior Leader: Toward a New Professional Ethic*, US Army War College Strategy Research Paper (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, June 2013). Even though not bound formally by regulations, Colonel Smawley, US Army, has made a provocative argument that retired officers are still bound to the force in unique and consequential ways—indeed, in ways that set a retired officer apart from his fellow retirees in other professions. What these obligations suggest is that once an officer, always an officer—at least in some regards. Therefore, the meaning of retirement may differ, and retired officers, thus, may have a special obligation to forego political activity.
57. ADRP-1, *The Army Profession*, (The Pentagon: HQ US Army), June 2013, [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP\\_1.html](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP_1.html), 1-1.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 3-5–3-6.
60. Ibid., 3-5.
61. Bender, interviewed Goodman, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”
62. O’Brien, “The ‘Military-Industrial Complex.’”
63. Vanden Brook, Dilanian and Locker, “Retired Military Officers Cash In.”

*“Cashing In” Stars*

64. Thom Hartman, “How the Defense Industry Bankrolls Pro-War Pundits,” *Opednews.com*, 16 September 2014, [http://www.opednews.com/articles/How-the-Defense-Industry-B-by-Thom-Hartmann-Accountability\\_Defense\\_Disclose\\_Generals-140916-961.html](http://www.opednews.com/articles/How-the-Defense-Industry-B-by-Thom-Hartmann-Accountability_Defense_Disclose_Generals-140916-961.html).
65. Adm James Stavridis, US Navy, retired, interview by the author, New York, 12 June 2015.
66. Brooks and Ulrich, “The Political Activism of Retired Officers.”
67. Bender, interviewed in Goodman, “From the Pentagon to the Private Sector.”
68. Michael Hoffman, “Schwartz Slams Retired Generals in Contracting,” *Air Force Times*, 16 September 2008, <http://archive.airforcetimes.com/article/20080916/NEWS/809160302/>.
69. Ibid.
70. See the *WarCouncil’s* blog at <http://www.warcouncil.org/blog/>. The *WarCouncil* is in the process of converting to the Modern Warfare Institute, with the full support of the US military.
71. Matthew Cavanaugh, “Should Retired Generals Be Allowed to ‘Cash In’ and Keep Their Commissions?” *WarCouncil.org*, 21 August 2014, <http://www.warcouncil.org/blog/2014/8/16/should-retired-generals-be-allowed-to-cash-in>.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. DOD 5500.07-R, *The Joint Ethics Regulation (JER)*, August 1993.
75. Cavanaugh, “Should Retired Generals Be Allowed?”

## Book Reviews

*Congress and Civil-Military Relations*, edited by Colton C. Campbell and David P. Auerswald. Georgetown University Press, 2015, 223 pp., \$29.95.

Professors Colton Campbell and David Auerswald, noted scholars affiliated with the National Defense University, deliver a well-crafted compilation of individual essays that address critical aspects of the multi- and interdisciplinary civil-military relations discussion. The book's structure offers scholars and practitioners a logical progression of thought, beginning with the tools and processes available to Congress and ending with case analyses of national security and parochial issues that create tensions within and among the various actors. While useful for those who regularly study civil-military relations, the editors' approach and the authors' "bottom line up front" style offer the casual reader accessible insights into an intriguing aspect of governance.

Despite the relative dearth of appreciation for Congress as a political entity over the past few decades, the editors contend that any understanding of US civil-military relations necessitates an appreciation for that body's role. Rather than engage in the often "less than productive" debates regarding partisan congressional activity, Campbell and Auerswald's authors provide straightforward, useful developments of historical, current, and future issues that influence the civil-military relations narrative and national security policy-making apparatus.

