Changing the Conversation:

A Comparison of Presidential Narratives about the US Military after the Vietnam War

BY

Rachel E. Seablom

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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RICHARD R. MULLER (Date)

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THOMAS A. HUGHES (Date)

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Rachel E. Seablom was a 2005 graduate of Princeton University, where she majored in Psychology. She has served 15 years as an Air Force Intelligence Officer in a variety of assignments.

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the effect of presidential narrative about the military institution on public perception of the military. By the late 1980s, the negative post-Vietnam War public perception of the military had significantly improved. Both President Jimmy Carter and President Ronald Reagan were concerned about the relationship between the American people and the military. Analysis and comparison of each president's actions and rhetoric provides insight into the strength of the narrative about the military that each put forth to the American people. This paper concludes that while Carter and Reagan both attempted to bolster military capability and credibility, their efforts had different effects on public perceptions of the military. The difference in their approaches lay in the prioritization of the effort and the strength of accompanying narrative. Carter put little effort into developing a narrative about the military that appealed to his domestic audience. In general, Carter was not skilled at creating or delivering narratives. Additionally, although he expressed concerns about the negative post-Vietnam public perception of the military, he did not prioritize improving this perception. Instead, he focused on building military credibility in the eyes of the external audience, the Soviet Union. In contrast, Reagan dedicated significant time, thought, and energy into crafting a narrative about the military that would improve public impressions and bridge the post-Vietnam civil-military divide. Reagan was a master narrative craftsman, and he put these skills to use creating a narrative that highlighted the military's instrumental aid to US strategic concerns, the values-based motivations of the servicemembers, and the overall credibility of the military institution. Reagan's narrative about the military likely contributed to the improved public perception of the military that took place during his presidency.

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Introduction

US Public Perception of the Military After the Vietnam War

In the ten years following the Vietnam War, the American military transitioned from being scorned by much of society to being a respected American institution. In 1975, the American public had low trust and confidence in the US military.[1] The military that fought in Vietnam was perceived as having low morale, drug problems, disobedience issues, race issues, and poor discipline.[2] Additionally, reporting of the military's actions in Vietnam strengthened the perception of a flawed and failing military institution. Agent Orange, discovered to be extremely harmful to humans, despite accompanying government assurances to the contrary, was spread by Air Force aircraft.[3] In the *Saturday* Review, Eugene Linden detailed the reports of enlisted soldiers "fragging" their senior officers. By titling his article "The Demoralization of an Army: Fragging and Other Withdrawal Symptoms," Linden depicted the US military in Vietnam as having lost its way.[4] Seymour Hersh's expose of the My Lai massacre portrayed not only military service members who would violate the rules of war and human decency, but also military officers that were complicit. Additionally, Hersh revealed that in the aftermath, military officials withheld information from the public in an attempt to prevent further tarnishing of reputations.[5] These stories underscored institutional military problems.

The creation of the all-volunteer force at the end of the Vietnam War in 1973 created an opportunity to change public perception of the military: the last draftee entered military service on June 30, 1973, and the military became entirely all-volunteer the next

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[1] "Military and National Defense: Confidence in the Military," Gallup poll, 1975-2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1666/military-national-defense.aspx.
[2] David C. King and Zachary Karabell, *The Generation of Trust: Public Confidence in the U.S. Military Since Vietnam* (Washington, D.C: AEI Press, 2003), 6.
[3] Clyde Haberman, "Agent Orange's Long Legacy for Vietnam and Veterans," *The New York Times*, 12 May 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/us/agent-oranges-long-legacy-for-vietnam-and-veterans.html.
[4] Eugene Linden, "The Demoralization of an Army: Fragging and Other Withdrawal Symptoms," *Saturday Review*, 8 January 1972, https://www.unz.com/print/SaturdayRev-1972jan08-00012/.
[5] Seymour Hersh, "The Massacre at My Lai," *The New Yorker*, 15 January 1972, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1972/01/22/coverup.

day.[6] No longer would the military be filled with unwilling conscripts; the military institution had an opportunity to rebrand. The challenge would be filling military ranks with sufficient numbers and sufficient quality of personnel.

The end of conscription and the unpopularity of the Vietnam War combined to eliminate service in the military as an inherent part of citizenship in the minds of many Americans.[7] As a result, the all-volunteer force was faced with a unique recruiting challenge and had to shape its approach from one based on honor and virtuous sacrifice to financial incentives and career opportunities.[8] Unable to cull widely from society without a draft, the Army had to adjust its recruiting efforts to attract the right quality and quantity of recruits, while also fighting the lingering problems of drug abuse, racism, and the incorporation of women into the service.[9] The military struggled with these efforts, resulting in a late 1970s force that was over-budget, under-trained, and filled with recruits who lacked in aptitude and skills.[10] This was the military which Army General Edward C. "Shy" Meyer described to President Jimmy Carter as a "hollow army" in 1980.[11]

By 1985, however, the public perspective on the military had drastically changed: polls suggested that, aside from the church, the US military was the most trusted US institution.[12] The positive perception of the military steadily improved through the late 1980s, peaking with the demonstration of US military power in the Gulf War. The transformation of public perception from the end of the Vietnam War to the end of the 1980s was a significant turnaround. Understanding how this transformation occurred can illuminate our understanding of current civil-military concerns. Central to this transformation was the leadership exhibited by two presidents. Each president found

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[6] Beth L. Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.
[7] Richard M. Wrona, "A Dangerous Separation: The Schism between the American Society and Its Military," *World Affairs* 169, no. 1 (2006): 29.
[8] Wrona, 29.
[9] Bailey, *America's Army*.
[10] Bailey, 173.
[11] Frank L. Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised: President Carter, Defense Budgets, and the Politics of Military Readiness*, Letort Papers, no. 54 (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012), 2.
[12] "Confidence in Institutions," Gallup poll, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx.

himself building the military's capabilities while simultaneously needing to *sell* the professionalism of the military to the general public. This paper evaluates President Jimmy Carter's and President Ronald Reagan's rhetoric and actions toward the military to determine the extent to which each created a narrative about the military institution that was sufficiently compelling to influence public perception.

This project falls into the larger field of civil-military relations, the study of the relationship between civil society and the military. This is really a three-way relationship amongst the civilians that compose American society, the civilians in the government who are elected by the civilian populace and control the military, and the military itself. The Clausewitzian trinity of violence, reason, and chance that shaped the character of war also represented the people, the government, and the army (we can say military since Clausewitz certainly did not have an Air Force and was disinterested in naval warfare). Clausewitz advised that this trinity needed to be in balance. Thus, a disruption in the relationship between any two vertices of the trinity have an effect on the other third. This relationship underscores the significance of American public perception of the military. How the public perceives the military can affect the civilian government's decision calculus of when and in what context to employ armed force. Additionally, because of the democratic nature of the United States, public support to the military is directly tied to the United States' overall strength. Because the military's role is to uphold the commands of the government, which are in turn based on the will of the people, a lack of support for the military could decrease the military's credibility as a deterrent in the international security environment.

Recent political science scholarship has explored the current civil-military environment and found two concurrent characteristics: first, a significant gap between the civilian populace and the military, and second, exceptionally high public support for the military.[13] The co-existence of these two phenomena have driven academic and

[13] Mara E. Karlin and Alice Hunt Friend, "Military Worship Hurts U.S. Democracy," *Foreign Policy*, 21 September 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/21/military-worship-hurts-us-democracy-civilian-trump/. Karlin and Friend highlight the 2016 book, *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military*, in which Kori Schake and then-Defense Secretary James Mattis found evidence that the American public holds "unquestioning, and largely uninformed, faith in the military as an institution and a profession." Americans also seem willing to cede civilian control of military action: according to Schake and Mattis, nearly half of Americans think the

practitioner interest because of their potential to create several problems.

First, a disconnection between the military and the society which it serves can lead to either a military that self-serves, rather than society-serves, or a society that, disinterested and unconcerned with how the military is used, abdicates full control to the government.[14] Mara Karlin, who has written extensively on civil-military relations, described this two-fold problem as "both an abdication of civic involvement on the part of civilians and the establishment of a right to override civilian input on the part of the military."[15]

Second, a distinct civil-military gap can make recruiting for a volunteer military difficult. If the armed forces have different values, ideals, goals, and membership than the wider population, the public may be less willing to volunteer for service.[16] Currently, a small percentage of US citizens serve or have served in the military. Additionally, there is high correlation for family service, meaning that military service is often a family tradition, while other families have no exposure to the military.[17] This means that much of the population has not themselves served, nor do they have family members that have served, limiting their personal exposure to military service.

Third, when the military and its civilian oversight come from different spheres of society, military members may distrust civilian leaders because of their inexperience with the military.[18]

The findings of the 2011 PEW Research Study on the Public and the Military illustrate that the problems identified above are manifest in today's civil-military relationships. The study concluded "when it comes to their armed forces, most Americans in the post-9/11 era have feelings of pride, gratitude and confidence. At the same time,

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president should leave military war plans in the hands of generals. Additionally, a Gallup on confidence in institutions found that in 201, Americans' trust in the military was more than twice what it was for the presidency and six times higher than faith in Congress. "Confidence in Institutions," Gallup poll.

[14] Wrona, "A Dangerous Separation," 25–26.

[15] Karlin and Friend, "Military Worship Hurts U.S. Democracy."

[16] Wrona, "A Dangerous Separation," 25–26.

[17] "The Military-Civilian Gap: Fewer Family Connections," Pew Research Center, 23 November 2011, https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/23/the-military-civilian-gap-fewer-family-connections/.

[18] Feaver, Peter D. and Richard H. Kohn. "The Gap: Soldiers, Civilians and Their Mutual Misunderstanding," *The National Interest;* Fall 2000, 36.

most Americans acknowledge they know little about the realities of military service. And, in increasing numbers, they disapprove of or do not pay attention to the wars the military is currently fighting."[19]

The idea that the American public has a high level of trust and confidence in an institution of which it has little knowledge raises questions on what this confidence is based. In August 2019, Peter Feaver and Jim Golby presented a paper to the American Political Science Association that suggested that polling of US citizens regarding support for the military is heavily influenced by social desirability bias.[20] Social desirability bias is "over- or understatement of actual responses to questions due to the respondent's desire to provide the normative or socially appropriate response."[21] To be socially desirable, survey participants sometimes will answer in a way that they think will be viewed favorably, rather than truly represent their perspectives. The presence of social desirability bias regarding public support for the military suggests the existence of a norm concerning how American think they should feel about the military. Norms are "the informal rules that govern behavior in groups and societies" and are generally believed to constrain behavior.[22] If public support for the military is a societal norm that masks individual opinion, this suggests two somewhat contradictory problems: support for the military could be less than what is expressed, and support for the military could be more fragile than understood.[23] Because both of these problems have significant implications for the health of US civil-military relations, understanding the origins of high levels of support for the military is important.

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[19] "Chapter 5: The Public and the Military," *The Military-Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era,* research study, Pew Research Center, 2011, https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/chapter-5-the-public-and-the-military/.

[20] Jim Golby and Peter D. Feaver, "The Determinants of Public Confidence in the Military" (Paper presented at the American Political Science Association's Annual Meeting and Exhibition, Washington, DC, August 2019).

[21] Meredith Kleykamp, Crosby Hipes, and Alair MacLean, "Who Supports U.S. Veterans and Who Exaggerates Their Support?," *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 92–115, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16682786.

[22] Cristina Bicchieri, Ryan Muldoon, and Alessandro Sontuoso, "Social Norms," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-norms/.

[23] Golby and Feaver, "The Determinants of Public Confidence," 26. Paul Gronke and Peter D. Feaver. "Uncertain confidence: Civilian and Military Attitudes about Civil-Military Relations." *Soldiers and Civilians* (2001): 33.

The improved public perception of the military between the Vietnam War and the Gulf War is of interest because there was no overwhelming demonstration of military force, such as the Gulf War or the 2003 invasion of Iraq, that demonstrated the military's capability and effectiveness. Military operations such as Operation Eagle Claw and Operation Urgent Fury did little to inspire public confidence in the military. Instead, the military was struggling to rebuild itself, both in capabilities and reputation, after the Vietnam War. With regards to public opinion, the internal machinations of the military did not matter; what mattered was what was communicated to the public. As the leader of the country and the Commander in Chief, the president has a unique opportunity to influence public perception.[24] Thus, a comparison of the presidential rhetoric during this time period can provide insight into the reestablishment of American trust in the military. Evaluating President Carter's and President Reagan's approach enables the comparison of two presidents who each served full terms (one of them two terms) as the Commander-in-Chief of the all-volunteer force after the Vietnam War. Both were faced with rebuilding a military to face a Soviet threat, in a time of economic difficulty. Although the contexts of their presidencies were not identical, they have enough broad similarities to make a side-by-side comparison of how they built a narrative about the military institution a worthwhile undertaking.

The framework for analyzing President Carter's and President Reagan's narrative about the military is extrapolated from *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, a 2005 RAND research project that studied American public support for military operations in the 1990s and in the post 9-11 period (the report used the terminology "GWOT" for Global War on Terror). The resulting data and analysis found that there were several predictors for public support of military operations: importance of the stakes, probability of success, and beliefs about likely costs, particularly US casualties. This study was an investigation into the assumption that Americans were wholeheartedly casualty-averse, and it found that in the post-9/11 period, the American public was more willing to accept casualties than it was during the 1990s, largely because post-9/11 military operations were viewed as more central to US

[24] A. Cooper Drury et al., "'Pretty Prudent' or Rhetorically Responsive? The American Public's Support for Military Action," *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2010): 84.

interests. The study defined interests as either a vital national interest, a security interest, or a moral or a humanitarian interest.[25]

Because this research paper is focused on public support to the military institution, rather than military operations, the results of the RAND study are not directly applicable. Using the RAND findings, however, enables the extrapolation of a framework with which to consider presidential rhetoric. If the American people were more likely to support military operations that had a good chance of being successful and reflected American interests and values, then it can be argued that the American people will have confidence in a military that is characterized by these same attributes. Therefore, the American people will have a positive perception of a military that is: first, essential to and in service of US national and strategic interests; second, perceived as sharing American values, and third, a credible, well-trained, and professional force capable of achieving superiority and success in military engagements, while also minimizing US casualties. Thus, the quality and effectiveness of each president's narrative can be evaluated by determining the extent to which the president depicts the military in these ways.

This paper compares and contrasts President Carter's and President Reagan's rhetoric about, and political decisions and actions concerning, the military. Chapters 1 and 2 cover President Carter while Chapters 3 and 4 cover President Reagan. Each pair of chapters is modeled similarly. Chapter 1 describes President Carter's public speeches and public interactions that discussed the military as an institution, the military's interaction with civil society, and the problems internal to the military. Chapter 3 does the same for President Reagan. These speeches and interactions represent what each president presented to the American population about the military. Chapter 2 analyzes President Carter's actions toward the military more holistically by examining the major decisions of his administration that had an impact on the military. Likewise, Chapter 4 does the same for President Reagan. The actions taken provide important context to each president's rhetoric or messaging. If a weak or non-existent narrative is undergirded by strong actions that were simply not well-messaged to the public, that suggests a failure to

[25] Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2005), 213.

create a convincing narrative, rather than either apathy toward, or a desire to constrain, the institution. Chapter 5 compares and contrasts the rhetoric and actions of President Carter and President Reagan to determine how their narratives and actions public impacted perception of the military. Additionally, the framework extrapolated from the RAND study is applied to each presidents' narrative to assess its likely effect on public opinion.

Understanding the role that presidential rhetoric and narrative has on public perception of the military institution can improve understanding of the reestablishment of American trust in the military and civil-military dynamics that persist today.

Chapter 1

President Carter's Rhetoric about the Military

President Jimmy Carter was so unfamiliar to the American public as a national politician that, shortly before his entrance into the race for president, he had not been listed in a Gallup survey of 31 potential Democratic candidates.[1] Born and raised in Georgia, Carter had attended the Naval Academy and served just over seven years in the Navy as a submariner.[2] After his father died, Carter left the Navy to return home and run the family's peanut farm. He became a leader in the community and served two terms in the state senate. After a failed bid for governor in 1966, he campaigned heavily and won the 1970 election with 49 percent of the votes.[3] Despite his time in office and his role as the chairman of the Democratic party's committee that coordinated the 1974 congressional and gubernatorial campaigns, Carter was not well known.[4] His own hometown newspaper, the *Atlanta Constitution*, reported on his announcement with the headline, "'Jimmy Who Is Running For What!?"[5]

Carter's military service might suggest that his presidential actions would display an affinity for the military and partiality to military desire to build up capabilities in the post-Vietnam, all-volunteer force era. Instead many would perceive Carter to be "soft on defense."[6] Evaluating President Carter's speeches, public appearances, and presidential actions regarding the military provides insight as to whether President Carter developed a coherent narrative about the military institution that could sway the American populace

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[1] Wayne King, "Georgia's Gov. Carter Enters Democratic Race for President," *The New York Times*, 13 December 1974, https://www.nytimes.com/1974/12/13/archives/georgias-gov-carter-enters-democratic-race-for-president-governor.html.
[2] "Jimmy Carter's Naval Service," The Jimmy Carter Presidential Museum and Library, https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/about_us/naval_service.
[3] Robert A. Strong, "Jimmy Carter: Life Before the Presidency," University of Virginia Miller Center, https://millercenter.org/president/carter/life-before-the-presidency.
[4] King, "Georgia's Gov. Carter Enters Democratic Race."
[5] Jeffrey Frank, "The Primary Experiment: Jimmy Who?", *The New Yorker*, 1 May 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-primary-experiment-jimmy-who.
[6] Hedrick Smith, "Carter Move May Deepen Public's Doubts," *The New York Times*, 8 April 1978, https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/08/archives/carter-move-may-deepen-publics-doubts-news-analysis-jackson.html.

and thus public perception of the military. As an elected president of the United States, in contrast to his predecessor Gerald Ford, Carter had a unique opportunity to improve the largely negative post-Vietnam public perception of the military institution. Formal speeches are planned, drafted, and edited with deliberate content in mind, and therefore any purposeful messaging regarding the military should be evident. Additionally, studying interactions with the public via question and answer sessions and town halls give insight into how Carter interacted with "average" citizens when he had the opportunity to influence their understanding of government and military institutions.

As his first official speech as the Democratic presidential candidate, Carter's acceptance speech would shape the narrative that he formed during his presidency. In this speech, Carter described the country as emerging from a time of uneasiness and scandal into an era characterized by a search for newness in concepts and leadership. Not surprising for a prospective president, he described the United States as transitioning from a time of low morale into a time of healing, faith, and quiet strength. These messages were consistent with Carter's reputation as a humble, good man who believed in strong values, morality, and Christianity. Similarly, his description of peace as not just the absence of war, but also "action to stamp out international terrorism… unceasing effort to preserve human rights… [and] a combined demonstration of strength and good will," as well as his emphasizing the threat of nuclear destruction, reflected Carter's belief in human rights, strong values, and the importance of denuclearization.

Carter's language in this speech was abstract, poetic, and yet non-specific, and his references to the military, either as an institution or as a means of military might, were scant. He described the American people as "troops who have been in combat… tempered by the fire," guided by morality, but lacking in leadership. Although his comparison of Americans to hardened, honorable combat troops painted the military in a positive light, Carter did not directly correlate this generalized imagery to any specific trials that America's real-life combat troops had undergone in Vietnam or elsewhere.

Carter highlighted the division between the military and the American public and suggested that Vietnam and other scandals resulted from the divide between the government and the noble, honorable American people. He did not present a clear picture of how to remedy this problem, but his words hinted at military downsizing: he spoke

about the power of noble ideas, instead of the "size of an arsenal," and advocated investing in people, rather than "buildings and weapons."[7] What emerged from the speech was an image of a country that, though it had lost its way, had the hope of a brighter future. Carter provided little detail about that future; all that was clear was that values, government of the people, quiet strength, and global peace would prevail, and the world would have less nuclear weapons. Arguably, an acceptance speech for a political party is a time that a candidate can be a bit more aggressive, specific, and provocative in their content: they are speaking to a friendly and likeminded audience. Carter's speech, however, did not make use of this home field advantage and provided little specificity or boldness.

President Carter's inauguration speech, given on January 20, 1977, more straightforwardly articulated some of his ideas. He again used concepts of war and peace to discuss global poverty and human rights, saying, "we will fight our wars against poverty, ignorance, and injustice, for those are the enemies against which our forces can be honorably marshaled." He acknowledged his focus on values and ideals, but was careful to present his ideals as backed by strength, rather than weakness: "We are a proudly idealistic nation, but let no one confuse our idealism with weakness." His references to strength alluded to military capability, but he did not mention that outright. Instead, he revisited the concept of nobility of ideas undergirding American strength, saying that it would not just be arsenal size that provided power.[8] This was a subtle change from his speech just six months earlier, in which he said that America's strength would be based on the nobility of ideas *instead of* arsenal size.[9] Whether or not this subtle shift was deliberate is unclear, but Carter's inauguration speech depicted a nation grounded in ideals, but backed by a military so powerful that adversaries would not dare contest it. Finally, with regards to the military and security concerns, Carter's inauguration speech clearly presented his intent to stop the arms race with the Soviet

[7] Jimmy Carter, "Our Nation's Past and Future" (acceptance speech, Democratic National Convention, New York City, NY, 15 July 1976), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/speeches/acceptance_speech.pdf.
[8] Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address" (address, Washington, DC, 29 January 1977), https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-0.
[9] Carter, "Our Nation's Past and Future."

Union and move toward denuclearization.