The book's first section offers a cogent assessment of four primary means through which Congress influences the "civil-military relations contract." *Officer selection* is addressed with a review of the various methods used to appoint US military officers during the nation's history. Given that the extant literature regarding civil-military relations continues to focus on the officer corps—although inclusion of enlisted matters is a maturing theme—Mitchel Sollenberger's treatment offers a solid contextual underpinning for the book and a history of the profession that all US officers should comprehend. Katherine Scott and Jordan Tama address the issue of *congressional oversight* in separate yet supportive chapters. Scott provides an instructive review of Pres. Harry Truman's efforts regarding oversight and control of what became the modern military establishment and which presaged current concern and effort regarding acquisition and contracting reform. Tama's subsequent analysis of congressional commissions addresses an often-derided tool—due to the seemingly acrimonious atmosphere of some standing defense committees—that Congress uses to perform its oversight function. The author accurately posits that the success of ad hoc commissions is debatable. They are useful, however, in their ability to help advance agendas, facilitate the oversight process, and/or help avoid the potential for "blame" due to faulty policy (sometimes a commission simply helps delay the need to make a decision). John Griswold addresses the third tool available to Congress regarding influence or control of the military: *delegation of authority*. Specifically, Griswold peers into Congress's "delegation" of mission sets and responsibility between the Reserve, National Guard, and active duty military. The author deftly navigates issues regarding applicable US Codes and focuses on the

key issue: “How best to balance the reserve component’s efforts between domestic and foreign roles.” Serious scholars of military roles and missions should recognize the continuity between Griswold’s argument and Samuel Huntington’s recognition of the National Guard’s influence on national security policy in his 1957 work, *The Soldier and the State*. Moreover, both active and reserve officers should become intimately familiar with this issue, given the continued blending of efforts regarding domestic and foreign policy and how each plays into a growing interagency or “whole-of-nation” approach to national security. Rounding out the opening section is Alexis Lasselle Ross’s analysis of the role Congress plays regarding the fourth tool of influence or control: *incentives*. In looking at the issue of entitlements, Ross debunks the oft-cited claim that Congress has largely abdicated its responsibility concerning control or influence on the military. Using the TRICARE for Life (TFL) benefit as a case study, Ross articulates an alternative “reality”: Congress supported this benefit for military retirees in spite of executive branch arguments against doing so. Arguably, the decisions regarding TFL influence current debates about military pay and compensation and force tough personnel and platform decisions in an effort to balance labor and operational costs in a rather austere budget environment. In sum, the first section elicits a more appreciative mind-set regarding the role of Congress in civil-military relations and establishes a firm foundation for the second part, which analyzes Congress’s general approach toward parochial and national security interests.

Chuck Cushman launches part two of the text with a clear-eyed analysis of congressional activity regarding defense issues. The upshot of his piece is that the post-Cold War environment of the legislative branch is less bipartisan than the previous era due to “harsh ideological differences.” What was considered “regular order”—effective oversight and empowerment of defense-related committees—has devolved to staunch adherence to partisan beliefs. Cushman offers that Republicans focus attention primarily on budgetary policy, while Democrats tend to focus on domestic priorities. In essence, defense is viewed as but one of many policy areas for legislative consideration. Despite these changes and seemingly negative impacts, the author offers some solace in that defense-policy processes and outcomes seem to be faring better than those of homeland security and intelligence. Although there appears to be divisiveness on defense policy writ large, Charles A. Stevenson’s subsequent chapter, “Congress and New Ways of War,” indicates that Congress tends to partner with “military factions” that promote or advocate new ways or means of war, which counters a frequent claim that Congress “forces” unwanted or unnecessary platforms on the Department of Defense (DOD). As with any activity, it is folly to generalize the activities or choices of primary actors. While new platforms or capabilities may be funded, it is often following a lengthy hearing and committee debate calendar after which one should not expect a consensus. Stevenson offers that cyber capabilities and the use of drones (autonomous systems) provide two specific capabilities that continue to evoke confusion and disagreement as to their viability and use—views often driven more by parochial interests than any substantive discussion on capability.