Immediately after the inauguration, President Carter signed a pardon for draft dodgers, making good on the campaign promise he made during a speech to the American Legion in Seattle, Washington on August 24, 1976. Despite the announcement being met with resounding "boos," accompanying aides felt that Carter would be undeterred.[10] His speech stressed that military strength was important, but was composed of more than technological capability and firepower; Carter argued that "adequate national defense could only come from a spirit of national unity, good management, and sacrifices by the American people."[11]

As a former military member with a son who had received a cold reception upon his return from Vietnam, President Carter was intimately familiar with both the negative public perception of the military and the negative military veteran perception of draft evaders. Despite these tensions, which his pardon was likely to inflame, Carter saw the draft evader pardon as a necessary step toward societal reconciliation and national unity. In 2006, in an interview with Brian Williams, Carter reflected on the controversy of this action, saying, "It was [a] very difficult political issue… my action in giving the pardon was not the most popular thing… [to the American Legion]." He justified his decision, calling it the right thing to do to "heal our nation, and to give us a chance to move beyond the Vietnam War and obsession with Vietnam into another era of life."[12] President Carter clearly saw this action as critical to repairing the societal divide. By choosing to make this his first presidential action, he sent a strong message about the need for post-Vietnam reconciliation.

As early as March 1, 1977, President Carter publicly articulated concerns about public perception of the military. He attended a question-and-answer session with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and civilian and military Pentagon workers. During this session, when asked about a member of Congress who often disparaged the military,

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[10] James T. Wooten, "Legionnaires Boo Carter on pardon for Draft Defiers," *The New York Times*, 25 August 1976, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/25/archives/legionnaires-boo-carter-on-pardon-for-draft-defiers-but-some-at.html.
[11] Wooten, "Legionnaires Boo Carter."
[12] Jimmy Carter, interview by Brian Williams during Vietnam and the Presidency Conference, Boston, MA, 11 March 2006, https://www.archives.gov/files/presidential-libraries/events/vietnam/pdf/transcript-04.pdf.

President Carter addressed the negative post-Vietnam public perception of the military. He said that, as president, he felt a responsibility to improve this relationship, saying that he would do all he could to "let our people know the truth; and that is, that we depend upon you, that the Nation depends on you, and that the heroism is still there, the dedication is still there, the self-sacrifice is still there, and that military persons were not responsible for the mistakes that have been made in the past in unpopular wars."[13] He elaborated, saying that his dedication to improving the military relationship with the public was a responsibility he shared with the Department of Defense. DoD employees needed to ensure that waste and inefficiencies were rooted out, but that unjustified criticism should be defended against. This discussion centered around restoring the credibility of the military; Carter wanted unfair criticism to be stopped, but also was quick to insist that the military still must uphold its responsibilities to the American public.

At that same DoD town hall meeting, Carter was asked a question about recruiting shortfalls, particularly within the reserve force, and possible reinstitution of the draft. Carter acknowledged recruiting shortfalls and said that although he did not favor that route reinstating the draft, a decision had not yet been made. His statement regarding recruiting shortfalls was straightforward: "We have a constant concern about the weakness of recruitment, particularly for the Reserve forces." Additionally, he clarified his attention to the underlying recruitment problem, his desire to avoid a draft, and the reality that reinstituting the draft was a possibility: "But to recapitulate my answer, at the present time, we are not contemplating such a move. We are assessing the situation constantly. If it becomes necessary, I would not hesitate to recommend it."[14]

In answering these questions, President Carter addressed the military's underlying organizational and operational challenges. Simultaneously, he painted a picture of an honorable military institution that was not above criticism from the American public which it served. Instead, the military institution should evaluate criticism and respond

[13] Jimmy Carter, Department of Defense Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Department Employees (Pentagon, Washington, DC, 1 March 1977), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242861.
[14] Carter, Department of Defense Remarks.

appropriately, either by defending and refuting or, when necessary, self-correcting. This DoD town hall session demonstrated both President Carter's recognition of civil-military relations concerns and his attempt to create a positive perception of the military. This positive, credibility-building narrative, however, did not reach the ears of the broader American public. Although voting members of the electorate, the participants of the town hall session were DoD employees, not an external civilian public audience.

On March 5, 1977, President Carter participated in a CBS Radio Network "Ask President Carter" telephone call-in session with Walter Cronkite. During this question and answer session, numerous people asked questions touching on defense issues. Unsurprisingly, Carter received a question about the possible reinstatement of the draft. His answer elucidated the recruitment challenges that the new all-volunteer force was experiencing, particularly in the reserves. He stated that there were no plans to "put in a draft system. So far we are still getting by with the voluntary armed forces."[15] Unsurprisingly for a president with military experience, Carter clearly understood the existence and implications of military recruitment shortfalls. His manner of addressing this issue in a public forum, however, fell short in terms of constructing a positive narrative about the military. "Getting by with the voluntary armed forces" is not a glowing endorsement of military capability or credibility. Carter was aware of problems plaguing the all-volunteer force; perhaps he was glossing over them to avoid worsening public perception of the military. Regardless, Carter missed an opportunity to paint the health and respectability of the military in a more positive light and emphasizing his commitment to making the all-volunteer force successful.

When asked, rather acerbically, about what he was going to do for veterans after pardoning draft evaders, Carter directly addressed negative public sentiment for the military, saying "I hope in the future that we can have a restoration in our country of appreciation for veterans who did go to the Vietnam war, who have not been thanked or appreciated enough in the past, and a much more sensitive Veterans Administration toward the Vietnam veterans who have not had as many benefits as veterans of previous

[15] Jimmy Carter, "Ask President Carter," Remarks During a Telephone Call-in Program on the CBS Radio Network (5 March 1977), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242900.

wars that were more popular."[16] He described specific efforts he had undertaken to improve support for veterans, including appointing Max Cleland as head of the Veterans Administration and presenting an economic program to Congress that included veteran training and employment opportunities. Additionally, upon learning the caller was a veteran, he praised his service and sacrifice in Vietnam by calling him a "loyal and patriotic veteran." These comments demonstrate both Carter's awareness of the post-Vietnam divide between society and the military institution and his desire to mend it.

Another caller asked whether President Carter supported the War Powers Resolution Act. Carter emphasized that although it decreased his power as Commander of Chief, the War Powers Resolution Act would not hinder, or even significantly alter, his approach to combat operations; he would always discuss entering a war with Congress.[17] He contrasted this approach with the governmental hiding and lying to the American public that occurred before and during the Vietnam War. Although this reference could suggest a reactive response to Vietnam and the subsequent "Vietnam hangover," Carter's support for the War Powers Resolution Act seems consistent with his values of transparency and honesty. Although there is no evidence this was a deliberate attempt to improve the credibility of the military, his support for the Act likely contributed to a narrative of greater military credibility. By ensuring that both executive and legislative branches of government approved combat operations lasting longer than 60 days, the military would gain public and political credibility.

When asked about the G.I. Bill being reactivated, Carter had to ask an aide for assistance answering the question. Upon receiving an answer from his aide later in the program, Carter answered that he had counteracted President Ford's efforts to cut the G.I. Bill period of eligibility from 10 years to 8 years. Once in office, Carter pushed a budget to Congress that added back in the 2 years of benefits.[18] Although Carter's actions were supportive of providing veterans' benefits, he did not fit these efforts into a larger narrative of pro-military actions. It is unreasonable to expect a president to have perfect recall of all his initiatives, but this interaction demonstrates that, at least early in his

[16] Carter, "Ask President Carter."
[17] Carter, "Ask President Carter."
[18] Carter, "Ask President Carter."

presidency, President Carter was not attempting to create a specific narrative about the military institution.

On January 19, 1978, President Carter gave his first State of the Union address. In this speech, he stated that "militarily, politically, economically, and in spirit, the state of our Union is sound." He told Americans that he had provided Congress with a written message the outlined domestic initiatives, and so he would not belabor those issues in his speech. Instead, he focused on the economy and inflation, described the government re-organization, celebrated that the United States was at peace, and emphasized his priority on the security of the nation. He described security as being based on national will, strength of the Armed Forces, alliances, and international agreements, all of which he spoke about positively. Carter described the military as strong and discussed plans to modernize and increase military capabilities for the defense of Europe. The bulk of his speech concerning security and foreign policy concerned strategic arms limitations, stability with the Soviet Union, and denuclearization, reflecting his concerns about the Soviet threat and nuclear weapons.[19] There was no discussion of the military in his speech beyond its role as a tool for providing strength and strategic balancing to the relationship with the Soviet Union.

The amplifying written statement to Congress, which President Carter had told the nation was primarily concerned with domestic initiatives, also discussed military issues, such as plans to reduce military presence in Korea and a requested increase in the defense budget.[20] Carter justified the defense budget increase by explaining that the nuclear triad needed to be strengthened with upgraded B-52s, an increase in Trident submarines, and cruise missile technology development. Additionally, he explained that the Navy's budget should be intelligently increased to ensure that the correct technology was acquired to ensure US security. While he acknowledged that he had deferred aircraft carrier production, he emphasized that the delay was to be short and was pending the

[19] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Address (address, Joint Session of the Congress, Washington, DC, 19 January 1978), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245063.
[20] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 19 January 1978, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245130.

results of an informative study. In the meantime, Carter intended to offset any resulting loss in global mobility with a surge in funding for an airlift enhancement program. Furthermore, the proposed budget would increase the Army's budget by 18%, with the goal of bolstering the Army's, and therefore NATO's, combat readiness.[21] With these details, Carter justified many of the actions he had taken in the realm of defense. To ensure that defense decisions were economically and strategically optimal, he had halted some programs in favor of others and delayed production to wait for more information. Additionally, the detail he gave in this document regarding the military's role in balancing the Soviet threat underscored the role that the military had in securing the United States. More than just a washed-up post-Vietnam force, the military was strategically deterring the Soviet Union.

In addition to providing strategic justification for many of actions regarding the military, President Carter also detailed initiatives that his administration had undertaken to support military veterans. Since his time in office, support for service-related disabilities, G.I. Bill benefits, and veterans pension benefits had been increased. He articulated plans to improve additional veterans support by conducting a government-wide review of Vietnam veteran issues, creating substance abuse treatment programs, further increasing service-related disability benefits, and continuing employment programs for Vietnam-era veterans.[22] By not mentioning these initiatives in the State of the Union address, President Carter missed an opportunity to create a narrative about veterans who had sacrificed for the good of the country and the country's honorable obligation to care for them. Such a narrative could have begun to mend the divide between American society and the military. By burying such initiatives in a statement to Congress that average citizens would not read, however, the opportunity was lost.

Although publicly available, because the information in this document went to Congress, rather than being included in the State of the Union speech, the general American public would either not be aware of its contents, or learn of it only as summarized by a news source. In its coverage of the State of the Union on January 20, 1978, the *New York Times* called the written message to Congress "unusual" and

[21] Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 19 January 1978.
[22] Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 19 January 1978.

summarized its main points as pertaining to tax cuts, expansion to Federal jobs, creation of a Department of Education and expansion of federal education aid, and increase in housing assistance.[23] The *New York Times* described the speech itself as heavy on domestic and economic issues, mentioning the military only once in its summary as it described Carter's desire to strengthen and modernize the military for foreign affairs. Thus, without reading the message to Congress for themselves, American citizens might receive little information about the current status of or plans for the military.

Carter's second State of the Union, given on January 23, 1979, similarly focused on domestic and economic issues, as well as strategic arms limitations, but also had greater emphasis on the military than his first State of the Union. The emphasis on the military budget was likely included to gain support for his proposed defense budget. Carter highlighted that the military was strong and growing stronger, and he emphasized its role in maintaining strategic capability in alliance with NATO partners.[24] His discussion of the military was entirely focused on its utility in managing security threats; there was no discussion of the military as an institution, its internal workings, or its interactions with society.

As he did each year of his presidency, President Carter again submitted a written message to Congress. Again, it was in this document that he provided significant details about the military and the justification for his proposed military budget.[25] The written statement detailed that the plans for the increased defense budget would strengthen the strategic triad by developing a new ballistic missile, maintaining the Trident submarine and missile programs, extending the effectiveness of the bomber force with cruise missiles, and supporting nuclear research and development. Furthermore, the increased budget would strengthen Navy, Army, and Air Force conventional capabilities. Also within the written document was an overview of veteran support initiatives. He

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[23] Terence Smith, "Carter Says Energy and Panama are 1978's Priorities," *The New York Times*, 20 January 1978, https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/20/archives/carter-says-energy-economy-and-panama-are-1978s-priorities-state-of.html.
[24] Jimmy Carter, State of the Union Address (address, Joint Session of the Congress, Washington, DC, 23 January 1979), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/speeches/su79jec.phtml.
[25] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 23 January 1979, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-state-the-union-annual-message-the-congress-1.

articulated that veterans, particularly those from the Vietnam War, were still plagued with significant problems, including needs for medical care, employment assistance, and assistance with service-related disabilities. To aid these veterans, Carter stated that he would seek legislation to increase compensation, improve education programs, and grow medical and counseling assistance to make veterans self-sufficient. As with the previous year, Carter missed an opportunity to message broader American society about support to Vietnam veterans by burying the only mention of these programs in a written statement to Congress.

Next-day coverage of the speech in the *New York Times* emphasized a focus on economic, domestic, and arms control issues, with an unsurprising lack of references to internal military and veterans' issues.[26] Thus, for many Americans, the 1979 State of the Union would be about President Carter's economic efforts, support for the Equal Rights Amendment, maintaining peace through alliances, and military strength to deter the Soviet Union. As such, the deliberate increased focus on the military institution, military members, and veterans' affairs failed to create a strong narrative that would improve public perception of the military.

On July 15, 1979, President Carter gave a speech on the United States' crisis of confidence. He mentioned the military only as a symbol of strength and superiority, saying, "I do not refer to the outward strength of America, a nation that is at peace tonight everywhere in the world, with unmatched economic power and military might."[27] Instead, his speech, later deemed the "malaise speech" by Ronald Reagan and the press, identified problems of morale, distrust, and lack of confidence in the efficacy of democracy. Additionally, Carter referenced the post-Vietnam negative public perception of the military by identifying a "growing disrespect for government and for churches and for schools, the news media, and other institutions." He continued, "We were taught that our armies were always invincible and our causes were always just, only to suffer the

[26] Hedrick Smith, "Carter Pushes for Arms Pact and Curb on Inflation to Set 'New Foundation' for Peace," *The New York Times*, 24 January 1979, https://www.nytimes.com/1979/01/24/archives/carter-pushes-for-arms-pact-and-curb-on-inflation-to-set-new.html.

[27] Jimmy Carter, "A Crisis of Confidence," (televised address, 15 July 1979), https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycartercrisisofconfidence.htm.

agony of Vietnam."[28] Although it seems evident from these comments that Carter considered the division between society and the military to be affecting the nation's morale and confidence, he did not offer a counternarrative or a recommended solution. Instead, the only concrete recommendations and plans he articulated were related to the energy crisis. Although this speech hinted at the negative public perception of the military, Carter failed to develop an alleviating narrative.

Carter's third State of the Union, given January 23, 1980, established what became known as the "Carter Doctrine" and marked a departure from the focus on domestic and economic issues that had characterized the previous State of the Union speeches. From the outset, this speech, motivated by the recent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the Iran hostage crisis, was focused on security, military, and foreign policy issues. Carter continued to present military strength as a force used to preserve global peace, but for the first time in a State of the Union address, he detailed issues with the military beyond abstract references to "strength" and "modernization." Carter was clear that he did not see the military as the only, or even the primary, solution to the current security challenges; he discussed his decision to boycott the Moscow Olympics in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the importance of strengthening alliances. Nonetheless, he made clear that aggressive actions, such as attempts to seize control of Persian Gulf oil, were a threat to US vital interests and would be met with any means necessary, to include military force. In his book, *White House Diary,* Carter asserted that this willingness to use military force was the single most important thing in the speech.[29] Carter emphasized that in light of the ongoing challenges, his proposed defense budget, which would increase the defense budget by 5 percent, must be passed with no alterations. Further, he announced that he was reinstituting Selective Service registration to be prepared for any required rapid military mobilization.[30]

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan motivated Carter to reinstate Selective

[28] Carter, "A Crisis of Confidence."
[29] Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, 1st ed (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 394.
[30] Jimmy Carter, State of the Union Address (address, Joint Session of the Congress, Washington, DC, 23 January 1980), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml.

Service registration, despite the pushback from many of his advisors. Cabinet members were concerned that it undermined campaign promises, was unnecessary according to a National Security Council study, would suggest an increased likelihood of impending war, and introduced unresolved questions about whether women would have to register.[31] Carter's calculation was threat based: he believed that Selective Service registration would save six months if the United States had to mobilize in response to a Soviet threat.[32] Carter faced heated protests from his Cabinet and Vice President. He wrote that he had to fight off "draft dodgers" and faced a rebellion from Stu [Eizenstat] and Fritz [Vice President Walter Mondale].[33] Although Carter's action was designed to strengthen the military's ability to respond to a Soviet threat, reinstatement of Selective Service registration could have been perceived by the American public as sliding back to a Vietnam-esque military. For a country still experiencing a "Vietnam hangover," this was hardly welcome. Perhaps for this reason, Carter appealed to emotion and patriotic pride when he announced the reinstatement during his 1980 State of the Union, discussing the pride he felt in the men and women of the military.[34]

In the lead-up to announcing the re-institution of the Selective Service registration, Carter, for the first time during a State of the Union, alluded to the men and women that comprised the armed forces, as well as their relationship to American society: "The men and women of America's Armed Forces are on duty tonight in many parts of the world. I'm proud of the job they are doing, and I know you share that pride."[35] Never before in Carter's State of the Union addresses had the military been referenced as more than a unitary tool used for enforcing desired foreign policy. Now, with the possibility of a draft one step closer to reality, Carter highlighted the servicemembers themselves. Further, he complimented the manner in which they served and, in a few simple words, evoked an image of common American pride for the sacrifice and service of military men and women. Once the draft was again a possibility, Carter

[31] Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years*, First edition (New York, N.Y: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 2018), 652.
[32] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 652.
[33] Carter, *White House Diary*, 394.
[34] Carter, State of the Union Address (23 January 1980).
[35] Carter, State of the Union Address (23 January 1980).

needed common citizens, many of whom retained negative post-Vietnam sentiments about both the military and the draft, to feel pride, a sense of service, and a desire to preserve national security through military service, if necessary.

Carter's accompanying written statement to Congress elaborated on military issues, discussing the need to recruit, train, and retain "skilled and experienced military personnel." He also stated that readiness and combat endurance had been improved by a strengthened Reserve force. In addition to discussing skill and training, which alluded to warfighting capability, Carter's written message mentioned the dedication of military members and suggested that honor and selflessness characterized servicemembers.[36] If it was internalized, this message could create a more positive public perception of military members. President Carter's usual mention of veterans' services was amplified by an assertion that in 1980, his administration would "continue to honor and seek recognition of all our Nation's veterans, but we must acknowledge that veterans of the Vietnam War have yet to be accorded the full honor bestowed upon veterans of past wars."[37] This call to honor Vietnam Veterans was the most direct appeal that Carter had made in his State of the Union statements to address the divide between American society and its military.

Not surprisingly, Carter's references to veteran support programs and the importance of recruiting, training, and retaining military members were overshadowed in press coverage by the new Carter doctrine, the threat of using military force to preserve interests in the Middle East, and reinstatement of Selective Service registration. The cover of the *New York Times* the following morning was emblazoned with the headline "Carter Warns U.S. Would Use Armed Force to Repel a Soviet Thrust at the Persian Gulf; Calls for Renewal of Draft Registration."[38] The possibility of a draft did, however, call front-page attention to the recruiting and retention problems that the armed forces were experiencing. In an article designed to reassure the public that a draft was not imminent, reporter Richard Halloran explained that low pay, insufficient education benefits, and poor living and working conditions were affecting the military's ability to

[36] Carter, State of the Union Address (23 January 1980).
[37] Carter, State of the Union Address (23 January 1980).
[38] "Carter Warns U.S. Would Use Armed Force to Repel a Soviet Thrust at the Persian Gulf; Calls for Renewal of Draft Registration," *The New York Times*, 24 January 1980, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1980/01/24/issue.html.

recruit and retain competent and skilled personnel.

Carter's response to the disaster of Operation Eagle Claw, the military operation to rescue the US hostages in Iran on April 24th and 25th, demonstrated a concerted effort to shape the resulting narrative. In a television appearance on the evening of April 25, Carter took full blame for mission failure, saying "It was my decision to attempt the rescue operation. It was my decision to cancel it when problems developed. The responsibility is fully my own."[39] He praised the rescue team, speaking of their advanced training and detailed planning. Additionally, he met privately with the rescue team after Eagle Claw. He recorded in his diary that the meeting was "inspirational and thrilling;" the highly motivated team was eager to plan another rescue attempt.[40]

By the next week, press coverage of Eagle Claw was negative enough to motivate Carter to record in his diary that some reporters were claiming that Carter's slashing of the defense budget had created operational limitations that caused the mission to fail. In response, Charlie Beckwith, the commander of Operation Eagle Claw, told the press and his men that President Carter was tough and would not back out on a mission.[41] Understanding President Carter's mindset on Operation Eagle Claw is challenging. In the years since Eagle Claw, he has repeatedly described the mission as well-planned and with every possibility of success, prevented from success by insufficient helicopter numbers and a "strange series of mishaps."[42] This perspective is largely contradicted by the Holloway Report, which was commissioned to review the rescue mission, and identified problems of poor interservice planning and information compartmentalization.[43]

The discrepancy between Carter's perspective and the official Holloway conclusions make it difficult to ascertain whether President Carter genuinely believed the military was not at fault, and thus should suffer no loss in credibility, or whether his praise of the military was a purposeful attempt to shield them from loss of credibility

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[39] "Debacle in the Desert," *Time*, 5 May 1980, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,948836,00.html.
[40] Carter, *White House Diary*, 422.
[41] Carter, *White House Diary*, 424.
[42] Carter, *White House Diary*, 422. Carter, interview by Brian Williams during Vietnam and the Presidency Conference.
[43] Admiral James L. Holloway, III, "The Holloway Report," investigation directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1980, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB63/doc8.pdf.

resulting from their poor planning and coordination. Regardless, in this instance, Carter took an active role in attempting to shape the narrative by meeting with the press and putting forth a deliberately positive view of the military. His decision to keep his meeting with the rescue team private, however, was potentially a missed opportunity. Although secrecy may have been a concern, allowing the press a degree of access to his interaction with the team could have helped further shape the narrative.