As briefly described above, the first two of five chapters in section two have clear applicability and linkage to what might be considered “normal” civil-military rela-

tions discussion. With that in mind and at first blush, Louis Fisher's analysis of the issues surrounding the closing of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp and Frank Mora and Michelle Munroe's chapter on civil-military relations in Latin America and the Caribbean seemed out of context. Reflecting on the chapters' contents and the editors' stated purpose for the book, one realizes that indeed this collection is rather unique in its breadth. While the issue of Guantanamo seems primarily focused on a standoff between Congress and the president, the DOD is drawn into the political fray—offering a classic case for the need to maintain balance in civil-military relations. Mora and Munroe's analysis of Congress's approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean over a nearly seven-decade period effectively demonstrates that, as with foreign policy, civil-military relations issues do not “stop at the water's edge.” Moreover, their discussion of the shift in focus from Cold War containment to post-Cold War emphasis on human rights issues illustrates the type of analysis needed regarding the use of military force in that capacity, especially given the increased emphasis on human rights in our national security strategy and United Nations's adoption of the Responsibility to Protect concept.

The editors offer a nice concluding chapter that provides a concise summary of key points made throughout the book. They accurately surmise that three key issues will influence future civil-military relations discourse regarding the role of Congress. Not surprisingly, the future fiscal picture for defense in the aftermath of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom is rather foreboding. Issues related to Congress's “social change agenda” are gaining attention, and general “civil-military belief” is altered by a decreasing number of legislators having military experience. In essence, Campbell and Auerswald continue a dialogue started more than 50 years ago by Samuel Huntington, Morris Janowitz, and Samuel Finer. In that regard, *Congress and Civil-Military Relations* provides the reader a necessary and up-to-date analysis of a critical civil-military relations component: the role, responsibility, and influence of Congress. Perhaps most important, it reminds us of the need to remain vigilant concerning “unhealthy” trends or unbalance in civil-military relations.

**Ronald N. Dains, PhD**  
*Associate Professor*  
*Air Command and Staff College*

***Civil-Military Relations in Perspective: Strategy, Structure, and Policy***, edited by Stephen J. Cimbala. Ashgate, 2012, 211 pp., \$119.95.

The edited volume *Civil-Military Relations in Perspective* includes works by several civil-military relations scholars, many of whom have experience working with the Department of Defense (DOD), including service academy and war college professors. With Penn State Brandywine's distinguished professor of political science Stephen Cimbala at the helm, this compilation covers a wide variety of subtopics in the civil-military relations field, comparative studies of Russia and Canada, as well as analysis of strategy and missions pressing new demands on the civil-military dynamic in the United States. By utilizing the expertise of scholars with military backgrounds,

Cimbala has done a remarkable job of assembling an edited work on civil-military relations, the chapters of which address the field with an eye for civil-military relations from a military perspective.

While each of the chapters are valuable contributions to the field, the target audience of *Strategic Studies Quarterly* will likely be drawn to two in particular—both of which represent nonstandard approaches to civil-military relations. In chapter 1, Isaiah Wilson III, Edward Cox, Kent W. Park, and Rachel M. Sondheimer analyze the differences in military professionalism across generations and offer a unique counterpoint to traditional models. Meanwhile, in chapter 6, C. Dale Walton considers problems in civil-military relations and grand strategy following the 9/11 attacks and asserts that military leadership should not simply accept civilian ideas of war and strategy but should challenge those notions, especially where challenging civilian strategy will improve the chances of a successful operation.

According to Wilson and company, at any given point in time, the US armed forces are composed of three distinct generations, with the differences between each simultaneously helping and hindering the training and development of the forces. By recognizing and articulating the variance among generations and the society in which these service members grow to adulthood, this chapter encourages discussion as to how leadership can best harness the comparative advantages of younger generations while avoiding the transference that can impede getting the most from junior personnel. The researchers specifically note the high degree of autonomy in the millennial generation compared to the baby boomers now leading the DOD. Millennials, raised in a collaborative environment, will have different views of leadership than boomers who were raised in a more hierarchical fashion. Wilson concludes that the challenge of creating a single professional ethos is one each service will need to address to leverage the decades of experience from the boomer generation in a fashion that simultaneously harnesses the collaborative learning methods of millennials—the latter of whom have a different way of looking at problems and could well be put off by efforts to constrain unorthodox thinking or problem solving.