On October 2, 1980, Carter conducted a town hall question-and-answer meeting in Dayton, Ohio. During this meeting, Air Force Major Paul Davis asked the president about what initiatives the president was going to take to ensure that quality people were recruited and retained by the military. This interaction was an opportunity for Carter to present a developed narrative because the question was posed by a military member, who presumptively would be informed about the issues impacting the military, but was asked in front of a largely civilian crowd. Carter used the question to discuss the implications of the Selective Service registration, stating that he was committed to the all-volunteer force and had implemented the draft in order save time if a rapid mobilization were needed. Specific to recruitment, President Carter said that 15 percent of those who registered for Selective Service indicated an interest in a military career. Pertinent to retention and also potentially recruitment, Carter described the Nunn-Warner bill's housing allowances and pay increases, initiatives to increase stability for military families, minimize deployment time, and opportunities for women to have gratifying careers.[44]

Although these programs and initiatives undoubtedly would increase the attractiveness of military service, Carter's response did not deliver a comprehensive narrative of the value and appeal of military service. He failed to mention duty, honor, and patriotism, as well as the opportunities to receive educational benefits and valuable skills training. Carter possibly meant to allude to these career opportunities when he said, "this will open up opportunities for Americans that didn't have it before, and this is a very fine chance for me to put in a plug for that," but this is a case of knowing what you mean and expecting others to understand. Carter did not provide any details that would help a

[44] Jimmy Carter (Remarks, Question-and-Answer Session at a Townhall Meeting, Dayton, Ohio, 2 October 1980), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252033.

young American looking for opportunity to picture him or herself gaining experience and skills in a stimulating military job.[45]

Another questioner provided an opportunity for Carter to pitch the military as a source of jobs and skills training by asking about opportunities to reemploy unemployed white-collar professionals. Carter responded that white collar professions were particularly hard to reemploy. After saying that he did not have specific programs for white collar reemployment, he briefly mentioned the military: "but in the military there's very fine opportunity." Then, without any further elaboration, Carter moved on, saying that federal government was not hiring civilians, but there was federal assistance available for college training for those that needed to make career changes.[46] This exchange demonstrates that even when Carter was presented with opportunities to discuss what military service could offer, he only briefly touched on it rather than creating an appealing narrative. He seemed to expect his audience to infer the significance of his short declaration about military career opportunities.

Another attendee at the Dayton town hall asked Carter about naval combat readiness issues, quoting a September 1980 *New York Times* article that reported 7 out of 13 aircraft carriers not being combat ready and naval air squadrons in a poor state of readiness. Carter responded that the military was in a better state of readiness than when he took office. He explained that military forces are never 100 percent combat ready, described developing capabilities, such as a rapid deployment force, and stated that American military capabilities were sufficiently advanced to counter Soviet technology. Finally, at the end of his answer, Carter presented a narrative that could inspire others to serve in the military. After describing his own service, he said that no matter the career path someone eventually wanted to take, "this is a good way to serve your country, to do a patriotic thing, to see the world, to have an exciting life, to learn a career, to get experience, and to mature a little bit before you finally make a permanent decision about what you want to do in your lives."[47] Compelling though this declaration was, only after three questions did Carter put together a convincing narrative that the military was a

[45] Carter, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session.
[46] Carter, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session.
[47] Carter, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session.

respectable, honorable, exciting, and rewarding place to be.

In 1981, Carter chose not to give a State of the Union address, instead submitting the written statement to Congress as the only record. In this statement, Carter gave his most forceful argument for a strong military that would be capable of deterring and defending against the threat of the Soviet Union, a nation that had developed its military beyond any reasonable level. Stating that national security was and had been his first concern, "both the military power and the political will to deter our adversaries and support our friends and allies" were necessary. Further, he stated that "we must pay whatever price is required to remain the strongest nation in the world," which may require a greater portion of the nation's budget in the future.[48] With the same words as the 1980 statement, Carter justified the proposed increased defense budget as a response to the threat of the Soviet "war machine." Additionally, his statement included the exact same words regarding the importance of recruiting and retaining skilled and experienced military personnel that had been in the 1980 statement to Congress with the addition of the statement: "this Administration has supported for FY 1981 the largest peacetime increase ever in military pay and allowances."[49]

As Carter had only days left in office, his statement to Congress served as a synopsis of Carter administration initiatives, rather than a plan for the coming year. His discussion of veterans' issues summarized his efforts to improve healthcare, job training, psychological counseling and adjustment services, and disability services. His first listed priority, however, was improving the relationship between society and military veterans. He wrote that finally, after four years, "at long last we were able to separate the war from the warrior and honor these veterans," suggesting that Carter believed he had established a narrative of public support for the military.[50] The *New York Times* published a summary and excerpts of the statement to Congress, characterizing the message as a warning about inflation, unemployment, and oil. In the excerpts published on page 10 of the paper, there was no mention of veterans at all. The military was only mentioned in

[48] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 16 January 1981, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/250760.
[49] Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 16 January 1981.
[50] Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 16 January 1981.

context of the need to balance Soviet military power.[51] Thus any effort Carter made to create a positive narrative regarding the veterans, the military institution, and the relationship between society and the military was countermanded by its lack of press coverage.

In addition to these specific dated speeches and interactions, Carter's behavioral patterns throughout his presidency also served to contribute to narratives about the military. Secretary Brown highlights one such pattern in his memoir, *Star Spangled Security*. Throughout Carter's term in office, senior military leaders were not invited to White House dinners. Although Brown was clear that he believed this was an oversight, rather than a deliberate choice by President Carter, Brown found the omission to be so important that he brought it up to the protocol staff, offering to give up his seat for the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff or service chief. Brown believed the failure to include senior military leaders in these formal state events affected the relationship between the military and president.[52] The absence of the military leaders at these events also likely affected public perception of the military. Seeing military leadership in close proximity to the president demonstrates their importance to the government and country as a whole; by failing to include senior military leaders, President Carter missed an opportunity to improve the credibility of the entire military institution.

During his presidency, Carter often spoke about the military, but primarily about its use as a strategic capability to counter the Soviet threat. Although he expressed concerns about the relationship between the military and society in his writings and interactions with the public, he did not highlight that mending the divide was a priority, nor did he address the issue in his landmark speeches. When directly asked about issues concerning the military institution, such as pay and benefits that affected recruitment and retention or veterans support programs, Carter was able to provide accurate information. This information, however, was not coalesced into a cohesive narrative that would convince his domestic audience that the military had increased in credibility and

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[51] "Excerpts From President's Last Message to Congress on the State of the Union," *The New York Times*, 1 January 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/01/17/us/excerpts-from-president-s-last-message-to-congress-on-the-state-of-the-union.html.

[52] Harold Brown and Joyce Winslow, *Star Spangled Security: Applying Lessons Learned Over Six Decades Safeguarding America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 239.

capability since the Vietnam War. Carter's rhetoric, however, only told part of the story. The actions he took with regards to the armed services, to include increases in military modernization and changes in defense budget, servicemember pay, and veteran benefits, all served to affect military capability and credibility. Understanding Carter's actions is necessary to understand whether his shortfalls in improving the civil-military divide were caused by a breakdown in communicating his actions or shortfalls in the efforts themselves.

Chapter 2

The Listmaker: President Carter's Context and Actions

A study of Carter's speeches and other public statements suggests that he had trouble crafting and communicating a compelling narrative regarding the armed forces' place within American civic life. But what was the Carter Administration's actual record regarding military affairs? This chapter examines the major actions Carter took with regards to the military, considers how well these actions corresponded with how Carter portrayed them to the public, and discusses the discrepancy between Carter's words and actions. Finally, this chapter poses possible explanations for why Carter failed to put forth a narrative about the military institution and his efforts to strengthen it that would have contributed to mending the gap between post-Vietnam society and the military.

President Carter entered office with a broad range of interests that shaped his actions during the ensuing four years and are essential to understanding his approach to handling the military, both as an institution and as an operational force. During his campaign, Carter's numerous areas of interest led the *New York Times* to publish an analysis after his election that attempted to lay out a coherent list of presidential priorities. Ultimately, the *New York Times* concluded that Carter was prioritizing job creation, tax reform, welfare reform, defense spending cuts, health care, the budget, and efforts to curb inflation. The article also highlighted the variety of programs and initiatives which President Carter had mentioned during his campaign, to include creating a consumer protection agency, developing a more bipartisan foreign policy, pardoning Vietnam draft resisters, increasing nuclear plant safety regulations, lessening the danger of nuclear weapons proliferation, conducting efforts to find missing in action persons in the Vietnam theater, reducing arms sales, and withdrawing US ground forces from South Korea.[1] This lengthy list, and the fact that Carter had not stated what his priorities were, made it difficult to ascertain where he would focus his efforts.

[1] Charles Mohr, "Carter, With a Long List of Campaign Promises, Now Faces the Problem of Making Good on Them, *The New York Times*, 15 November 1976, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/15/archives/carter-with-a-long-list-of-campaign-promises-now-faces-the-problem.html.

A current understanding of the prioritization of this laundry list of initiatives is aided by President Carter's own diary and memoir, as well as the inputs from his close staff. Stuart Eizenstat, President Carter's Chief Domestic Policy Advisor and a recorder of copious notes throughout Carter's presidency, articulated that Carter prioritized nuclear non-proliferation and American strategic superiority over the Soviet Union by means of technology.[2] In his book *White House Diary*, which captured and at times commented on the journal entries he made during his presidency, Carter emphasized that his fiscal focus shaped his approach to various issues; for example, he felt that the 1978 defense authorization bill was wasteful and thus should have been vetoed.[3] His focus on both the economy and the strategic Soviet threat combined in his concern that the military's "bottomless pit" of financial requests demonstrated weakness and weakened its credibility in the eyes of the Soviet Union and other adversaries.[4]

What is apparent from these combined depictions of Carter's priorities is that the military institution was not a primary priority. The health of the military was a concern because it was directly related to the United States' ability to counter, deter, and balance the Soviet Union. The defense budget was important because it affected the nation's economy and the government's bottom line. Beyond this, however, Carter did not prioritize improving the American public's relationship with or perception of the military. Although significant efforts were taken with the Department of Defense during Carter's administration to improve the military's ability to recruit and retain for the all-volunteer force, these issues did not rise to the level of presidential priority.[5] This was emphasized by a lengthy meeting in April 1978, when Carter met with his top staff and cabinet officials to discuss big-picture issues. He began the meeting with a summary of accomplishments, which he called "comprehensive efforts." In the list of things that the administration had handled well, he mentioned issues that dealt tangentially with the military, such as managing the Mideast and Panama, but did not refer to the military

[2] Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years*, First edition (New York, N.Y: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 2018), 614, 618.
[3] Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, 1st ed (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 214.
[4] Carter, *White House Diary*, 495–96.
[5] Beth L. Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

explicitly, either in regards to its operations or its health as an institution.[6] Thus, it seems that Carter perceived the military as a backdrop and prerequisite to top priorities, rather than an institution that required high-level focus or initiatives.

This lack of focus on the institution of the military in his public rhetoric was not due to unawareness of the issues that plagued the military. President Carter was certainly aware of problems that plagued the military, both in terms of its standing with the public and its ability to perform its operational requirements. As one example, President Carter's 1976 campaign team had examined David R. Segal's report, *Illicit Drug Use in the U.S. Army*, that not only catalogued the drugs that plagued the post-Vietnam army, but also the negative perception that the American population had of the military.[7] His knowledge of the problems plaguing the military were amplified by a November 1979 meeting with General Edward Meyer, Chief of Staff of the Army, and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown. During this meeting, General Meyer told the President that systematic deficiencies were degrading combat readiness. Recounting the meeting during a 1988 interview, General Meyer recalled that he had told President Carter, "We had a hollow army. Hollow people. Hollow equipment. Hollow sustainability. Hollow quality."[8]

In line with his focus on the military predominantly as a means to counter the Soviet strategic threat, Carter's efforts to improve the military centered on what would directly improve its ability to do this. During his time in office, Carter re-established American leadership in NATO, formalized a strategy that continued to focus US strategy against the Soviet Union, increased the defense budget, and initiated technological revitalization of military capabilities, designed to give the United States strategic advantage over the Soviet Union.

During his presidency, Carter put significant effort toward growing US and allied military capabilities in support of NATO. In May 1977, Carter successfully appealed to

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[6] Carter, *White House Diary,* 185.
[7] David R. Segal, "Illicit Drug Use in the U.S. Army," in Jimmy Carter Library archives, Collection: Records of the 1976 Campaign Committee to Elect Jimmy Carter; Series: Noel Sterrett Subject File; Folder: Drug Use in the U.S. Army; Container 82 https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital_library/campaign/564806/82/76C_564806_82_03.pdf
[8] Frank L. Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised: President Carter, Defense Budgets, and the Politics of Military Readiness*, Letort Papers, no. 54 (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012), 27.

NATO defense ministers to increase their budgets by 3 percent annually, resulting in a formal communique of agreement. With this action, Carter reestablished the United States as a leader in the NATO alliance. According to Eizenstat, this was a move that reversed a declining leadership role by, and negative perceptions of, the United States after Vietnam.[9] Keeping faith with this appeal, Carter signed Presidential Directive/National Security Council-18, *U.S. National Strategy*, in August of 1977. This strategy was consistent with Nixon's and Ford's national defense strategies and focused on counterbalancing the Soviet Union and influencing Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.[10] Carter's subsequent defense budgets fulfilled his promise to NATO allies by increasing defense spending in accordance with the formal communique.

Carter's 1980 State of the Union similarly bolstered NATO: the speech, which unveiled what became known as the Carter Doctrine, advocated for greater NATO-backed collective defense. Additionally, Carter laid out current and future US military growth. He described the previous three years' steady military budget increases and pledged a new five-year defense plan with further budget increases. After the speech, Eizenstat recalled that Carter and his staff felt confident about the strong military message of the speech and would have been shocked to learn that years later they would be portrayed as having a weak national security policy.[11]

Carter grew the defense budget during his presidency, which was in seeming conflict with his campaign promises. During his campaign, Carter pledged that he would reduce the defense budget by $7 billion and balance the budget by fiscal year 1981.[12] Secretary of Defense Brown wanted less drastic reductions, and Carter's resulting proposal reflected a compromise between their positions. The proposal was a cut from Ford's *proposed* budget, rather than a cut of the *actual* defense budget, although this fact has often been misperceived. Ford's proposed budget had been a significant increase from previous years; Eizenstat called this proposal "deliberately bloated."[13] Ford's proposal was for $123 billion, a $13 billion increase from the previous year. Once

[9] Eizenstat, *President Carter,* 608.
[10] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 14.
[11] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 654.
[12] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 16.
[13] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 607.

inflation was considered, this would have been an increase of $7 billion, or 6 percent.[14] In his analysis of President Carter and the defense budget, Frank Jones infers from a Brookings Institution analysis of the 1978 defense budget that, because of the bloating of Ford's budget, Carter's proposed cuts would have had little effect on investments in military hardware and research and development.[15]

Under the Carter proposal, the defense budget would experience 3 percent real growth, rather than a cut. As Carter announced when he submitted the budget proposal, the cut was a reduction in a "planned increase," rather than a true cut in actual budget.[16] Carter's defense budgets had to overcome inflation to yield any true growth; the unpredictable rising inflation of this era eroded much of the proposed budgetary increases, while also cultivating a political environment that was under pressure to control inflation through fiscal conservatism.[17] Despite soaring inflation, however, Carter's 1980 defense spending increased 3.1 percent in accordance with his promises to NATO allies, resulting in what the *New York Times* described as a "substantial rise in [the] arms budget."[18]

When evaluating the effects of Carter's budget on the military, the role of Congress should not be overlooked. Presidents provide the budget to Congress, which can subsequently make changes or concur. Therefore, evaluating Carter's actual budget against Ford's proposed budget, which had not been congressionally-approved, is an unfair comparison. As Jones points out, "there is no reason to assume that Congress would have merely acquiesced to Ford's request."[19] Thus, criticism of Carter's budget cuts as degrading military combat readiness is unfounded; the money had not yet flowed to the military. As described above, despite Carter cutting proposed gains, the military

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[14] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 16–17.
[15] Cited in Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 17. Barry M. Blechman *et al.,* "The Defense Budget," Joseph A. Pechman, ed. *Setting National Priorities, The 1978 Budget*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1977: 83.
[16] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 16–17.
[17] W. Bowman Cutter, "The Battle of the Budget," *The Atlantic*, March 1981, https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/politics/budget/cutterf.htm.
[18] Richard Burt, "Carter Accepting Substantial Rise in Arms Budget," *The New York Times*, 29 November 1979, https://www.nytimes.com/1979/11/29/archives/carter-accepting-substantial-rise-in-arms-budget-unusual-capitol.html.
[19] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 18.

budget was increased above previous levels. Another layer to the complexity facing Carter defense budget proposals was the limited Congressional appetite for defense budget increases. Prior to the Iran hostage crisis, there was little support in Congress for budget increases: in fact, Congress cut Carter's first three proposed defense budget by a cumulative $6 billion.[20]

Overall, Carter's three fiscal year budgets provided substantial increases in the military's budget, enabling force modernization, large-scale production of expensive weapons, and combat readiness in support of the national defense strategy.[21] In a 1988 interview, General Meyer, who earlier in 1981 briefed President Carter and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown on the "hollow" status of the Army, stated that the fiscal year 1981 budget was a significant increase.[22] Eizenstat described Carter as an architect of reviving the defense budget, saying, "even after Carter finished cutting it [Ford's proposed defense budget], defense spending had increased by 3 percent in real terms that first year, and 10 percent during his four-year term, with a commitment to a 5 percent annual increase for the following five years, starting in 1980."[23]

In addition to increasing the defense budget, Carter revitalized the Department of Defense through technological modernization. This approach was reasonable for a president who valued fiscal conservatism. By developing better technologies, perhaps the United States could provide for its defense and counterbalance the Soviet threat more efficiently, thus creating an adaptable military that could retaliate against any attack.[24] In the annotations to his diary, Carter stated that the major effort of the Department of Defense was the development of technological innovations, such as precision bombs and stealth aircraft.[25] In his inside account of the United States' Cold War efforts, Robert Gates wrote that Carter "sustained every major strategic modernization program while beginning at least one important new one [stealth technology]."[26]

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[20] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 19.
[21] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised,* 22.
[22] Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised*, 22.
[23] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 607.
[24] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 615.
[25] Carter, *White House Diary*, 450.
[26] Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

To lead this effort, Carter appointed Harold Brown as Secretary of Defense. Harold Brown had a strong scientific background and experience as a civilian military leader; he studied and taught physics and engineering, served as the Director of Livermore Laboratory, and was Secretary of the Air Force from 1965 to 1969.[27] Brown's strategy, supported by Carter, was not to simply amass weapons to achieve numerical superiority against the Soviets, but to develop diverse weapons and advanced technology that would give the United States an advantage.[28] Brown was technologically knowledgeable and innovative, and Eizenstat perceived that Carter's background as a naval electronic warfare officer made them a good team to modernize the military.[29] Carter's selection of Brown to lead the Department of Defense demonstrated his commitment to technologically revitalizing the military.

One of the most controversial actions President Carter took with regards to the military was canceling production of the B-1 bomber. Beginning with Francis Gary Powers' being shot down in May 1961 while flying the U-2 over the Soviet Union, the threat posed from surface-to-air missiles, particularly the SA-2, began to impact the way the Air Force thought about the threat environment.[30] Instead of simply having to defeat enemy aircraft to gain and maintain air superiority, the Air Force now had to avoid surface threats. This reality was clearly demonstrated by Vietnam aircraft statistics: out of the total 1,737 aircraft the US Air Force lost, 1,443 were from ground or AAA fire, 110 were from SAMs, 117 were from "other combat", and 67 were from enemy aircraft.[31] To counter the SAM threat, pilots began to ingress and egress the target area at higher speeds. Although there were research and development efforts to investigate means beyond simply "blowing through" the threat rings of integrated air defense systems, it was classified and still under development: it was the late 1970s when DARPA and Lockheed began pursuing stealth technology with its work on how to decrease radar cross

[27] U.S. Air Force, "Dr. Harold Brown," https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/107591/dr-harold-brown/.
[28] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 614.
[29] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 615.
[30] Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 37.
[31] Brian D. Laslie, *The Air Force Way of War: U.S. Tactics and Training after Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 4.

section.[32] The majority of aircraft and tactics were still focused on high-speed, low-level penetration. Additionally, the Air Force had limited interest in pursuing stealth to counter Soviet defenses because of two "conventional Pentagon views." The first was that enemy capabilities outpaced US counter-efforts, and the second was that the Air Force's commitment to the idea that high-speed, low-level penetration was a credible recipe for survivability.[33] Accordingly, the Air Force believed that the B-1's terrain-following radar and low-altitude capabilities successfully replaced the aging B-52 and would effectively thwart the Soviet threat by "sneak[ing] past ground defenses and deliver[ing] a nuclear weapon deep inside the Soviet motherland."[34]

In direct contrast, Carter considered the B-1 a "gross waste of money."[35] Carter believed that, because of the threat environment, the B-1 would enjoy only a limited window of combat effectiveness. Additionally, he believed that cruise missiles could accomplish everything that the B-1 could, but at a fraction of the price. To him, the decision was straightforward: upgraded B-52s armed with cruise missiles could provide the same capability at less expense, buying time for stealth technology development. This perspective was supported by Dr. Richard Garwin, a renowned physicist who developed the final design of the hydrogen bomb and advised the government on myriad science, technology, and national security issues.[36] In 1975, Dr. Garwin testified to the House Armed Services Committee and concluded that cutting funds to the B-1 would save the Department of Defense $3 billion per year, with no decrease in capability. Dr. Garwin advocated that cutting the B-1 would give the United States the opportunity to turn a mediocre defense capability into a first-rate military power.[37]

Carter's decision to stop production of the B-1 was justifiable: he made a decision

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[32] Laslie, *The Air Force Way of War*, 92–95.
[33] Ben R. Rich and Leo Janos, *Skunk Works: A Personal Memoir of My Years at Lockheed*, 1st ed (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1994), 18; Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power*, 74.
[34] Rich and Janos, *Skunk Works*, 18.
[35] Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, University of Arkansas pbk. ed (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 81–83.
[36] Joel N. Shurkin, *True Genius: The Life and Work of Richard Garwin, the Most Influential Scientist You've Never Heard Of* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2017).
[37] House Committee on the Budget, *Fiscal Year 1977 Defense Budget: Hearings Before the Task Force on National Security Programs*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1976, Committee Print, 515.

to save money while also providing a gap-filling technology until a fully sufficient technology was available. And yet, when President Carter announced he was stopping B-1 production, his initial statement elaborated on neither of these points. Instead, he simply said that even without the B-1, the United States could have a sufficiently capable, effective, and flexible strategic response. He provided no details on replacement technology or limitations of the B-1 that prevented it from effectively contributing to the nation's defense. Only when asked for details on the rationale did he elaborate. When a reporter asked what major factors led to his decision, President Carter explained that the triad provided by the B-52, submarine-launched missiles, and intercontinental ballistic missiles created an adequate national defense.[38] Despite the logic of his decision-making process, Carter did not share this rationale with the public, until explicitly asked.

Carter's record on increasing military pay and benefits is mixed. His focus on fiscal austerity led him to seek ways to decrease military spending where able, and one of those places was federal manpower costs, which included military pay.[39] One of the initiatives to review how to minimize rising defense manpower expenses was the 1978 Presidential Commission on Military Compensation. The resulting report recommended cutting military retirement by eliminating the half-pay pension for 20 years of military service. Additionally, it advocated providing financial incentives for short-term workers, which would incentivize military service members who were less motivated by the idea of a 20-year military career.[40] Pushback from service chiefs and lack of strong support from within the administration led to this report fading into the background. Instead, Carter approved the revision of military pensions being based on an average of the last 36 months of pay (now known as "high-3"), rather than the highest year of pay. This change was calculated to save 13 percent and was adopted in the FY 1981 and 1982 Defense Authorization Acts.[41]

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[38] Jimmy Carter, The President's News Conference, 30 June 1977, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/244181.
[39] Bernard Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), 401.
[40] Rostker, *I Want You!*, 380.
[41] Edward C. Keefer, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge 1977-1981*, Secretaries of Defense Historical Series, volume 9 (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), 528.

Despite Carter's desire to limit military manpower costs, Congress eventually pressured him into approving a substantial military pay raise. In 1980, Carter agreed on a $790 million benefits package that increased sea pay by 15 percent and flight pay by 25%, gave servicemembers a location-dependent housing allowance, and increased the food allowance. In 1981, Congress granted an 11.7% pay raise, a substantial increase from the 5.5 to 7 percent raises of the previous three years.[42] As he signed off on this pay raise, Carter spoke about how deserved it was by the men and women serving in the military, and how this was one small way that the nation could reimburse the debt it owed them.[43] Despite this substantial pay raise, Carter would receive little credit or gratitude for it.

Carter's resistance to increasing military pay was criticized in later years by John White, Carter's Deputy Director at the Office of Management and Budget. White described Carter's stance on using military pay stagnation as a means to control inflation as a policy error that would have resulted in a return to conscription, had Congress not stepped in. This explains the minimal credit that Carter received for military benefit increases that he approved: his increases were seen as coming too late and under too much pressure from Congress.[44] Additionally, a letter that he wrote to Harold Brown expressing disapproval regarding military members desiring a pay raise was leaked to the *Army Times*, the *Navy Review*, and the *Air Force Journal*.[45] In the letter, Carter stated that his own service had been about service, not pay.[46] According to Brown, some senior military felt that Carter was questioning their motives, which could have only widened divisions between the president and the military. Additionally, any civilians in the broader American public could only perceive this as a schism between the president and the military. Further, the implied criticism of servicemembers who wanted increased financial benefits weakened any perception that Carter wanted to improve pay and

[42] Keefer, *Harold Brown*, 530.
[43] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1980-1981* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1981), 1665.
[44] Keefer, *Harold Brown*, 530.
[45] Richard C. Barnard, "Carter to SecDef: Don't Bug Me About Pay," *Army Times*, 17 March 1980. Richard C. Barnard, "Carter Tells Brown, Military Leaders to Stop Pay Criticism," *Navy Times*, 17 March 1980. Richard C. Barnard, "Carter Tells DoD: Stop Complaining about Pay," *Air Force Times*, 17 March 1980.
[46] *Public Papers of the Presidents: Jimmy Carter*, 969.

benefits for the military and created a sense that Carter's values were at odds with those of servicemembers.

Carter's actions during his presidency laid the groundwork for rebuilding the military after Vietnam through budget increases and military modernization. Why then, did, and does, a public perception exist that Carter's weakness with regards to the military and defense created an unsound, unprepared, and hollow military that only Reagan's sweeping defense reform could save?

The mixed messages that Carter's actions conveyed helped create this state of affairs. Eizenstat wrote that Carter's top priority of American strategic superiority over the Soviet Union through technology went largely unrecognized.[47] Carter wanted to increase the supply of bombs, have diverse weapons systems, and implement advanced technology projects to maintain strategic advantage. Eizenstat pointed to contradictory actions that muddied Carter's overall message. Despite campaign rhetoric that promised future defense budget cuts, Carter increased the defense budget. Although he cut high profile programs and focused on cost-effectiveness, he funded other expensive initiatives.[48] Carter made no secret of his own military service, regularly mentioning it when meeting with servicemembers and in other public appearances, and his 1980 letter to Harold Brown indicated that he was concerned about the overall well-being of the military and wanted to improve military members' lifestyle.[49] Despite this, his leaked response to Harold Brown's proposal for a military pay increase suggested a criticism of the military members' motivation for service.[50] Without a clear narrative to tie these actions into a compelling vision for the American public, public perception of Carter was confused, leaving an impression that he was weak on defense.

Carter's failure to create a coherent narrative about the military cannot be attributed to a lack of appreciation of the power and importance of narrative. When it came to other situations, Carter was cognizant of how perceptions and narratives can

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[47] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 606.
[48] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 623.
[49] Jimmy Carter, "Ask President Carter," Remarks During a Telephone Call-in Program on the CBS Radio Network, 5 March 1977, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242900. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Jimmy Carter*, 969.
[50] *Public Papers of the Presidents: Jimmy Carter*, 969.

affect reality. Eizenstat recounted that Carter was suspicious of the National Security Council's threat assessment of the Soviet Union because their calculation of relative strength was "based on a perception of weakness" created by analysts with "excessive concentration on our weaknesses."[51] In a similar vein, Carter was suspicious of those who overemphasized dangers, particularly the Committee on the Present Danger, composed of Paul Nitze, Gene Rostow, Colin Gray, and others. About this committee, Carter wrote, "this group and their associates created serious problems for me whenever we attempted to do anything that related even remotely to a weapons system, the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, or Israel…. True to their name, they were inclined to overemphasize dangers from the Soviets, Cubans, North Koreans, and others."[52] These examples demonstrate that Carter understood that reality would be interpreted through people's perceptions of events and circumstances, rather than cold, hard facts. Although Carter sought to sort through biased interpretations before reaching conclusions, he could not have been unaware that his own actions and decisions would be interpreted through similar human lenses of perception, and therefore the rhetoric which surrounded his decisions would shape their interpretation.

Despite his seeming awareness of the power of rhetoric and narrative, Carter and his administration did not construct meaningful narratives that convinced the American public. The Carter administration recognized its lack of theme and narrative on many topics. In Carter's April 1978 meeting with top staff and cabinet officials to discuss the health of the administration, both Carter and Patricia Harris, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, highlighted both a lack of a cohesive theme and a need to let the public know what the administration was trying to accomplish.[53] The Carter administration realized that this lack of narrative would likely lead the public to view their efforts as weak and ineffective.

A number of factors contributed to Carter's failure to put forth a cohesive and effective narrative regarding the Department of Defense and institution of the military. These factors were unresolved disagreements between Cabinet members over a number

[51] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 613.
[52] Carter, *White House Diary*, 76–77.
[53] Carter, *White House Diary*, 186.

of issues, a focus on the external Soviet audience at the expense of the domestic audience, a propensity to expect actions to translate into clear audience understanding, a suspicion about the value of military intervention, and a veil of secrecy over military initiatives that prevented candid discussion.

Carter's 1978 speech at Annapolis is an example of how unresolved differences of perspective amongst Cabinet and staff members resulted in conflicted messaging. Two key advisors, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, had very different views of the best way to handle the Soviet challenge. Vance believed that Soviet actions, rather than being part of a cohesive strategy, were case-by-case opportunities that were being exploited. Thus, the United States should deal with each incident individually, rather than perceiving it as indicative of a larger Soviet plan. Vance believed that this approach offered greater opportunity for US-Soviet cooperation, and detente.[54] In direct opposition, Brzezinski perceived Soviet actions as more coherently interrelated; he found it impossible to consider Soviet activities in Africa, for example, as separate from nuclear concerns. For this reason, he believed that all Soviet issues should be addressed comprehensively and more aggressively.[55] Eizenstat believed that Carter was unwilling to make a clear choice between these two outlooks, instead mixing irreconcilable perspectives into his rhetoric.[56]

According to reputable *Washington Post* journalist Murray Marder, Carter was expecting intense argument over the content of the Naval Academy speech. Instead, there was little dissent, which Marder attributed to two factors: there was enough in the speech to appease both Brzezinski and Vance, and what little there was to argue about was not worth risking subversion of the president's authority. "What appears to have happened…" Marder wrote, "is that each of the Carter advisers saw in the president's draft of the speech enough to satisfy his own objectives. Each adviser therefore apparently decided it was best not to provoke a debate on the portions of the draft that he

[54] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 629.
[55] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 628.
[56] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 607.

liked least, or even wanted to have modified or deleted."[57] This article created an image of a president triumphing over his squabbling staff, ending by describing a presidential assertion of authority that gave in to neither side, despite expectations of conflict: "Each of them thought best not to speak up too much. It was the president's speech."[58]

In his critique of Carter, journalist James Fallows similarly viewed the speech as a mash-up of two perspectives, but saw the outcome not as an assertion of presidential authority, but an inability to extract a coherent message from conflicting perspectives. After a recommendation to do so by Vance, Carter intended the Naval Academy speech to explain US policy toward the Soviet Union. According to Fallows, rather than receiving his staff's conflicting inputs, exploring the differences, and reconciling them into a coherent message, Carter simply stapled Vance's and Brzezinski's memos together and used them as the basis for his speech.[59]

This anecdote creates a vivid image of a president who was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to synthesize contradictory perspectives. Of note, however, in his book *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, Robert A. Strong explained that his research on the Naval Academy speech indicated that Fallows' story, while compelling, could not have occurred as told. Strong's analysis of the handwritten outline and first draft led him to conclude that the final draft was consistent with the first, indicating that the final speech contained the message that "Carter planned to say from the outset."[60] Strong thus concluded that the speech contained emphasis on strategic arms limitations and curtailing Soviet world-wide behavior because those were both things he cared deeply about, not because they were a result of an attempt to incorporate the Vance and Brzezinski memos.[61] Similarly,

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[57] Murray Marder, "Behind Carter Annapolis Speech," *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1978, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/06/11/behind-carter-annapolis-speech/00625fe7-53fd-4ea1-a12d-8f9a1bb07dfe/.
[58] Marder, "Behind Carter Annapolis Speech."
[59] James Fallows, "The Passionless President," *The Atlantic*, May 1979, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1979/05/the-passionless-presidency/308516/.
[60] Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, Miller Center Series on the American Presidency (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 100.
[61] Strong, *Working in the World*, 109.

Brzezinski disputes Fallows' telling of the story in his memoirs.[62]

Whether or not Fallows' compelling recollection is true, the audience's perception of the message is what mattered. American newspapers, and even the Soviets, found the speech to be disjointed. In addition to Murray Marder's piece on how the speech was created, the *Washington Post* also published coverage entitled "President Challenges Soviet Leaders: Two Different Speeches," which, in both title and content, highlighted the conflicting messages internal to the speech.[63] An article in the *New York Times* reported that the Soviet Union said the Naval Academy speech was "strange, to say the least" and suggested that the United States was "vacillating between cold war and detente" without having made a decision between the two.[64] Fallows recalled that Carter was astonished at the reaction from his audience; Carter believed he had explained his nuanced thoughts, and thus had fulfilled his responsibilities.[65] The Naval Academy speech, then, is an example of Carter explaining facts and nuance without being able to weave together a cohesive, memorable narrative.

A second reason that Carter failed to develop a narrative about the strength of the military institution that appealed to the American public was his almost exclusive focus on the external Soviet threat. In his book, *Carter's Conversion: The Hardening of American Defense Policy*, Brian J. Auten makes the case that Carter's efforts to strengthen the military were based on a new understanding of the significance and danger of the Soviet threat, rather than a response to domestic politics, opinions, and pressures.[66] Given Carter's lack of narrative creation in all realms, when his motivations were caused by external factors, he would be even less likely to create a narrative that appealed to internal US audiences. Because of Carter's chronic lack of focus on narratives, any narrative that was created would only be focused on the obvious audience: the Soviet

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[62] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 320–21.
[63] Murray Marder, "Carter Challenges Soviet Leaders; Two Different Speeches; Which of Two Speeches Did the Kremlin Hear?" *The Washington Post,* 8 Jun 1978.
[64] Craig R. Whitney, "Soviet Calls Attitude of Carter Strange, Reaffirms Détente," *The New York Times*, 8 June 1978, https://www.nytimes.com/1978/06/08/archives/soviet-calls-attitude-of-carter-strange-reaffirms-detente-soviet.html.
[65] Fallows, "The Passionless President."
[66] Brian J. Auten, *Carter's Conversion: The Hardening of American Defense Policy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

Union. Eizenstat stressed that Carter's top priority was "American strategic superiority over the Soviet Union through technology."[67] Similar to Fallows' critiques, it was beyond the character of Carter and his administration to consider nuanced narratives that would create strategic gains on multiple audiences.

In reinstating Selective Service registration, Carter prioritized creating a strategic narrative to counter the Soviet Union above the domestic effects that such an action might have on a nation still experiencing the post-Vietnam aversion to a draft and any large-scale military action. Beth Bailey's analysis of Carter's decision supports this interpretation. In choosing mobilization timeliness over addressing concerns about unresolved gender roles in the military, Carter "was more intent on sending a message to the Soviets than on defending the principle of gender equity."[68] Eizenstat recalled that Carter's primary concern in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was affecting Soviet behavior: "more to the point, Carter's unhesitating actions had a demonstrable effect on Soviet behavior in the future, and from the very start he made clear that was his goal."[69] Carter's speech announcing reinstitution of Selective Service registration, however, suggested that he was sensitive to the effects on the domestic public. Rather than referring to the military as a unitary bloc, this is one of the few examples where he spoke of individual soldiers and their sacrifice. For a domestic audience with strong antibodies to an impending draft, these words could potentially weaken the domestic audience's strong aversion to an impending draft by inspiring a collective sense of pride, service, and a need to preserve national security. With the new all-volunteer status of the military being threatened, the requirement to serve again impacted all citizens. Though he did not do this routinely, by addressing these domestic concerns, Carter showed a capability to consider and address the secondary audience.

The Naval Academy speech in June 1978 is another example of prioritizing the strategic Soviet audience. The speech was designed to send a clear message about the US stance on Soviet issues, and Carter seems to have not considered his immediate audience – the midshipmen and their families who were physical witnesses to his speech. Although

[67] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 614.
[68] Bailey, *America's Army*, 131–32.
[69] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 656.

he briefly mentioned his own Naval Academy graduation 32 years earlier at the beginning of the speech and advised that the future officers before him would need to lead with "courage, self-sacrifice, idealism, and self-discipline," the bulk of his speech lacked the personal touches that were likely to resonate with the soon-to-be officers before him.[70] Had he considered his immediate, domestic audience, Carter could have included specific examples of naval officers who had contributed to national security or other more personal anecdotes. Instead, Carter seemingly dismissed the significance of his naval audience by recalling about his own graduation speaker, Admiral Chester Nimitz, "As will be the case with you, I don't remember a word he said."[71] As a result of his lack of focus on a narrative that would appeal to the graduating midshipmen, he likely ensured that would be the case.

Carter's ability to construct a meaningful narrative about the military institution was further hampered by two interrelated personal qualities: his apparent belief that actions could impart a story without the need for a supporting narrative, and his personal style of communication which was not conducive to creating such narratives.

Carter's apparent belief that his actions would convey a coherent, well-understood message was evidenced by Walter Mondale's recounting of how Carter handled the Iran hostage situation while also seeking reelection. In his memoir, Mondale described Carter trying to resolve the Iran hostage situation by hunkering down to create a solution, an approach that became known as the "rose garden strategy." While he focused almost exclusively on this problem, he sent others out to campaign for his re-election. Mondale believed that Carter was trying to demonstrate he was working hard on the most serious problem at hand. Instead, the public perceived that he was hiding from his campaign and was so incapacitated by Iran that he was unable to do anything else. Mondale recalled that he advised Carter to "get out there" and "make your case to the American people," but that Carter seemed worn down and drained, stating "they're [the American public]

[70] Jimmy Carter (address, Commencement Exercises, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 7 June 1978), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/248470.
[71] Carter, United States Naval Academy Commencement Address.

not listening to me anymore."[72] This again demonstrated Carter's lack of skill in creating a resonant public narrative: he believed that his actions alone could create the desired narrative, and even when faced with evidence to the contrary, he resigned himself to the result instead of attempting to reshape the public's perception.

James Fallows' critique of Carter's leadership style supported the interpretation the Carter believed his actions would self-explain. Certain characteristics, such as his proclivity for making decisions based on facts rather than abstractions, Fallows wrote, made Carter a skilled analyst and manager. But when it came time to translate those decisions into a vision, Carter struggled. According to Fallows, Carter perceived the decision, the making of the policy, as the essence of leadership and did not see a need to "project a vision larger than the problem."[73]

Carter's natural communication habits also may have worked against him. Fallows described Carter as someone who thought in lists, rather than arguments, which meant that he thought statements containing facts and accomplishments were more important than context and persuasion.[74] Additionally, Fallows said that Carter did not distinguish among his audiences, a point already driven home by the example of the 1978 Naval Academy speech. Fallows advocated for making detailed speeches aimed at addressing experts and leaders in the field. Even if these experts were not in the physical audience, Fallows argued, they would read the transcripts and write articles that would trickle down through serious journals to newspapers and more widely-read magazines, thus ultimately shaping the American public's ideas.[75] Carter did not favor speeches that provided this level of insight to experts, thus inhibiting this form of public persuasion.

An example of President Carter's difficulty creating and presenting an effective narrative is his handling of the decision to cancel B-1 production in October of 1977. In his *White House Diary*, Carter explained this as an easy decision to transition to technologically superior solutions: cruise missiles and stealth technology.[76] Stuart

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[72] Walter F. Mondale and David Hage, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics*, 1st Scribner hardcover ed (New York: Scribner, 2010), 253.
[73] Fallows, "The Passionless President."
[74] Fallows, "The Passionless President."
[75] Fallows, "The Passionless President."
[76] Carter, *White House Diary*, 66.

Eizenstat recalled that President Carter was "wary of spending billions on ineffective weapons systems with fatal strategic flaws like the B-1."[77] Both of these justifications – that there was more sophisticated technological option, and that there were significant problems with the B-1 – are perfectly reasonable explanations that, in theory, would be convincing to the American public. Despite what seemed to have been a simple opportunity to present a compelling narrative to the public about both presidential decision-making and the bolstered capability of the military, Carter did not provide this explanation until asked by a reporter for an explanation. [78] Without this question, this point would never have been offered to the public. Carter's handling of this announcement is an example of failing to craft a compelling narrative: the rationale is there, the justification can be made, but Carter failed to knit it together.

Carter's suspicions about the value of military intervention and its reception by domestic audiences may also have contributed to his lack of a strong defense narrative. In general, Carter preferred diplomacy to military action, and Eizenstat suggested that Carter was reluctant to use force until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, months after the hostages in Iran were taken.[79] Although this was due to a preference for diplomacy, Eizenstat believed that Carter's refusal to threaten military action undercut diplomatic and economic leverage. In the instance of the Iranian hostage crisis, Carter cared more about the safety of individual hostages than American prestige and personal political standing. For these reasons, he was unwilling to threaten military action and potentially endanger hostages' lives.[80]

Carter seems to have believed that his ability to put forth a strong narrative about the military was constrained by the lingering effects of the Vietnam War. In a 2006 interview with Brian Williams, Carter described the domestic context of his presidency as being unreceptive to military narratives. In response to a single question regarding the character of the Pentagon during the Carter administration, Carter described a nation

[77] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 615.
[78] Jimmy Carter, The President's News Conference (30 June 1977), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/244181.
[79] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 607.
[80] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 782.

suspicious of a strong military and his successful efforts to strengthen it. "The military that I inherited was minimal. And there was a major adverse reaction when I became President to any sort of emphasis on military capability. Vietnam turned our nation against a strong military," he said. He continued, "I came from a military background. That was my chosen profession. And I elevated military budgets and commitments to improved weaponry, to a top level of priority in my administration… So almost all of the weaponry that has been devised since then originated in its embryonic stages during my administration under Harold Brown's leadership. So we made a major commitment to strengthen our military and to emphasize not just on the number of ships and the number of tanks, but on the technical capabilities of new weaponry.[81]"

This statement suggests that public opinion prevented Carter from advertising the significant initiatives he undertook to strengthen the military. His understanding of an unfriendly audience was made personal by his son's experience after Vietnam, which he described in the same interview. "He [Carter's son] was adverse to wearing his uniform while he was home on leave, because there was a lot of scorn and derogation and condemnation of him for being naive, as to leave the sinecure of college education at Georgia Tech and going to Vietnam. He was condemned by his own peer group."[82] Carter seems to have recognized a need for a strong military to counter the Soviet threat, but perceived the American public was unlikely to support it. Rather than attempting to shape the narrative and change public perceptions, Carter focused primarily on the external Soviet audience, chose to let his actions speak for themselves, and did not dedicate resources to creating a positive American narrative with regards to the military. As such, not only did Carter not receive credit for many of the efforts he initiated, but he also failed to substantially alter the "American resistance" to the military.