In stark (and welcome) contrast to prevalent civil-military relations constructs, Walton contends that military personnel have an obligation to confront civilians as to the veracity of their strategic thinking and objectives—albeit doing so privately to preserve civilian authority. Walton's contention is not that civilians have failed in their responsibilities to the military but rather that senior military officers have failed in their responsibilities to their respective services. By failing to challenge civilian superiors, military leadership has been willing to accept vague and ill-designed strategy, potentially at the cost of greater military casualties. According to Walton, the “terror-centric” approach to strategy has contributed to an overall failure to develop and employ a truly grand strategy for engaging the challenges of the current international system.

As a whole, *Civil-Military Relations in Perspective* is a thorough and often original contribution to the field, and the variety of the individual chapters ensures that the book will have something for most readers interested in politics, the military, and the nexus of the two. As a slight critique, a couple chapters begged the authors continue their research to the next logical conclusion. For instance, while Walton's “The War

without a Strategy” advocates for a stronger voice from senior military leadership when counseling civilian strategy, he falls short of pointing out that failure to challenge civilian strategy could be considered an abdication of military duty, inasmuch as those generals and admirals are responsible for the safety of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines charged with carrying out civilian orders. Poor strategy leads inexorably to casualties in combat, most of which are borne by young men and women trusting their safety to the leadership of those same senior military officers charged with advising the politicians. Similarly, while Wilson and company describe the importance of top-down, bottom-up, and peer-to-peer learning in “Kids These Days,” recommendations are missing regarding how bureaucracies predicated on the notion that time in service equates to superior expertise can actually learn from the younger generations that might have less experience with general staffs and grand strategy but have honed expertise in Iraq and Afghanistan and are not tied to concepts and lessons from conflicts of decades past.

Apart from these minor critiques, the chief shortcoming of *Civil-Military Relations in Perspective* is largely an issue of form over function. While the quality of the book is such that the compilation belongs on each Chief of Staff reading list, the price of the book puts ownership out of reach of those military officers and noncommissioned officers who could benefit most from the research. At \$120, the lessons and recommendations of the book will likely only be consumed by institutional libraries, graduate students, and other researchers in the civil-military relations field. This is unfortunate because, unlike many such works on civil-military relations that seem to pay scant attention to the military role, Cimbalá’s compilation actually speaks directly to the military side of the equation.

**Lt Col Kevin McCaskey, PhD**  
*USAF Academy*

***Unity of Mission: Civil-Military Teams in War and Peace***, edited by: Jon Gundersen and Melanne A. Civic. Air University Press, Forthcoming Fall 2015, 620 pp. On-line at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/afri/reviews.asp>.  
Reviewed by: **James A. Schear, PhD**, the Wilson Center

---

## Mission Statement

*Strategic Studies Quarterly* (SSQ) is the strategic journal of the United States Air Force, fostering intellectual enrichment for national and international security professionals. SSQ provides a forum for critically examining, informing, and debating national and international security matters. Contributions to SSQ will explore strategic issues of current and continuing interest to the US Air Force, the larger defense community, and our international partners.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed or implied in SSQ are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the US Air Force, the Department of Defense, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government.

## Comments

We encourage you to e-mail your comments, suggestions, or address change to: [StrategicStudiesQuarterly@us.af.mil](mailto:StrategicStudiesQuarterly@us.af.mil).

## Article Submission

The SSQ considers scholarly articles between 5,000 and 15,000 words from US and international authors. Please send your submission in Microsoft Word format via e-mail to:

[StrategicStudiesQuarterly@us.af.mil](mailto:StrategicStudiesQuarterly@us.af.mil)

---

**Strategic Studies Quarterly (SSQ)**  
155 N. Twining Street, Building 693  
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6026  
**Tel (334) 953-7311**  
**Fax (334) 953-1451**

View *Strategic Studies Quarterly* online at <http://www.au.af.mil/au/ssq/>

**Free Electronic Subscription**

A forum for critically examining,  
informing, and debating national and  
international security.



"Aim High . . . Fly-Fight-Win"