Finally, Carter's ability to construct an effective narrative may have been hampered by the secrecy surrounding some of the technological initiatives. The secret military innovation and research programs, which Carter anticipated would revolutionize aerial warfare, were classified. Because the public was ignorant of these programs'

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[81] Jimmy Carter, interview by Brian Williams during Vietnam and the Presidency Conference, Boston, MA, 11 March 2006, https://www.archives.gov/files/presidential-libraries/events/vietnam/pdf/transcript-04.pdf.
[82] Carter, interview by Brian Williams.

existence, the main thrust of Carter's defensive initiative did nothing to counter the perception that he was, at best, weak on the military, and at worst, actively undermining the military's capability.[83]

During his presidency, Carter took action to strengthen the military through technological innovation and increased budget. He approved a substantial pay raise for servicemembers, and he supported a number of veterans' support programs. Though cognizant of the post-Vietnam War gap between the American public and the military, Carter did not create a compelling narrative to improve civil-military relations. In a manner consistent with how he handled other issues, Carter chose to let his actions speak for themselves and predominantly focused his narrative on the external Soviet audience. As a result, his efforts to improve military capability likely did little to improve public perception of the military. It would take a president who combined increased funding and military modernization with a strong positive narrative about the military to finally sway public opinion and erode post-Vietnam War sentiments. Ronald Reagan, former actor, governor, and skilled communicator, was ideally suited for such a role.

[83] Carter, *White House Diary*, 450.

Chapter 3

President Reagan's Rhetoric about the Military

The contrast between President Carter and his successor, President Ronald Wilson Reagan, could not have been more dramatic. While Carter was little known to the American public when he announced his candidacy for president, Reagan was famous as both an actor and a politician. Born and raised in Illinois, Reagan became interested in the performing arts while attending a small liberal arts college. After a few years working at a radio station, Reagan made a screen test for Warner Brothers that led to a seven-year contract, multiple movie and television roles, including the host of the popular show "General Electric Theater," and ultimately a six-year stint as the president of the Screen Actors Guild.[1] In the early years of his acting career, Reagan took a break from Hollywood to serve in the Army; for medical reasons, his World War II service was limited to stateside.[2] Originally a politically-active Democrat, Reagan campaigned for candidates such as Nixon. His family's experience during the Depression contributed to his original political affiliation: Reagan idolized Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his ability to use rhetoric to inspire confidence and courage during the Depression.[3] His beliefs in big-business capitalism and minimal government interventions led him to his 1962 switch to the Republican party.[4] In October 1964, Reagan gave the speech "A Time for Choosing" in support of Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign. Although Goldwater lost the race, the speech, still referred as one of the most impactful speeches in 20th century American politics, launched Reagan's political career.[5] After two terms as the governor of California, Reagan defeated Carter in the presidential election and

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[1] "Reagan's Pre-Presidential Biographical Sketch Timeline," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sreference/reagan-s-pre-presidential-biographical-sketch-timeline.
[2] "Reagan's Pre-Presidential Biographical Sketch Timeline," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[3] M. Stephen Weatherford and Lorraine M. McDonnell, "Ideology and Economic Policy," in *Looking Back on the Reagan Presidency*, ed. Larry Berman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 124.
[4] Weatherford and McDonnell, "Ideology and Economic Policy," 126.
[5] David Keene, "When a Changed Mind Changed the World," *The Washington Times*, 27 October 2014, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/oct/27/keene-when-a-changed-mind-changed-the-world/.

entered office as a well-known public figure with a focus on and skill for mobilizing popular support.[6]

This chapter will study a number of President Reagan's presidential speeches, notable interactions with the public regarding the military, and public responses to significant military events. Studying how Reagan chose to represent the military to the public in these instances provides insight into the strength and consistency of Reagan's narrative about the military institution. Reagan mentioned the military often in his many memorable speeches, and he presented a consistent picture of both the military itself and its relationship with society. Examining this presidential narrative about the military can help us understand what influence he had on improving civil-military relations in the late Cold War.

Ronald Reagan articulated his focus on improving public perception of the military during his campaign. Upon accepting the Republican nomination at the Republican National Convention on July 17, 1980, he directly addressed the challenges of maintaining a combat-effective volunteer army. Criticizing President Carter, Reagan said that Carter's claims of supporting servicemembers were contradicted by low military pay and benefits that made many enlisted personnel eligible for food stamps. Reagan stated that he supported increasing pay and benefits to enable the recruitment of "highly motivated men and women in our volunteer forces" that would be "ready for an instant call in case of an emergency."[7] Reagan thus implied that the current force was underqualified to fulfill its national security responsibility. He described American allies as unconvinced that the United States was capable and willing to operate as a world leader. Reagan suggested that military credibility was determined by the military's ability to recruit qualified personnel. Within a few paragraphs of his speech, Reagan linked together the concepts of military credibility, its ability to adequately defend national security, and the credibility of the United States in the eyes of key allies. By addressing

[6] Weatherford and McDonnell, "Ideology and Economic Policy," 127.
[7] Ronald Reagan, "Republican National Convention Acceptance Speech," (address, Detroit Michigan, 17 July 1980), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/7-17-80.

concerns about the military's ability to recruit qualified personnel, Reagan demonstrated an understanding that the American public did not view the military as an appealing career option.

During his inaugural address on January 20, 1981, Reagan emphasized his commitment to national security allies and used a metaphor of military service to inspire civilian society. He stated that he would strengthen historical alliances, and though he and the American people sought peace, they would not seek peace at the expense of national security. To be able to respond to threats, Reagan stated that the United Sates must maintain strength and prioritize military capability.

Although Reagan did not discuss the state of the military or the public's perception of it during his inaugural address, he used military service to evoke an ideal of dedication to the country's commitment to freedom. Reagan described the tributes to heroes that could be viewed from the west front of the Capitol, where the speech was given. He briefly mentioned George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, before highlighting Arlington National Cemetery and the soldiers of American wars that were buried there. He mentioned well-known battles during which these soldiers had died, including in the list the "hundred rice paddies and jungles of a place called Vietnam."[8] He then told a lengthy story about a World War I soldier who had written in his diary, "America must win this war. Therefore I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone."[9] Reagan noted that though Americans will not need to sacrifice what this soldier did, the current crisis required Americans to believe in their own abilities to accomplish great things in the face of hardship. By using American soldiers as an ideal for service and sacrifice, Reagan contributed to public perception of military service as honorable, patriotic, and dedicated to the health and well-being of the nation, characteristics to which, he implied, all American citizens should strive. Furthermore, by specifically referencing not just the Vietnam War as a whole, but also the many unknown skirmishes and battles that made up Vietnam, Reagan included the

[8] Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," (address, Washington, DC, 20 January 1981), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/inaugural-address-january-20-1981.
[9] Reagan, "Inaugural Address," 20 January 1981.

entire generation of Vietnam-era servicemembers in this image of respect and sacrifice. In this way, Reagan again placed emphasis on rebuilding the public image of the military in the wake of that unpopular war.

In his first State of the Union on January 26, 1982, Reagan led with a discussion of domestic issues, covering the economy, the role of government, and health care and focused on differentiating his approach from that of Carter. In his discussion of domestic issues, Reagan tied military capability and credibility on the international stage to military self-perception and public perception at home, saying "Together we've begun to restore that margin of military safety that ensures peace. Our country's uniform is being worn once again with pride."[10] Later in the speech, Reagan linked foreign policy success directly to military capability: "Our foreign policy is a policy of strength, fairness, and balance. By restoring America's military credibility, by pursuing peace at the negotiating table wherever both sides are willing to sit down in good faith, and by regaining the respect of America's allies and adversaries alike, we have strengthened our country's position as a force for peace and progress in the world."[11] Reagan justified his continued efforts to grow military strength by framing it as a long-term goal of mutual military reduction with the Soviet Union. To accomplish this, paradoxically, Reagan argued that strength was needed for negotiations, necessitating a military build-up: "it is essential that we negotiate from a position of strength. There must be a real incentive for the Soviets to take these talks seriously. This requires that we rebuild our defenses."[12] Reagan's speech made it clear that he viewed the Soviet threat as the impetus for the military build-up, and that he considered military credibility, both in the eyes of the American public and the international community, as essential to establishing American strength.

For his second State of the Union on January 25, 1983, Reagan again

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[10] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 26 January 1982), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/12682c.

[11] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," 26 January 1982.

[12] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," 26 January 1982.

concentrated on the economy and national security, while also highlighting the improved public perception of the military. In an effort to stabilize the federal budget, he proposed a one-year freeze on domestic spending programs, to include federal civilian and military pay and pension programs. When he announced this during the State of the Union, he included an apology to military servicemembers, saying that for years they had received less than they deserved for their service, but that he was confident that they would understand that the sacrifice was required and must be fairly shared across the government.[13] Despite the proposed pay freeze, Reagan explained that the country's economic troubles were caused by rampant domestic spending, rather than defense expenditures. Reagan pointed out that "Taken as a percentage of the gross national product, our defense spending happens to be only about four-fifths of what it was in 1970."[14] To ensure the health and security of the nation, Reagan stated that an economic plan must be instituted that was bipartisan, fair, prudent, and realistic, but also restored the strength of national defense. He then outlined his proposal to save $55 billion in defense spending over five years without atrophying defense capabilities. Summarizing his accomplishments with regards to defense thus far in his presidency, Reagan highlighted his administration's restoration of the military from a state of decay. He specified that increased military pay, sufficient military training, a good military strategy, and modernized military technology were essential to this restoration, resulting in the American uniform again being worn with pride, one of his recurring references to public perception of the military and military self-perception.[15]

With these words, Reagan sent two significant messages to the American public. First, by ascribing an understanding and acceptance of sacrifice to American servicemembers, Reagan painted an image of the military as composed of members of society who were selfless, honorable, and willing to give what was necessary, even to

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[13] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 25 January 1983), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/12583c.

[14] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," 25 January 1983.

[15] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," 25 January 1983.

their own disadvantage, to the needs of the nation. This made servicemembers exemplars of citizenship, rather than subsections of society to be looked down on by the broader American public. Second, Reagan attempted to divorce national security concerns, including military pay and benefits, from the larger discussion of the federal budget. Essentially, Reagan was arguing that national security was so important that, for the good of the nation, it could not face the same budget scrutiny that other programs faced. According to Reagan's logic, because the military was necessary for national security, military expenditures were not only above scrutiny, but they were also indispensable for the very existence of the nation. Thus, if Americans valued the nation and its continued commitment to its founding values, they must also value the military and its contributions to ensuring national security.

Reagan's October 23, 1983 response to the bombing of the Beirut International Airport in Lebanon provided an example of him continuing to strengthen military credibility. The attack resulted from a truck loaded with over 12,000 pounds of explosives that crashed through the perimeter of the US contingent of the multi-national force at Beirut International Airport. The ensuing explosion resulted in the deaths of 241 US military personnel. A post-event commission report identified and criticized sub-standard military policies and practices.[16] In discussing the incident, Reagan could have placed blame on the military by explaining either that unreasonable risks had been taken or that technical incompetence was somehow responsible. Instead, he stated, "If there is to be blame, it properly rests here in this office and with this President. I accept responsibility for the bad as well as the good."[17] In his diaries, Reagan worried that the commission's finding that officers had been negligent would have a detrimental effect on the families who had lost loved ones in the event.[18] By taking responsibility, Reagan prevented the attack from becoming a symbol of military incompetence reminiscent of the Vietnam War or Desert One. Instead, he tied his own credibility to that of the

[16] Department of Defense, *Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23, 1983*, 20 December 1983, https://fas.org/irp/threat/beirut-1983.pdf.
[17] Richard Halloran, "Reagan as Military Commander," *The New York Times*, 15 January 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/15/magazine/reagan-as-military-commander.html.
[18] Ronald Reagan and Douglas Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 207.

military.

In his January 25, 1984 State of the Union address, Reagan focused on a message of national restoration, with a focus on not just the economy, but also the values that undergird American society. With a subtle reference to the ideas laid out in Carter's "malaise" speech, Reagan stated that "the cynics were wrong; America never was a sick society."[19] Instead, Reagan painted a picture of a United States that had come together on "bedrock values of faith, family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom" to emerge stronger from past years' challenges.[20] The irony of Reagan's contrasting of his vision with those of the "cynics" is that his vision was very close to that laid out by Carter. Reagan tied public perception of the military, and budgetary support for the military, directly into his depiction of national health, stating "The Congress deserves America's thanks for helping us restore pride and credibility to our military. And I hope that you're as proud as I am of the young men and women in uniform who have volunteered to man the ramparts in defense of freedom and whose dedication, valor, and skill increases so much our chance of living in a world at peace."[21] Reagan stated that this new national unity made it possible for the United States to act as a force for good and peace, bringing "light where there was darkness, warmth where there was cold, medicine where there was disease, food where there was hunger, and peace where there was only bloodshed."

This speech again demonstrated that Reagan measured military credibility both by the international community's perception of warfighting capability and American public perception. Reagan very clearly laid out the logic that connected public perception of the military, which he suggested should be a feeling of pride, with military capability to maintain safety and security for the United States. At the same time, Reagan likened positive public support for the military to other markers of domestic health, demonstrating that he viewed perception of the military as important for overall national

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[19] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 25 January 1984), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/12584e.

[20] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," 25 January 1984.

[21] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," 25 January 1984.

well-being. By tying the American audience's support to the military to his own, Reagan stamped presidential approval on public support for the troops, thus norming this sentiment. His message underscored that these unifying values and beliefs were the very things that enabled the United States to be a "force for good and peace" in the world. This logic meant that public support to the military was a critical factor for American global strength and security.

On Remembrance Day, now known as Memorial Day, in May of 1984, Reagan spoke at the Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. During his speech, he described America's response to the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial on Veterans' Day in 1982 and how it served to heal the nation. "As America watched them - some in wheelchairs, all of them proud - there was a feeling that this nation - that as a nation we were coming together again and that we had, at long last, welcomed the boys home."[22] Reagan read from a *Washington Post* article that described how, the night before the Vietnam Memorial dedication, former marine Herbie Petit went to dinner with several other former marines. Upon leaving the restaurant, a group of college students stood and cheered for Petit and his friends. Petit was overcome with emotion and said that cheering made the whole week worthwhile.[23] Reagan did not mention it in the speech, but he had attended the reading of names of fallen soldiers during this dedication. After attending the name-reading ceremony, Reagan had emotionally told reporters, "The names that are being read are of men who died for freedom just as surely as any men who ever fought for this country. We're just beginning to appreciate that they were fighting for a just cause."[24]

In his Remembrance Day speech, Reagan not only spoke about the importance of honoring Vietnam veterans, but, by advocating for reenergizing efforts to find missing in

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[22] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at Memorial Day Ceremonies Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict," (address, Arlington National cemetery, Arlington, VA, 28 May 1984), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan.*
[23] Phil McCombs, et al., "'Whole Again'" *The Washington Post*, 14 November 1982, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/11/15/whole-again/1904fd3b-4fab-45a3-9120-a9b32dfdcfa3/.
[24] Ed Bruske and Kenneth Bredemeier, "Vietnam War Dead's Names Read, Remembered," *The Washington Post*, 11 November 1982, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1982/11/11/vietnam-war-deads-names-read-remembered/bbd48d31-ae90-43b3-93f5-874b9ee585e7/.

action (MIA) soldiers, also provided a recommended way to do so. Reagan highlighted the suffering of the families of the MIA: "Vietnam is not over for them. They cannot rest until they know the fate of those they loved and watched march off to serve their country." Reagan linked the nation's closure in Vietnam to the families' understanding of what happened to their missing members: "An end to America's involvement in Vietnam cannot come before we've achieved the fullest possible accounting of those missing in action."[25]

Reagan's words reinvigorated the emotion and support for veterans that surrounded the Vietnam War memorial dedication. He emphasized the newfound unity of groups that had been at odds during the Vietnam war – Marines and college students could not have been further apart culturally. Building on his 1982 comments to reporters that Vietnam veterans fought for the same American ideals that American soldiers had always fought for, he suggested an active way for American citizens to support Vietnam veterans. Reagan's proposal to ramp up efforts to find MIA soldiers asked for more than passive support for Vietnam veterans. He provided additional impetus for doing so by tying the fate of individual soldiers and their families to the collective status of the United States: without resolving the fates of the MIA, the United States would also be unable to resolve its own fate. Reagan's words in this speech tied the collective public's attitudes and actions, along with the nation's closure with regards to Vietnam, to the fate of Vietnam veterans. This linkage challenged any persistent "them and us" mentality that civilians may have had about Vietnam veterans and sought to close the divide between the military and society.

On June 6, 1984, Reagan gave a speech at the site of the U.S. Ranger Monument at Pointe du Hoc, France, to a crowd of Normandy invasion veterans. He described the danger and risks of the Normandy invasion, wondering rhetorically why anyone would take such a great risk. He answered his own musings by saying that the soldiers were motivated by an understanding that they were fighting for liberty and freedom from tyranny, with the knowledge that their fellow citizens back home supported them. Even in this instance, Reagan made sure to include the importance of public support for

[25] Reagan, "Remarks at Memorial Day Ceremonies Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict."

military action: how it impacted the soldiers and made them a more lethal and credible force. Reagan went on to tie the fighting at Normandy to the current conflict, saying "We are bound today by what bound us 40 years ago, the same loyalties, traditions, and beliefs. We're bound by reality. The strength of America's allies is vital to the United States, and the American security guarantee is essential to the continued freedom of Europe's democracies. We were with you then; we are with you now. Your hopes are our hopes, and your destiny is our destiny." Reagan added another layer of seriousness to the comparison, saying that they should all make a vow to the dead to not fail or forsake them. With these words, Reagan imbued a sense of duty, a requirement that America and her allies must continue to advance with military superiority, and the support of the populace, to counter threats that oppose liberty.[26] With one speech, Reagan sent messages to both the veterans in front of him, his domestic audience, his current military servicemembers, and his external audience, the Soviet Union.

After being re-elected, Reagan gave a second inaugural address on January 21, 1985, during which he portrayed the rebuilding of the military as part of the overall American legacy of greatness. In his speech, he painted an image of a revitalized country with challenges still ahead, saying "We are creating a nation once again vibrant, robust, and alive. But there are many mountains yet to climb."[27] He focused heavily on the economy, and the next day's *New York Times* only referenced his economic talking points.[28] His discussion of the military had a strategic external bent: he concentrated on the need to rebuild military capabilities and strengthen defenses to create the strength necessary for peace. He described an ideal future "when we made sincere efforts at meaningful arms reductions and by rebuilding our defenses, our economy, and

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[26] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Normandy Invasion, D-day," (address, Pointe du Hoc, France, 6 June 1984), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60684a.

[27] Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," (address, Washington, DC, 21 January 1985), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/12185a.

[28] Bernard Weinraub, "President Sees U.S. at 'Turning Point' as 2d Term Begins: Familiar Themes Echoed," *The New York Times*, 22 January 1985, https://www.nytimes.com/1985/01/22/business/reagan-gives-hint-on-gnp-washington-jan-21.html.

developing new technologies, helped preserve peace in a troubled world." [29] Although he praised the progress that had been made with restoring defense capabilities, he stressed that the threat of the Soviet Union required more to be done. Only by strengthening the military, Reagan argued, could the United States eventually eliminate the need to use it: "There is only one way safely and legitimately to reduce the cost of national security, and that is to reduce the need for it." Reagan wrapped up his national security talking points with a discussion of his efforts to fund the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Reagan's aspirational plan to bolster US missile defenses. Although he did not address domestic perception of the military, his message validated the necessity of a strong military for national security.

On December 16, 1985, Reagan gave remarks at a memorial service in Fort Campbell, Kentucky for the members of the 101st Airborne Division who died in an airplane crash in Newfoundland. His words about the deceased were centered around peace: rather than calling them warriors, he referred to them as idealists and peacemakers, suggesting that their service in the military was tied to honorable ideals. He described not only the individuals lost, but also their collective talents and values: "For lost were not only the 248 but all of the talent, the wisdom, and the idealism that they had accumulated; lost too were their experience and their enormous idealism."[30] He described the servicemembers' unwavering commitment and unfailing potential, likening their efforts to "a perfect expression of the best of the Judeo-Christian tradition." [31] As peacemakers, Reagan said, they were referenced by Jesus Christ when he said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."[32] The remarks in this speech were understandably more romantic and emotional than a State of the Union address because of the context of recently killed soldiers and speaking in front of the fallen soldiers' unit members and families. Even so, the characterization of the fallen and the military seems exceptionally positive, ascribing to them characteristics of bringing

[29] Reagan, "Inaugural Address," 21 January 1985.
[30] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for the Members of the 101st Airborne Division Who Died in the Airplane Crash in Gander, Newfoundland," (address, Fort Campbell, KY, 16 December 1985), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/121685a.
[31] Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service in Fort Campbell, Kentucky."
[32] Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service in Fort Campbell, Kentucky."

peace. To a nation still suffering from the Vietnam hangover, the idea of someone who was in the military to bring peace would be much more appealing than the idea of a warrior training and equipping to wage and win wars. With this speech, Reagan created an image of gentle peace-bringing warriors that would appeal to the American public.

In his February 6, 1985 State of the Union, Reagan reflected on the first four years of his presidency, describing his successes and aspirations for greater accomplishments. Within this discussion, he justified his defense budgets, stating that defense expenditures took up a smaller portion of the overall federal budget than they had in previous years. Two days prior to this speech, Reagan had proposed a large defense budget that had drawn ire from both parties in Congress.[33] Likely in response to this, Reagan's speech focused on justifying building up the military. He argued that "we must not relax our efforts to restore military strength just as we near our goal of a fully equipped, trained, and ready professional corps."[34] He said that military spending was an investment in peace and freedom, and that the negative connotation of the military-industry complex evaporates in a time of crisis. Reagan highlighted the United States as a place where aspirational dreams could come true and used two people to exemplify this possibility. One of his examples was Jean Nguyen, who had left Vietnam ten years earlier, after the fall of Saigon and moved to the United States, where she studied, learned English, and graduated high school. In May of 1985, Jean would graduate from the United States Military Academy (USMA) and commission into the Army. Reagan called Jean an American hero, making two significant points about Jean and her path into the Army. First, attending and graduating from the USMA fully Americanized Jean, signifying that military service was something that imbued servicemembers with true "American" qualities. Second, Jean's decision to join the military made her a hero, suggesting that military service is something to be admired, praised, heralded – a marked deviation from the negative post-Vietnam public sentiment about the military.

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[33] Bernard Weinraub, "Reagan Sketches Legislative Goals for the Next Four Years," *The New York Times*, 7 February 1985, https://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/07/us/reagan-sketches-legislative-goals-for-next-4-years.html.

[34] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 6 February 1985), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/20685e.

In Reagan's February 4, 1986 State of the Union, he did not explicitly mention the institution of the military, but he continued to emphasize the importance of a commitment to national defense and support for the defense budget. As a result, this speech validated the necessity of the military to ensure national security: "the threat from Soviet forces, conventional and strategic, from the Soviet drive for domination, from the increase in espionage and state terror remains great. This is reality. Closing our eyes will not make reality disappear."[35] Rather than the nation closing its collective eyes, Reagan advocated for budgetary support to national defense, which implicitly elicited public support for the military institution because of its centrality to national security.

On February 27, 1986, Reagan gave a speech on national security that was broadcast live from the Oval Office. In this speech, he stated that the military and defense posture had been in bad shape five years previous, but had been vastly improved, largely because of increased defense spending. Reagan outlined specific problems internal to the military, saying "It was not just years of declining defense spending but a crisis in recruitment and retention and the outright cancellation of programs vital to our security."[36] Reagan described the previous military as deserving of low public confidence, and he detailed problems of broken down aircraft, un-seaworthy ships, and non-combat ready army units. In contrast, Reagan stated, a focused effort had reversed these negative trends and created a revitalized 1986 military. "Pride in our Armed Forces has been restored. More qualified men and women want to join and remain in the military. In 1980 about half of our Army's recruits were high school graduates; last year 91 percent had high school diplomas." [37] Again, in this speech, Reagan tied the health of the military to overall national security. Additionally, by detailing the problems that had plagued the military in post-Vietnam years and asserting that they had been remedied, Reagan provided information that could assuage the American public's lack of confidence in the military. Now, the American public could differentiate between two

[35] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 4 February 1986), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/20486a.
[36] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on National Security," (address, Washington, DC, February 26, 1986), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/22686b.
[37] Reagan, "Address to the Nation on National Security."

militaries: a first one that fought in Vietnam and barely limped through the early post-Vietnam years, and a second one that emerged as a more capable force, and thus more deserving of support and respect, under Reagan's cultivating hand.[38]

In his January 27, 1987 State of the Union, Reagan summed up the accomplishments of his years in office and again mentioned the pride with which the military wore their uniforms. He described recent economic gains, to include lower interest rates and a decreased unemployment rate. Although these gains were significant, Reagan emphasized that America's state of peace was the most important thing. "Freedom was on the march," he stated, by means of restored defense, alliances, and US leadership in the world. Immediately following this statement, he called servicemembers "our sons and daughters."[39] With these words, Reagan linked a proud and capable military directly to national defense and to American society. Military servicemembers, he was saying, were not another subsection of society to blame or look down on; military servicemembers are us, and they are of us – our flesh and blood, part of the family. Again, Reagan created a deliberate narrative that sought to positively join the American public with the military institution.

On May 27, 1987, Reagan spoke at a memorial service in Jacksonville, FL for crewmembers of the USS *Stark* who died after an Iraqi jet fired two missiles at the ship during the Iran-Iraq War. Reagan's speech mourned the loss of crewmembers. He called the deceased servicemembers heroes, and he asked the public to carry on to honor them. While likely providing solace to the deceased's friends and family members, the speech also served to bond the broader public to the military mission. In stating his appreciation for the service of the deceased, Reagan also ascribed a similar appreciation to the broader public, thus suggesting that all members of society understood and appreciated the sacrifice of military members. "So, too, I believe that most Americans today know the price of freedom in this uneasy world… So, it's a simple truth we reaffirm here today:

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[38] James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).
[39] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 27 January 1987), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/012787a.

Young Americans of the U.S.S. *Stark* gave up their lives so that the terrible moments of the past would not be repeated, so that wider war and greater conflict could be avoided, so that thousands, and perhaps millions, of others might be spared the final sacrifice these men so willingly made." [40] Similar to his speech at Fort Campbell, Reagan once again suggested that these military servicemembers were heroes, drawing on the words of American author Herman Wouk, who described the country's uniformed servicemembers as heroes who stand guard in the night. "The men of the USS *Stark* stood guard in the night," Reagan proclaimed. "Yes, they were ordinary men who did extraordinary things. Yes, they were heroes."[41] For their heroic actions, Reagan stated that Americans would always be proud and grateful for the sacrifice that enabled Americans to possess America. At the end of the speech, Reagan gave Americans a task associated with their respect and gratitude for the sacrifice. "The men of the USS Stark have protected us; they have done their duty. Now let us do ours." [42] Reagan asked Americans to keep faith with their sacrifice and to "understand that these men made themselves immortal by dying for something immortal, that theirs is the best to be asked of any life -- a sharing of the human heart, a sharing in the infinite. In giving themselves for others, they made themselves special, not just to us but to their God." [43] As with the speech at Fort Campbell, Reagan imbued military sacrifice with religious significance. Even more significantly, he tasked the American people with support for veterans; by asking them to remember deceased military members as special, he inherently asked the American people to consider all military service as exemplifying the best of humanity, a marked deviation from how many Americans thought immediately post-Vietnam.

In the January 25, 1988 State of the Union, Reagan did not discuss the military as an institution, instead focusing on the budget, families, and abortion, while concentrating his comments on national defense on the Strategic Defense Initiative and the funding it required. He emphasized his focus on creating a future free of the shadow of nuclear

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[40] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service for Crewmembers of the U.S.S. *Stark* in Jacksonville, Florida," (address, Jacksonville, FL, 27 May 1987), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/052287a.
[41] Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service for Crewmembers of the U.S.S. *Stark*."
[42] Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service for Crewmembers of the U.S.S. *Stark*."
[43] Reagan, "Remarks at a Memorial Service for Crewmembers of the U.S.S. *Stark*."

weapons via strategic offensive arms and the Strategic Defense Initiative. He justified the cost of SDI, saying that it would reduce the risk of war and nuclear weapons for all humans, while also providing insurance against a nuclear accident.[44] Of all Reagan's State of the Union addresses, this one provided the least focus on and narrative about the military.

Yet he soon returned to that theme. At a Veterans' Day ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial on November 11, 1988, Reagan spoke at length about the gap between the American public and Vietnam veterans. He described Vietnam veterans' longtime place in society as if "they stood in a chill wind, as if on a winter's night watch." He described the gap between where they stood and the American public: "we knew them not… we heard them not." Reagan described this gap as now mended, saying "The night is over. We see these men and know them once again – and know how much we owe them… we say we love you." Reagan enumerated the ways in which the divide had been healed, describing the POW-MIA flag that was flown on Memorial Day, Veterans' Day, and POW-MIA Recognition Day, the efforts to bring home those killed in Vietnam and Laos, and the creation of a Department of Veterans' Affairs and improved veterans' benefits. Reagan stated that service in Vietnam had become "universally recognized" as a badge of pride. He implied that finally the American public viewed Vietnam veterans as heroes, thus healing a crucial societal divide: "as I approach the end of my service and I see Vietnam veterans take their rightful place among America's heroes, it appears to me that we have healed."[45] Reagan finished the speech by reading a note that he and his wife had composed to leave on the Vietnam War memorial: "``Our young friends -- yes, young friends, for in our hearts you will always be young, full of the love that is youth, love of life, love of joy, love of country -- you fought for your country and for its safety and for the freedom of others with strength and courage. We love you for it. We honor you. And we have faith that, as He does all His sacred children, the Lord will bless you

[44] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 25 January 1988), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/012588d.
[45] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Veterans Day Ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," (address, Washington, DC, 11 November 1988), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/111188b.

and keep you, the Lord will make His face to shine upon you and give you peace, now and forever more."[46]

Reagan gave a great many speeches over the course of his presidency. What is striking about the speeches regarding the military institution across his eight years in office is how consistent he was in his message. In speech after speech, he emphasized the significance of the Soviet threat, the troubling post-Vietnam divide between the military and society, the need to bridge this divide, and his appreciation for the sacrifices of military servicemembers. With his repetitive, clear, and consistent messaging, he was able to build a narrative that likely contributed so some reconciliation between the military and society. His words, however, were only one part of his effort; he also took a great deal of concrete action to bolster the military, strengthen its relationship with society, and increase its ability to counter the Soviet threat.

[46] Reagan, "Remarks at the Veterans Day Ceremony."

Chapter 4

The Great Communicator: President Reagan's Context and Actions

Analysis of President Reagan's landmark speeches reveals that he consistently put forth a strong and straightforward message about the relationship between the public and the military: it was central to national security, had been fraught, and must be improved. Although Reagan's rhetoric was strong, without underlying action, his words would have been merely lip service. While the previous chapter addressed how Reagan portrayed the military in public speeches and interactions with the public, this chapter describes the actions Reagan took with regards to the military. Assessing how well his actions lined up with his words provides insight as to effectiveness of his narrative on effecting change in post-Vietnam War civil-military dynamics.

Reagan's approach to the military institution was shaped by his perspective on national security. Reagan entered office with a clear priority to strengthen the national posture against the Soviet threat, whose military buildup he found extremely dangerous and called the "biggest in the history of man."[1] To counter this threat, Reagan's approach, which unsurprisingly became known as the Reagan Doctrine, "committed the US to resisting Soviet and Soviet-supported aggression wherever it arose, to building US-style democracies in Third World countries, and to rolling back communism by aiding anticommunist insurgencies."[2] This approach fit well with a United States that was tired of the post-Vietnam reluctance to use military force to defend US interests overseas.[3] To execute this doctrine, Reagan needed a strong and capable military and the support of the populace.

Reagan believed that rebuilding US military strength was central to a successful strategy against the Soviets. He believed that US military strength and security

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[1] Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns: Reagan and National Security," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 86.
[2] Christopher Layne, "Requiem for the Reagan Doctrine," in *Assessing the Reagan Years*, ed. David Boaz (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1988), 98.
[3] Layne, "Requiem for the Reagan Doctrine," 97.

capabilities had degraded during the 1970s. Reagan especially blamed Carter for weakening US resolve and failing to advance military technology with his decisions to cancel the neutron bomb, cut and delay the MX missile and Trident submarine, and halt production of the B-1 bomber. To Reagan, these choices represented the loss of US strategic superiority, as well as brought about naval, tactical aircraft, and long-range bomber deficits. The B-1 decision especially rankled Reagan; he felt that the loss of the bomber symbolized the "unease on the part of the people about our entire defense posture."[4]

To right the ship and give the United States the capability to meet global Soviet threats, Reagan's sought to modernize both strategic and conventional forces.[5] By building dominant military superiority, Reagan believed that he could bring peace that would be reminiscent of the calm that followed World War II. Reagan sought US invulnerability and victory, rather than simple survival.[6] Thus, Reagan sought to vastly improve military capabilities.

Upon inauguration, Reagan immediately set about increasing the defense budget. His proposed defense budget would have resulted in over 10 percent real growth between 1980 and 1986. This was a "revolutionary proposal;" the defense budget had never been increased for more than three years in a row during peacetime.[7] Reagan felt strongly that calculating the defense budget based on tax revenue and number-crunching was inadequate. In his "Star Wars" speech in March 1983, Reagan argued against this way of thinking, saying "What seems to have been lost in all this debate is the simple truth of how a defense budget is arrived at. It isn't done by deciding to spend a certain number of dollars… We start by considering what must be done to maintain peace and review all the possible threats against our security. Then a strategy for strengthening peace and defending against those threats must be agreed upon. And, finally, our defense establishment must be evaluated to see what is necessary to protect against any or all of

[4] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 87.
[5] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 85.
[6] Hugh Heclo, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 26–27.
[7] Lawrence J. Korb, "The Reagan Defense Budget and Program: The Buildup That Collapsed," in *Assessing the Reagan Years*, ed. David Boaz (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1988), 83.

the potential threats. The cost of achieving these ends is totaled up, and the result is the budget for national defense."[8] Essentially, he was arguing, the defense budget should be as big as America needed it to be.

Reagan's defense budget was groundbreaking not only in its size, but also in its distribution of funds. In 1980, the bulk of the defense budget, 68 percent, went to operating costs, while only 32 percent went to investment (developing and procuring new equipment and technology). Reagan increased the investment allocation to almost 50 percent, the highest in 25 years, which would enable the research and development of new military technologies.

In the first six years of his presidency, Reagan's budget and defense policies resulted in the purchase of over 3,000 combat aircraft, 3,700 strategic missiles, 200 ships, and 10,000 tanks.[9] The defense budget continued to grow through 1985, despite Congress instituting cuts. Reagan and his team had anticipated cuts and built in a buffer, resulting in a 16 percent increase in the defense budget from 1982 to 1985, even after Congressional cuts and inflation adjustments.[10] In January 1985, Reagan proposed a five-year defense spending program of $2 trillion. If approved, this would have increased defense spending from $287 billion in 1985 to $487 billion in 1990. In Reagan's second term, however, Congress finally began significantly cutting his proposed budgets, slashing the 1986 request, for example by 10 percent. As Lawrence Korb, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Materiel Readiness during Reagan's first term, observed, as of 1988, "Ronald Reagan may have the dubious distinction of presiding over the biggest peacetime defense buildup and the biggest defense decline in the nation's history."[11] Congressional cuts may have reflected public opinion about defense spending. At the beginning of Reagan's presidency, 51 percent Americans believed the United States spent too little on defense, and only 15 percent believed the United States spent too much. Just 22 months later, the collective public opinion on defense spending had

[8] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," (address, Washington, DC, 23 March 1983), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/32383d.
[9] Korb, "The Reagan Defense Budget and Program," 84.
[10] Richard Stubbing, "The Defense Program: Buildup or Binge?," *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 849–50.
[11] Korb, "The Reagan Defense Budget and Program," 85.

inverted: 16 percent Americans believed the United States spent too little on defense, and 41 percent believed the United States spent too much. This trend perpetuated throughout Reagan's presidency, and by 1987, 44 percent of Americans believed the United States spent too much on defense, while only 14 percent believed defense spending should increase.[12]

Reagan planned to apply the increased defense budget to sweeping measures to improve strategic capabilities. In a statement made on October 3, 1981, Reagan laid out three objectives for his plan to overhaul American strategic capabilities and described five means of accomplishing them. The objectives were to deter Soviet action against American people and allies, ensure US ability to respond to Soviet growth and expansion, and enable arms reduction by signaling American resolve to counter the Soviet build up. The means by which these objectives were to be achieved were to revitalize the bomber force with the B-1 and a follow-on stealth bomber, the continued development of Trident submarines and the development of a sea-based ballistic missile, the completion and deployment of the MX missiles with a future decision on long-term deployment options, improved strategic communications and control, and improved strategic defenses.[13]

Reagan's decision to resurrect the B-1 bomber that Carter had canceled stemmed from his belief that the B-52 was not the technological solution that Carter had found it to be. As a remedy, in February 1981, Reagan asked for $2.5 billion for a two-phase plan to modernize the Air Force. First, the Air Force would build a fleet of long-range bombers, and second, the Air Force would develop a stealth aircraft.[14] The new-long range bomber was necessary because the B-52 would not be capable of penetrating Soviet air defenses, and stealth capability would not be available until at least five years later. The B-1 was

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[12] "Americans' Views on U.S. Military and Military Spending (Trends)," Gallup poll, https://news.gallup.com/poll/228146/americans-views-military-military-spending-trends.aspx.
[13] Richard Halloran, "Reagan Drops Mobile MX Plan, Urges Basing Missiles in Silos; Proposes Building B-1 Bomber," *The New York Times*, 3 October 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/03/us/reagan-drops-mobile-mx-plan-urges-basing-missiles-in-silos-proposes.html.
[14] Richard Halloran, "Reagan Moving on Start of Fleet of New Bombers," The New York Times, 22 February 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/22/us/reagan-moving-on-start-of-fleet-of-new-bombers.html; Associated Press "Background Statement from White House on MX Missile and B-1 Bomber," The New York Times, 3 October 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/03/us/background-statement-from-white-house-on-mx-missile-and-b-1-bomber.html.

intended to fill the capability gap during the interim years.[15] In addition to being a military capability, the B-1 was perceived as a political symbol, at least by several Democratic members of the House of Representatives. Representative Jim Wright reported that many House members were concerned that voting against the B-1 would result in them being considered "weak on defense." Similarly, Representative Thomas J. Downey, stated "The B-1 is a ribbon or a badge you can wear out there to prove you're tough-minded on defense."[16] Reagan also used the B-1 as a political symbol during the election of 1984. During a visit to the B-1 production facility while campaigning in October 1984, Reagan cited Mondale's support to Carter's decision to halt production of the B-1 as an attempt to weaken the military.[17] Thus the B-1, while a genuine attempt to improve military capability, also became an emblem of support to a strong defense.

The Trident program, which rung in at almost $60 billion, was intended to strengthen the nuclear triad and make the United States better able to counter Soviet nuclear capabilities. In total, the plan outlined building 20 Trident submarines, each loaded with 24 Trident II missiles, over 10 years.[18] This plan bolstered the United States' nuclear triad and countered the Russian nuclear threat by creating the ability to attack Soviet targets from a virtually invulnerable platform. The Trident capability, if fielded and successful, would increase the military's credibility in contributing to the defense of the United States.

A discussion of Reagan's efforts to strengthen US strategic capabilities would be remiss if it did not mention the SDI. Reagan saw this missile defense initiative as having groundbreaking potential for improving US strategic defenses; he referred to it as "the most important technological breakthrough in defense strategy in our lifetime" in his

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[15] Steven V. Roberts, "House Votes Funds for the B-1 and MX and Backs Reagan," The New York Times, 19 November 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/19/us/house-votes-funds-for-the-b-1-and-mx-and-backs-reagan.html.
[16] Roberts, "House Votes Funds for the B-1 and MX and Backs Reagan."
[17] Frances X. Clines, "Reagan at B-1 Factory Presses Attack on Rival," *The New York Times*, 23 October 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/23/us/reagan-at-b-1-factory-presses-attack-on-rival.html.
[18] Richard Halloran, "Reagan Expanding Trident Program," *The New York Times*, 6 February 1983, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/02/06/us/reagan-expanding-trident-program.html.

letter to Weinberger accepting his resignation.[19] Rather than being a single stand-alone program, SDI was a sweeping research program that encapsulated other strategic military capabilities and aspired to link them together into an impenetrable strategically defensive system.[20] While SDI did not yield an operational program, the weight and purpose that Reagan ascribed to it likely served to legitimize military capabilities that contributed to strategic defense.

These efforts to strengthen the US strategic capability received coverage both by Reagan and the press, but they did not represent the totality of Reagan's efforts to strengthen the military: Reagan was also intent on improving conventional military capability. The rationale for this was two-fold: first, a capable conventional force would enhance United States' overall credibility with the Soviets and NATO allies, and second, improving the US conventional force was directly tied into funding for the strategic force. Reagan's expensive efforts to improve national security, both strategically and conventionally, were at odds with the competing priority of strengthening the United States economically.

Building economic strength was as important to Reagan as building military strength; he viewed the economy and the military as the foundation for national power and capability to counter the Soviets.[21] To improve the economy, Reagan wanted to lower taxes to stimulate the economy and to minimize the size of government.[22] The means to achieve these economic aims ran counter to the financial requirements for building a strategically and conventionally dominant military; such an endeavor was necessarily very expensive. His challenge was to convince the American people, and by extension Congress, that massive budget expenditure increases were justified, despite seemingly contradictory economic priorities.

To achieve the required support for his massive defense budget increases, Reagan

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[19] Caspar W. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1990), 446.
[20] Ronald Reagan, foreword, 28 December 1984, *The President's Strategic Defensive Initiative – January 1985* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office: 3 January 1985), https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/10385a.
[21] W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham, eds., *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 4.
[22] Brownlee and Graham, *The Reagan Presidency*, 5.

needed to rebuild the American people's faith in the military, convince the American people of the urgency of countering the Soviet threat, and validate pulling funds from other areas of governance to pour into the military. The first requirement, rebuilding the American people's faith in the military, at first glance seems of questionable validity. A reasonable argument could be made that the seriousness of the Soviet threat would be sufficient to achieve public support for increased and expensive defense initiatives. Reagan's emphasis on improving the public perception of the institution of the military, as well as the accounts of Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense, however, make it clear that they believed that the public faith in the military was a critical aspect to American credibility and strategic capability.

Throughout his memoir, *Fighting for Peace*, Weinberger emphasized Reagan's belief that the federal government had neglected the military, which, along with the Vietnam War, contributed to the American public losing respect for the military institution. In fact, when he asked Weinberger to be Secretary of Defense, Reagan highlighted the simultaneous occurrence of the US military having sunken to a "lamentable state" and the Soviet Union growing its military capabilities.[23] Reagan was concerned that the lack of US military strength weakened the United States' stature in the eye of allies and partners. Military strength was essential to the policy toward the Soviet Union outlined in the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75, which he signed in January 1983. NSDD 75 outlined a plan to prevent "unacceptable behavior by inflicting costs that exceed gains." To credibly accomplish this, both the strategic and conventional forces required modernization.[24]

Perhaps even more concerning, Reagan feared that the United States lacked the will to regain military strength.[25] This concern for American resolve was where the American public's perception of the military was critical. The American public's poor opinion of the military could influence resolve in one of two ways: either the public could support revitalization to improve the military, or the public could view the military not worth the government funding it would take to revitalize it sufficiently to meet the

[23] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 14–15.
[24] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 95.
[25] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 15.

Soviet threat.

Reagan's task, then, was to convince the American public of the value and honor of the military so that the public would be more likely to support both defense funding to improve military capability and any future military operations against the Soviets. Both Reagan and Weinberger recognized that an important lesson from Vietnam was that American public opinion was critical if use of the military were to achieve political goals. Weinberger recalled repeatedly emphasizing to Reagan (and he emphasized repetitively in his memoirs) what is known as the Weinberger Doctrine. To be able to win militarily, three criteria must be met: US public opinion must support the operation, the military must have all resources at its disposal, and the United States must have a real intention to win.[26] The first requirement explicitly named US public opinion, but public perception of the military was directly linked to achieving each of these three requirements. If the American public's lack of support to the military precluded military funding, and thus prevented the military from achieving necessary capability and readiness, then the United States was unlikely to achieve its goals militarily. Additionally, if the US public did not fully support the operation in which the military participated, then the means available to the military were likely to be limited, which again would have constrained the military's ability to achieve strategic and political goals. Weinberger described how employing a military force without the means to win ""might very well tear at the fabric of our society, endangering the *single*-most critical element of a successful democracy: *a strong consensus of support and agreement for our basic purposes*."[27] As such, in a democracy like the United States, public perception of the military institution was directly related to its ability to effectively achieve strategic end states.

Weinberger made clear that this conception of the importance of American public perception was central to his and Reagan's approach to revitalizing the military. Weinberger most clearly stated this by saying, "military actions not fully supported by the American people cannot succeed."[28] To use US military power most effectively, then, Reagan understood he had to eliminate the post-Vietnam negativity toward and distrust of

[26] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 31.
[27] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 437.
[28] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 361.

the military, acknowledge the moral courage of those who fought in the Vietnam War, and be sure to provide the military with the means and resolve to win future conflicts.[29] Further, he recognized that continued poor public perception of the military would negatively affect defense policies. In turn, poor policies would make the military lose faith in its civilian leaders and decrease recruitment and retention. Once again, public perception of the military trickled down into significant credibility and capability issues: worsening recruitment and retention would further weaken US military capability and could contribute to the ultimate failure of the all-volunteer force.[30] Further complicating his attempts to reverse these negative trends, Reagan wanted to do this as quickly as possible to convince the Soviets they could not do what they wanted in places like Angola, Afghanistan, Cuba, and Ethiopia.[31]

This strategic perspective shaped Reagan's approach to revitalizing both the military's credibility, both to an international and domestic audience. Working within Reagan's guidance, Weinberger's priorities for military revitalization and the defense budget were enlistment and retention, compensation and support of the military, an increase in the number of Navy ships, and Air Force readiness, mobility, and firepower.[32] Reagan outlined his priorities for the conventional force during his "Star Wars" speech on March 23, 1983. He highlighted the Army's development and fielding of the first new tank in 20 years, modernization of the Air Force, and increasing the Navy's ships to a total of 600.[33]

In addition to bringing back the B-1 and pursuing stealth aircraft development, Reagan also concentrated on updating Air Force aircraft. During Reagan's time in office, the Air Force cut numbers of Vietnam-era F-4 Phantoms by more than 50 percent from 1,078 F-4s in 1980 to 448 in 1987. The number of F-106s, an obsolescent interceptor, was decreased from 142 to 5. Simultaneously, the numbers of new F-15 Eagles and F-16

[29] Ronald Reagan et al., *Reagan, in His Own Hand* (New York; London: Touchstone, 2002), 479.
[30] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 437.
[31] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 35.
[32] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 56.
[33] Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," 23 March 1983.

Fighting Falcons rose from 505 to 732 and from 156 to 944, respectively.[34] Additionally, Reagan funded and rushed production of the F-15E, which would become instrumental in air-to-ground warfare. Air Force mobility capabilities were augmented by the large C-5 cargo aircraft re-entering production, as well as the introduction of the KC-10 Extender, a refueling platform that was later used to fuel the F-111s that bombed Tripoli during El Dorado Canyon in 1986.[35]

The target number of 600 naval ships was based on the perceived Russian threat. In testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee on February 5, 1981, the Secretary of the Navy, John F. Lehman Jr., stated the Navy needed one-third more ships than it possessed at that time to regain naval superiority over the Soviet navy.[36] By 1987, the Reagan administration had begun to respond to the critics who charged that the hyperfocus on the Soviet threat left the navy unprepared for more likely smaller conflicts. As a result, assets with more utility in smaller conflicts, such as minesweepers and sea transports, began to be added back into the budget, increasing naval capability across the spectrum of warfare.[37]

These initiatives to improve the Army, Navy, and Air Force largely concerned technological revitalization, and while a more technologically-advanced military could potentially convince the American public that it was capable and credible, a significant aspect of Reagan's approach to restoring the military was focused on the people: the people in the military, the people in American society, and the relationship between them. To restore this aspect of the military, Reagan focused on improving benefits for military members and emphasizing the critical importance of the military – to include the service of those who fought in Vietnam – to the health and well-being of the nation.

Reagan's focus on improving military pay and benefits was pragmatic: he wanted

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[34] Rebecca Grant, "The Reagan Buildup," *Air Force Magazine,* September 2014, https://www.airforcemag.com/PDF/MagazineArchive/Magazine%20Documents/2014/September%202014/0914reagan.pdf.
[35] Grant, "The Reagan Buildup."
[36] Eric Pace, "Spending on Navy Ships May Rise Under Reagan," *The New York Times*, 16 February 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/16/business/spending-on-navy-ships-may-rise-under-reagan.html.
[37] Richard Halloran, "Reagan's Military: 1.6 Trillion but Still Questions," *The New York Times*, 17 August 1987, https://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/17/world/reagan-s-military-1.6-trillion-but-still-questions.html.

to prevent the all-volunteer force from failing. Reagan recognized that to retain qualified personnel and to recruit the caliber of personnel needed to make the military successful, benefits would have to be attractive and persuasive.[38] Reagan significantly raised military pay twice during his two terms in office. In 1981, Reagan approved a pay raise that resulted in an average 14.3 percent increase for military members.[39] Then, in 1988, Reagan approved a 4.1 percent pay raise for both military members and government civilian employees.[40] Although the causes of increased recruitment cannot be uniquely attributed to these pay raises, the military did not have trouble meeting its recruitment goals after the 1981 pay raise. All services exceeded recruiting goals, the number of Army recruits with high school diplomas increased from 50 percent in 1980 to 85 percent in 1983, and numerous Navy veterans signed back up.[41]

In addition to improving the quality of recruits and the ability to retain current service members, Reagan sought to increase the overall size of the force. In April 1981, Reagan considered a personnel increase of 250,000 over the following five years. This increase was designed to bolster readiness and to improve the services' abilities to operate the weapons and technology that were being planned.[42] This growth did not take place: in 1986, there were 2,169,112 military members while in 1981, there had been 2,082,560 military members, or just shy of a 90,000 person increase over the five years.[43] As James Fallows noted, this was less than a 20 percent increase, and, as a function of increased expenditures on military hardware and technology, the portion of the defense budget allocated to pay and benefits fell. Despite this, Fallows noted the improvement in the military, which he quantified (despite saying it was hard to quantify), as a 200 percent

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[38] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 51.
[39] "President Reagan Wednesday signed a $4.5 billion military pay," *United Press International*, 14 October 1981, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/14/President-Reagan-Wednesday-signed-a-45-billion-military-pay/1348371880000/.
[40] Judith Haveman, "Reagan signs 4.1% Pay Increase," *The Washington Post,* 24 September 1988, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/09/24/reagan-signs-41-pay-increase/d4a7f4d7-b3cc-430b-b4ab-3130768546e5/.
[41] Brad Knickerbocker, "How Reagan's Pay Freeze Will Affect the Military," *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 January 1983, https://www.csmonitor.com/1983/0127/012756.html.
[42] Richard Halloran, "Reagan Military Plan Envisions Up to 250,000 Additional Recruits," *The New York Times,* 26 April 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/26/us/reagan-military-plan-envisions-up-to-250000-additional-recruits.html.
[43] "Active Duty Military Strength by Service, FY 1954-1993," Defense Manpower Data Center, DMDC historical reports, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp.

improvement. [44] Fallows, a critic of the Vietnam War, was more educated and politically connected than the average American, but if his viewpoint can provide insight to the perceptions of an average American, then it seems the public perception of the military shifted in this timeframe.

In addition to pay and benefits for active duty, Reagan also sought to improve benefits for all veterans, with a specific focus on Vietnam War veterans. The effects of these efforts were uneven. Despite increasing military spending and overall net support to the veterans, veterans programs did not uniformly gain funding. By increasing some veterans programs while cutting others, Reagan presented a less clear narrative about his willingness to provide financial support to veterans, particularly when compared to the overwhelming increases in the overall defense budget, which left no question as to his perspective on growing the military.

Reagan's signing of House Resolution (HR) 2156 was an example of his efforts to improve support to Vietnam veterans. HR 2156 enabled hospitals to extend the use of their allocated funding for veteran health care for a year.[45] While signing, Reagan revisited his typical message about American society owing a great debt to veterans, saying "We owe more than money to those who wore our country's uniform and sacrificed on our behalf." He described HR 2156 as supporting a "sound and productive program for helping our American veterans and all American people."[46] During the signing, however, Reagan was asked, "Mr. President, why won't you meet with the Vietnam veteran hunger strikers?"[47] Eight Vietnam veterans were conducting hunger strikes to demand an inquiry into the Veterans Administration hospital and Agent Orange.[48] Reagan seemed almost irritated when he responded, saying "This is the only

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[44] James Fallows, "The Spend-up," *The Atlantic,* July 1986, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1986/07/the-spend-up/308325/.
[45] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Signing a Veterans Medical Care Bill," 17 June 1981, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/61781a.
[46] "President Reagan's Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner (CPAC) at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC on March 20, 1981," Ronald Reagan Library Audiovisual Composite, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgotrA-wZ2M.
[47] Reagan, "Remarks on Signing a Veterans Medical Care Bill."
[48] United Press International, "3 Veterans End Hunger Strike," *The New York Times*, 11 July 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/11/us/3-veterans-end-hunger-strike.html.

question I'll take on that. Let me explain something about that." He elaborated that although he could not meet with the hunger strikers, some of his representatives did hear their concerns. In fact, he stated, the hunger strikers were happy with other initiatives Reagan was taking with regards to veteran support, such as funding for Agent Orange research and Veteran Treatment Centers.[49]

Although Reagan supported efforts to improve treatment of and support to veterans, these initiatives were largely at odds with his overall goal of cutting big government and broad social programs. As such, Reagan's budgeting for veteran support differed from his approach to concurrent funding for enhanced military capabilities. Whereas pay and benefits for currently serving military members was directly tied to Reagan's ability to counter the Soviet threat, the link between social programs for veterans and counter-Soviet capability was more tenuous. As a result, his record on supporting veterans through federal programs, while strong, was also characterized by efforts to trim extra expenditures wherever possible. Also, it should be noted that the Agent Orange research that Reagan mentioned in his response to the reporter's question about the veteran hunger strikers was condemned by a 14-month House committee investigation in 1990. The investigation found that a panel of scientists and officials had obstructed the study by claiming that exposure levels could not be established. The study was ended in 1987.[50]

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 and the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 established Reagan's first budget with priorities of tax cuts, reductions in domestic discretionary spending, and increased military spending.[51] In this budget, funding was increased for veteran income security, which included service and non-service related compensation, burial, and insurance, and for hospital medical care. Funding was decreased, however, for veteran housing and veteran education, training and

[49] "President Reagan's Remarks at the CPAC Dinner," Ronald Reagan Library Audiovisual Composite.
[50] Keith Schneider, "Agent Orange Study was Obstructed, Panel Says," *The New York Times*, 10 August 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/10/us/agent-orange-study-was-obstructed-panel-says.html.
[51] The Bancroft Library, "1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act," University of California-Berkeley, https://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/debt/1981reconciliationact.html.

rehabilitation.[52] Especially significant was the elimination of the readjustment counseling for Vietnam veterans, a service that was intended to help veterans reintegrate into society. Additionally, the proposal reduced reimbursement to veterans for travel expenses to the Veterans Administration medical facilities and restricted out-patient dental services.[53] These cuts to veteran programs were not a one-time occurrence: in 1987, Reagan's budget cut medical benefits for veterans that made $15,000 or more per year.[54]

Reagan, however, showed his support to veteran issues and concerns in ways other than funding. In 1988, Reagan elevated the Veterans Administration by signing Public Law 100-527, or the Department of Veterans Affairs Act, which created the Department of Veterans Affairs and made it a Cabinet-level position.[55] Reagan's decision to support the Veterans Affairs Act was a strong showing of support for veterans, particularly since his support ran contrary to the advice of his senior advisors. Reagan commented, "This is a personal decision I've thought about for some time. There are six times as many veterans alive today as in 1930 when the agency was first created. And veterans have always had a strong voice in our government, but it's time to give them the recognition that they so rightly deserve. So, I'm joining with those here today in support of this effort."[56]

Reagan also used symbolic gestures to show his support to veterans and their service. Weinberger wrote about Reagan's handling of the presentation of the Medal of

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[52] Congressional Budget Office, "An Analysis of President Reagan's Budget Revisions for Fiscal Year 1982," staff working paper (Washington, DC: March 1981), B-33-B-34, https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/97th-congress-1981-1982/reports/81doc11b.pdf.
[53] Special Committee on Aging, "Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Public Law 97-35 (Selected Provisions Affecting the Elderly)," information paper (Washington, DC: US Senate and Congressional Research Service, September 1981), 10, https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/reports/rpt681.pdf.
[54] United Press International, "Reagan Seeks Cut in Vets' Medical Aid: Budget Also Calls for Military Boost, More Aid to Rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1987, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-01-02-mn-1667-story.html; Robert Pear, "US Health Care for Veterans Cut in Budget Draft," *The New York Times*, 27 December 1985, https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/27/us/us-health-care-for-veterans-cut-in-budget-draft.html.
[55] "Department of Veterans Affairs Act signed 27 years ago," US Department of Veterans Affairs, 25 October 2015, https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/23584/department-veterans-affairs-act-signed-27-years-ago/.
[56] Mary Thornton, "Reagan's Sudden Shift on VA," *The Washington Post*, 11 January 1988, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/01/11/reagans-sudden-shift-on-va/5697a673-bd92-4669-8e9c-669556e818ce/.

Honor to Staff Sergeant Roy Benavidez, who had served in Vietnam. The medal had been approved several months before Reagan entered office but, according to Weinberger, the Carter administration had held off on a presentation out of a reluctance to emphasize anything related to the Vietnam War. Reagan approached the situation very differently: he wanted to award the medal and volunteered to read the citation himself, commenting that he had a trained voice. On February 24, 1981, Reagan did just that, and in the process, he delivered a strong message about how he valued military members and their service, even in – maybe especially in – the Vietnam War.[57]

Reagan's narrative about the military as an institution and the personnel serving within the institution was strong, consistent, oft-repeated, and well-publicized. More than perhaps any other president, he was well-equipped to develop and deliver a persuasive narrative: his time as a Hollywood actor gave him experience with speech and message delivery, and his time as the governor of California familiarized him with the political aspect of influencing the public. Hugh Heclo, in his analysis of how Reagan influenced American public philosophy, stated that Reagan was "probably the only 20th century president whose political career was so thoroughly devoted to contesting for the public philosophy."[58] Commonly referred to as "the great communicator," Reagan entered office with clear priorities, executed them with strong central leadership, and delivered a narrative that was purposefully designed around his priorities and adroitly honed to his audience.

Central to Reagan's ability to deliver an effective, coherent narrative was his focus on high priority issues. He recognized that when in office, he would only be able to accomplish a limited number of things. After leaving the White House, Reagan commented on his decision to concentrate his efforts, saying, "I had an agenda I wanted to get done. I came with a script."[59] Reagan stuck to core concerns, both in his policy-making and in his interactions with the public. His short list of topics included "the global communist conspiracy, national defense and intelligence, international arms control, the growth of government, taxation, regulating free markets." By focusing his efforts on this

[57] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 52–56.
[58] Heclo, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," 18.
[59] Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 771.

short list, Reagan was able to concentrate not only his energy, but also his messaging.[60]

His priorities of restoring American economic health and rebuilding US strategic and conventional capability to meet the Soviet threat required him to get the American public behind him: he needed their approval to substantially increase defense funding in a time of tax cuts and decreased government spending.[61] Although it certainly cannot be considered an unbiased source, the Reagan Center website provides insight into Reagan's understanding of the centrality of public perception of the military to his foreign policy goals. The website states that Reagan "knew that American strength was central to world peace. One of his first priorities as President was taking a demoralized and underfunded U.S. military and giving it the support and resources it needed to keep America safe and to be a force for peace around the globe." The website details the leadership responsibility that Reagan felt toward the military and the improvements he made to defense funding and readiness, then concludes the discussion of the military by saying "Ronald Reagan strengthened the military because he was a realist. He understood the world, and had a clear sense of what America's role should be – the champion of freedom for peoples everywhere.[62] Reagan had clear foreign policy goals related to countering the Soviet Union, he recognized that military strength was critical to achieving those goals, and he believed that public perception of the military was directly tied to both of these factors. Thus, he delivered a consistent and effective narrative about the value of military personnel and the military institution throughout his presidency.

Reagan took an active role not only in shaping his priorities, but in shaping the messaging and narrative around his priorities. Reagan answered letters himself, drafted speeches, and debated issues with his correspondents.[63] Although he chose a staff that would present different viewpoints, he resolved these viewpoints to a clear external message.[64] Weinberger credited Reagan with taking the premier leadership role in

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[60] Hugh Davis Graham, "Civil Rights Policy," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 286.
[61] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 94.
[62] "President Reagan's Foreign Policy: Making the World Over Again," Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/the-presidency/foreign-policy/.
[63] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 85–86.
[64] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 96.

reshaping public perception of the military. Weinberger wrote, "The president took care of that most vital aspect of restoring morale. Almost single-handedly he led the country, by a number of symbolic acts, by his matchless speeches and by showing the genuine affection that he had always had for our fighting forces. He changed the nation's outlook; and the men and women of the military knew it, and responded."[65] The Reagan Foundation website also emphasized the pride and personal responsibility Reagan felt in his leadership role as the Commander in Chief: "You could see in his face how much it meant to receive – and return – a salute… That they were willing to risk their lives for their country never ceased to amaze and humble President Reagan. He took no responsibility more seriously than to keep them out of harm's way. But he made a commitment to them that if it ever became necessary to send them into battle, he would make sure they had what they needed to get the job done."[66] Because of the Reagan Foundation's role of commemorating Reagan, the description on the website could certainly be dismissed as hagiography. Even so, the theme of personal leadership and responsibility with regards to rebuilding the military rings true, and is certainly consistent with Reagan's other actions.

In addition to focusing on his carefully curated list of priorities, Reagan's messaging was skillfully created and delivered. A 1984 *New York Times Magazine* analysis of Reagan's relationship with the press stated that "In the Reagan Administration, to an extraordinary degree, the development of the public relations strategy is the preoccupation of all the most powerful aides."[67] More than "hackneyed slogans," Reagan provided an appealing vision for the country.[68] In a 2015 essay on collective American memory of Reagan, H.W. Brands described Reagan's vision as one of "self-reliance, limited government, stout defense, and world leadership toward freedom… In a long political career, Reagan gave hundreds of speeches, but all were riffs on the single theme of expanding liberty." [69] With regards to the military,

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[65] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 52.
[66] "President Reagan's Foreign Policy," Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute.
[67] Steven R. Weisman, "The President and the Press," *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 October 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/14/magazine/the-president-and-the-press.html.
[68] Heclo, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," 19.
[69] H.W. Brands, "You're Remembering Reagan Wrong," *Time*, 16 May 2015, https://time.com/3858793/ronald-reagan-history/.

Reagan's goal was to communicate that not only did the President and Secretary of Defense care about the military, but also that the "the American people as a whole also respected, honored and appreciated the importance of what our military forces were doing for our country."[70]

To reach his audience, Reagan communicated with a vast number of speeches and weekly radio talks.[71] His deliberate and controlled handling of the press, as well as the skill with which he delivered his messages, led to much study of his techniques. Reagan's skillful use of television to reach audiences and timing to ensure the maximum impact was so transformative that the *New York Times Magazine* analysis concluded that it had changed the relationship of the press with the presidency and raised new questions on how the press should handle information that was so carefully curated.[72]

In dealing with common Americans, Reagan spoke in words that they could understand and with examples that resonated. In his analysis of Reagan's impact on American public philosophy, Heclo attributed Reagan's successful communication to his ability to provide a "fully finished perspective that needed only to be illustrated with any number of interesting facts, statistics, and stories. He could always explain to people what was happening to them in particular because he was convinced he knew what was happening in general."[73]

In addition to providing persuasive information, Reagan was able to adjust his tone for his audience. He used humor and told jokes to disarm his listeners, making himself appear warm and easy to like.[74] He also peppered his language with emotion and, at times, religious appeal. His overt statements about the sacrifices and service that military members gave to the country were impactful, but he also used more subtle language to drive home his desired reconciliation of the military and society. He described military service members as "sons and daughters," emphasizing to the country that the military was of the citizenry, rather than apart from it.[75] His prayers and speeches

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[70] Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 52.
[71] Heclo, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," 30.
[72] Weisman, "The President and the Press."
[73] Heclo, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," 33.
[74] Brands, "You're Remembering Reagan Wrong."
[75] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 27 January 1987), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W.*

about fallen soldiers gave their service and deaths religious significance. As Heclo wrote, according to Reagan's message, "death in service of the nation was death in service of the nation's God. Ipso facto, it was sufficient grounds for entering into the eternal heavenly presence of God."[76] Reagan was able to channel emotion, both humor and sadness, to strengthen the appeal of his message to his audience.

Reagan's priority of addressing the Soviet threat motivated his efforts to bolster the defense budget and improve military capabilities and credibility. Because Reagan perceived that public support for the military was directly tied to military credibility, he put significant effort into decreasing the post-Vietnam gap between them military and the American public. Throughout his presidency, aided by his skills and experience as a public speaker and government leader, he crafted and delivered a consistent narrative about the military that was well-designed to improve how the public viewed the military institution.

Reagan, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/012787a.

[76] Heclo, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," 33.

Chapter 5

Effect of Presidential Rhetoric on Public Perception of the Military

In the years after Vietnam leading up to the Gulf War, Gallup polling indicated that the American public's trust and confidence in the military significantly increased. A comparison of Carter and Reagan's narratives about the institution of the military can provide some insight into how public perception of the military changed. Although this relationship cannot be determined to be directly causal, presidential narratives, aided by positional authority and influence, have been shown to affect the perspective and judgments of the American public.[1]

To evaluate the likely effectiveness of Carter's and Reagan's rhetoric, this paper uses a framework extrapolated from the RAND research project on public opinion of military operations, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*. This report found that in the post-9/11 period, the American public was more willing to accept casualties and support military operations when the interventions reflected American interests and values and had a good chance of being successful. Using these findings, this paper infers that the American public will support a military that is reflective of these qualities. As such, presidential narratives, created by rhetoric and action, that depict the military as essential to and in service of US national and strategic interests, characterized by American values, and a credible, well-trained, and professional force are likely to generate improved public perception of the military.

This chapter will conclude the study by comparing Carter and Reagan priorities, actions, and rhetoric through this framework to assess the extent to which each president created a narrative that would improve public perception of the military. Gallup polling during each of these administrations provides a measure of this perception and therefore a means by which to verify the evaluative framework. What emerges from a comparison of Carter's and Reagan's actions and rhetoric is that while both took actions to improve the military, Reagan's efforts were more focused, more highly prioritized, and messaged to

[1] D A. Cooper Drury et al., "'Pretty Prudent' or Rhetorically Responsive? The American Public's Support for Military Action," *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2010): 84.

the American public in a far more resonant narrative.

When it came to priorities, Carter had too many. As James Patterson described, Carter was a details man, who spent hours poring over memoranda on numerous issues, scribbling notes in the margins, instead of selecting a few main issues and focusing almost exclusively on those.[2] The *New York Times'* attempt to establish what his priorities were during the campaign, rather than drawing from a list that Carter clearly articulated, demonstrated the incoherence of his priorities.[3] Eventually, however, Carter's priorities emerged as being the economy and, within the realm of the military and national security, nuclear non-proliferation and countering the Soviet Union.[4] He believed that building up the military was essential to checking Soviet ambitions, as evidenced by his belief that the constant requests that came from the post-Vietnam military created an image of decreased capability.[5] His focus was on building up the military as a strategic counter to the Soviet Union, rather than prioritizing domestic civil-military concerns. Nevertheless, he was not ignorant of civil-military relations and wanted to improve them: his 1981 written statement to Congress that accompanied the State of the Union speech indicated he wanted to eliminate the divide between society and veterans.[6]

Reagan similarly prioritized the economy and countering the Soviet Union. The difference was that, unlike Carter, Reagan maintained a short list of priorities and focused exclusively on them. Additionally, Reagan believed that civil-military relations, and how the public perceived the military, was directly related to military credibility and the ability to counter the Soviets. As such, his concerns about how the American public

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[2] James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111, http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=272607.
[3] Charles Mohr, "Carter With a Long List of Campaign Promises Now Faces the Problem of Making Good on Them," *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/15/archives/carter-with-a-long-list-of-campaign-promises-now-faces-the-problem.html.
[4] Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years*, First edition (New York, N.Y: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 2018), 614, 618.
[5] Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, 1st ed (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 495-496.
[6] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, (address, Washington, DC, 16 January 1981), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/250760.

regarded the military in the post-Vietnam era was not an afterthought. Instead, improving the way the American people thought about the military and veterans was a constantly revisited theme that Reagan believed was consistent with, and critical to, his overall strategic priorities.

Although Carter is commonly recalled in the collective memory as a president who cut the defense budget and was weak on the military, in reality, his defense budgets initiated an era of defense spending that Reagan continued and amplified. As Chester Pach describes in his analysis of Reagan's national security approach, the Reagan administration perpetuated defense budget increases that Carter had initiated. In his last two years, Carter asked for 5 and 6 percent defense budget increases, and he planned for second term expenditures of $1.27 trillion. Reagan's defense expenditures topped Carter's planned second-term expenditures by only $1.84 billion. Despite their common ground of increased defense budgets, "for Weinberger and Reagan, Carter was the president who canceled the B-1 and halted production of the neutron bomb," and they foisted this perspective on the American public.[7]

Reagan's famous line about spending what you need for defense, rather than budgeting within fiscal constraints, was remarkably similar to what Carter wrote in his 1981 message to Congress.[8] In this message, Carter stated, "we must pay whatever price is required to remain the strongest nation in the world."[9] Despite his support of force and weaponry modernization as a means to increase military capability against the Soviet Union, he also sought to offset defense costs by cutting programs he perceived as unnecessarily expensive, demonstrating that his willingness to spend on defense was constrained. Carter's budget increases were not as substantial as Reagan's: 3 percent as compared to 10 percent, and, because they were a decrease from what Ford had proposed, they were perceived as a cut.[10] Nevertheless, Carter did increase defense spending. Robert Gates recognized that Reagan's military build-up started in the Carter era and

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[7] Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns: Reagan and National Security," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 91.
[8] Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns," 90.
[9] Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 16 January 1981.
[10] Lawrence J. Korb, "The Reagan Defense Budget and Program: The Buildup That Collapsed," in *Assessing the Reagan Years*, ed. David Boaz (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1988), 83.

stated that the "strategic power and strength of 1980s was 'Reagan reaping the harvest sown by Nixon, Ford, and Carter.'"[11]

Both Carter and Reagan were intent on modernizing the military through technology. Carter, who sought military effectiveness that corresponded to fiscal conservatism, believed that technological advancement could efficiently increase military capability. At the same time, he was skeptical of projects with large budgets and worrisome capability shortfalls. Such concerns motivated his cancellation of programs such as the B-1, which he saw as a bloated program with capabilities that would be short-lived. Meanwhile, he initiated the development of stealth technology and supported research into precision weapons.

Reagan also supported technological development, but his initiatives were focused predominantly on growing capabilities. He increased the size of the Navy's fleet, brought back the B-1, continued stealth technology development, modernized Air Force aircraft, strengthened the nuclear triad, and launched the SDI initiative, all with the ever-increasing defense budget.

When thinking of an American president who influenced the Cold War, it is easy to bring to mind Reagan's speeches and his famous 1987 "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" speech.[12] Carter's lobbying of NATO members to increase support to the coalition may have played a similar, albeit less impactful, role in restoring US world leadership after Vietnam. In so doing, Carter also could have bolstered public perception of the military. The relationship between the military and the US leadership in the role was symbiotic: military capability was a cornerstone of US credibility, but increased US credibility also reflected well upon the military. Thus, as both Carter and Reagan strengthened the US leadership role in the world, they also bolstered the overall impression of the military institution.

Carter and Reagan both took action to improve the quality of the military and the

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[11] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 615.

[12] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin," (address, West Berlin, Germany, June 12, 1987), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library /sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1987/061287d.htm.

relationship between the military and society. Two means by which they attempted to do so were pay and incentive increases and support to veterans' programs.

Both Carter and Reagan raised military pay, though Reagan's pay raises were much larger. Carter's pay increases, however, did little to build a picture of him as a president intent on improving quality of life for the military. Even Carter's 1981 military pay increase of 11.4 percent, the largest in ten years, did not create this perception, largely due to the impression that he made the decision too late and only under a great deal of pressure from Congress.[13] Although Carter emphasized that the pay raise was important to reimburse servicemembers for their sacrifices to society, his failure to include this in a consistent narrative meant that the message soon faded.[14] Additionally, any attempt at a positive narrative regarding military pay was undermined by the leaked memo that criticized servicemembers' motivations. In contrast, Reagan improved military pay twice during his presidency: once by 14.3 percent in 1981, and then in 1988 by 4.1 percent.[15] Considered holistically with Reagan's strong and oft-repeated messaging about the value of the military and the sacrifice of servicemembers, the pay increase likely bolstered the impression of both Reagan as a president who believed in the value of the military and of the military as an important part of national defense.

Carter took efforts to address veterans' concerns, appointing Max Cleland to lead the Veterans Administration and presenting Congress with an economic package that included veteran training, employment opportunities, and service-related disability benefits. Despite his not being familiar with it when asked at a public question-and-answer session, his administration was responsible for restoring GI benefits. Despite all of these efforts, he relegated discussion of these programs to the written messages to Congress that accompanied his State of the Union addresses. Although a valid means of communicating information to Congress, this method weakened his ability to influence

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[13] Edward C. Keefer, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge 1977-1981*, Secretaries of Defense Historical Series, volume 9 (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), 530.
[14] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1980-1981* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1981), 1665.
[15] "President Reagan Wednesday signed a $4.5 billion military pay," *United Press International*, 14 October 1981, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/14/President-Reagan-Wednesday-signed-a-45-billion-military-pay/1348371880000/.

the American public. Press coverage of these written statements was limited, and therefore only the most interested Americans would be aware of the increased veterans support. Once again, Carter missed an opportunity to create an effective narrative about his accomplishments, thus missing a chance to shape public perception of the military. In the 1978 written message to Congress, he detailed veterans' initiatives. While in office, he increased support for veterans' disability benefits and pensions.

Reagan supported veterans' treatment and support programs, but his support for funding was not as enthusiastic as his stance on the defense budget, which he felt should not be limited by fiscal concerns. While some veterans' programs were funded, other funding lines, such as readjustment counseling and travel expenses to the Veterans Administration, were cut. Perhaps because the tie between addressing veterans' issues and countering the Soviet threat was more tenuous, Reagan was less willing to pursue a larger financial expenditure. For anyone who was paying attention, this may have demonstrated that Reagan was less willing to invest in improving veterans' lives, potentially weakening his narrative that the public owed a great debt to all military veterans.

Reagan did, however, increase the attention given to veterans' issues by elevating the Veterans' Administration to a Cabinet-level position. By formalizing the attention given to veterans, rather than leaving it up to each administration's preference, Reagan made support to veterans an integral part of the government, thus reinforcing that it was also part of being American. With this simple action, which he did against the advice of his staff, Reagan narrowed the gap between military and public.

Carter and Reagan differed in their specific actions, such as how much to increase the defense budget and whether or not the B-1 represented the correct capability. The most significant difference with regards to the military institution, however, was how Carter and Reagan messaged their thoughts and actions about the military.

Carter and Reagan differed significantly in their predispositions to creating effective narratives. Carter, to put it bluntly, was not good at it. This can be attributed to a number of causes. Carter was interested in a number of issues, and without a clear and short list of priorities, it is difficult to develop a coherent narrative. Additionally, Carter never fully reconciled the competing opinions from members of his staff into a clear

message. With regards to the military, the classified nature of the technological modernization was a barrier to creating a public narrative that Carter was unable or unwilling to surmount. Additionally, Carter's preference for diplomacy and suspicion about the value of military intervention may have prevented him from creating a narrative in which the military took on too great of a role. More personally, despite evidence that he appreciated the value of narrative, Carter seemed to believe that, at times, action was sufficient to create the desired perception. The American public's perception of his "Rose Garden" Iran hostage strategy, which had him holed up at the White House rather than out on the campaign trail, demonstrates the fallacy of his belief.[16]

Despite Carter's pride in his military service and the evident fondness he had for military servicemembers, he was leery of exacerbating the anti-military post-Vietnam hangover. The contrast in how Carter and Reagan handled the Medal of Honor ceremony for Sergeant Roy Benavides is a glittering example of how Carter avoided something that could have invoked memories of Vietnam and negative feelings about the military, while Reagan seized an opportunity to "change the conversation," to quote the classic narrative mastermind, Don Draper of *Mad Men* fame.[17]

In contrast, Reagan was a skilled orator and narrative creator. He drew on his experience as an actor and a governor to craft speeches peppered with emotion, religious appeal, and humor. He believed that narrative was important and gave numerous speeches that highlighted the importance of the military and addressed repairing a civil-military divide. Whereas Carter's references to the military commonly related to the role of the military in offsetting the Soviet threat, Reagan missed no opportunity to discuss the valuable contribution that servicemembers provided to America, even during a controversial conflict like the Vietnam War. Reagan's shorter list of priorities lent itself to the creation of a strong central narrative, and he never failed to drive home his vision of a fully free and strong America that rose above the Soviet Union, aided by the efforts

[16] Edward Walsh, "Carter Plans to Forsake Rose Garden; Carter Ready to Come Out of Rose Garden," *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1980.
[17] Don Draper, *Mad Men*, Season 3, Episode 2, as cited in "10 'Mad Men' Quotes to Live By at Work," *Business News Daily*, 9 April 2015, https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/7906-leadership-advice-mad-men.html.

of a capable military that served its society.

Despite Carter's seemingly innate aversion to creating strong narratives, like Reagan, he did believe that the military institution was important and needed improvement in regards to its capability and its relationship with society. Although Carter's narrative was not as polished and deliberate as Reagan's, both their words and actions created a presidential message about the military. There were similarities between how the presidents saw the world and their actions. Both presidents were most concerned with the economy and the Soviet threat. Both presidents believed that the military was a key aspect of countering the Soviet Union, that the military needed to be strengthened after Vietnam, that technological developments could bolster military capability, and that the relationship between the military and society needed to be repaired. Despite these similarities, the content and strength of the narratives that the two presidents created differed.

The narrative, however, is only significant if it changes the populace's perceptions. Evaluating their narratives through the framework extrapolated from the RAND *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad* provides a means by which to evaluate the effectiveness of their narratives intended to create an improved public perception of the military. This framework suggests that a narrative will build positive public perception of the military if it depicts the military as: first, essential to and in service of US national and strategic interests; second, characterized by American values; and third, an embodiment of a credible, well-trained, and professional force.

The first criterion of the framework is whether the narrative depicts the military as essential to, and in service of, US national and strategic interests. Carter's narrative about the military easily met this standard; he consistently emphasized the Soviet threat and the importance of the military in countering the Soviet Union. His 1978 State of the Union highlighted the importance of balancing the Soviet Union, and his accompanying written message to Congress underscored the role that the military played in protecting national security. His words clarified that the military had a significant role in strategically deterring the Soviet Union and pushed back on the image of the military as a washed-up force that had lost all credibility and capability in Vietnam.

Carter's perspective on national security and the Soviet threat intensified after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and his 1980 State of the Union address demonstrated this shift. In his "Carter Doctrine," he emphasized that aggressive Soviet action needed to be met by a strong military response. For the first time in one of his State of the Union addresses, Carter also discussed the military as more than a solitary unit critical to national defense. He discussed the men and women on duty and the pride that he and other Americans had in their service. These two speeches exemplify how Carter often spoke about the military as a critical means of countering the Soviet threat and thus tied the military to vital national and strategic interests.

Reagan was similarly emphatic about the importance of the military in countering the Soviet threat. He broadcast the importance of a strong military to ensure national security in a number of his presidential speeches, beginning with his acceptance of the Republican presidential nomination. In this speech, Reagan linked the military's ability to recruit, the military's ability to defend national security, and US credibility with allies. In his inaugural address, Reagan emphasized that military capability was essential to achieve peace; only through military strength could the United States ensure that it could respond as necessary to threats.

In his 1982 State of the Union, Reagan went beyond connecting the military with strategic concerns; he also tied public perception of the military to achieve peace and security. With the words, "Together we've begun to restore that margin of military safety that ensures peace. Our country's uniform is being worn once again with pride," Reagan reinforced the message that the military was instrumental in protecting the nation, and the American public had a role in making sure the military was capable enough to do so.[18] Reagan made clear that a strong military did not require its use; simply having a strong military could create leverage that would encourage the Soviets to negotiate. Reagan argued that strength was needed for negotiations, necessitating a military build-up: "it is essential that we negotiate from a position of strength. There must be a real incentive for

[18] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 26 January 1982), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/12682c.

the Soviets to take these talks seriously. This requires that we rebuild our defenses."[19]

Reagan's depiction of military strength being perfectly aligned with US strategic interests was a boon for generating support for increasing the military budget. In the 1983 State of the Union, Reagan used this justification to separate national security expenses such as military pay and benefits from other budget considerations. This fit well with Reagan's perspective that you pay what you need to pay for national defense. Reagan strengthened this rationale by repeatedly indicating the military strength was directly tied to the health and security of the nation.

The second framework criterion is whether the narrative depicted the military as characterizing American values. Carter emphasized values in all aspects of his presidency. In his candidacy acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Carter described the United States as emerging from a time of trials into a time of healing, led by faith and quiet strength. These descriptions fit with Carter's emphasis on strong values, human rights, and Christianity. Unsurprisingly, Carter emphasized values when speaking about the military. Although Carter did not explicitly mention the military during his inauguration speech, he described conflicts in which the military would (directly or indirectly) take part, portraying them as wars "against poverty, ignorance, and injustice, for those are the enemies against which our forces can be honorably marshaled."[20] In so doing, he aligned the use of the military with broader US ideals.

In addition to implicitly aligning the military with American ideals and values, Carter also explicitly described the military as honorable and values-based. For example, during the March 1977 DoD town hall, Carter talked about the heroism, dedication, and self-sacrifice that "still" characterized servicemembers.[21] During a March 1977 radio call-in, he described a caller who had identified himself as a veteran as a "loyal and patriotic veteran," thus ascribing honorable qualities to veterans.

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[19] Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," 26 January 1982.
[20] Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address" (address, Washington, DC, 29 January 1977), https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-0.
[21] Jimmy Carter, Department of Defense Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Department Employees, (Pentagon, Washington, DC, 1 March 1977), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242861.

Carter's efforts to depict the military as aligned with American values was inconsistent, however. The weakness of this aspect of his military narrative was not that he put forth an image of the military that countered American values. Rather, he missed opportunities to push a cohesive and compelling narrative, perhaps because of his general reluctance and lack of skill at creating narratives. Carter's question-and-answer session held in Dayton, Ohio on October 2, 1980 perfectly demonstrated his ineptitude at seizing opportunities to strengthen a positive narrative about the military. Asked about military recruiting and retention, a problem that Carter recognized and the DoD was making significant efforts to address, Carter had a textbook opportunity to put forth a holistically positive view of the military. Essentially, he had been asked "why should people join the military, and once in, why should they continue to serve?" A better question for someone who was trying to improve perception of the military could hardly have been designed. Carter did mention several positive initiatives, but he failed to take the opportunity to give a comprehensive answer that highlighted the values that the military represented and the career and education opportunities the military offered.[22]

Overall, despite Carter's strong personal beliefs regarding the importance of values, his depiction of the military as characterized by American values and ideals was uninspiring. His mention of the military's honor and sacrifice, though infrequent, made it clear that he believed that the military embodied American values. Despite these apparent beliefs, he – once again – did not translate them into a cohesive and oft-repeated public narrative.

In contrast to Carter, Reagan rarely spoke about the military without mentioning the American values that they represented. His inaugural address evoked military service as the ultimate sign of dedication to American freedom. To drive home the point, Reagan quoted the diary of a World War I doughboy, who committed to sacrificing, enduring, and fighting cheerfully so that America could win. [23] These words depicted soldiers as

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[22] Jimmy Carter (Remarks, Question-and-Answer Session at a Townhall Meeting, Dayton, Ohio, 2 October 1980), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252033.

[23] Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," (address, Washington, DC, 20 January 1981), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/inaugural-address-january-20-1981.

exemplars of citizenship, displaying honor, patriotism, and dedication to the nation. By specifically emphasizing that Vietnam soldiers were a part of this selfless group, Reagan attempted to mend American's post-Vietnam negative impressions of the military.

Reagan's State of the Union addresses also emphasized the military's American values. In 1983, Reagan described servicemembers as selfless, honorable, and willing to sacrifice for the good of the nation. In 1984, Reagan linked American values to military strength and pride, which enabled it to bring light to the rest of the world. This logic chain showed that not only did the military exemplify American values, but American values were critical to the military's success throughout the world. He went on to describe a Vietnamese woman who immigrated to the United States, attended the US Military Academy, and would serve in the Army. His celebration of her success depicted military service as completing her transition from immigrant to true "American." Additionally, Reagan called her a hero because of her decision to join the military, which makes military service honorable and praiseworthy. In the post-Vietnam anti-military era, this was a shift in perspective. In 1987, Reagan described military service members as "sons and daughters," emphasizing to the country that the military was of the citizenry, rather than apart from it.[24] This was significant in addressing the civil-military gap: not only should the public support servicemembers, they should remember that servicemembers were of and by them.

Reagan also emphasized American values when he spoke at memorial services for fallen soldiers, usually adding a religious twist. At the December 1985 memorial service, he discussed servicemembers' commitment and potential and described their efforts as representative of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In 1987, Reagan also used religious analogies, describing the servicemembers' sacrifice as giving of others in a way that contributed to Americans and to God. Although religious themes are common at funeral and memorial services, by speaking as the President, Reagan strengthened his narrative that military service was intertwined with American values and ideals, many of which were based in Judeo-Christian concepts.

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[24] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," (address, Washington, DC, 27 January 1987), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/012787a.

The third framework criterion is that the narrative depicts the military as a credible, well-trained, and professional force. As with the second criterion, Carter's performance on this measure was lackluster. In his written messages to Congress that accompanied his State of the Union speeches, Carter highlighted many military issues that had the potential to make the military seem more capable and credible. In 1978, for example, Carter explained the rationale for his defense budget increase, detailing the need to strengthen the nuclear triad with upgraded B-52, nuclear submarines, and cruise missiles.[25] Unfortunately, however, this message did not make it to the general public, and thus Carter's opportunity to improve public perception of military credibility was lost. Carter took the same approach in his 1979 State of the Union, using only the written message to describe the military's growing strength and capability.[26] During the October 1980 town hall in Dayton, Ohio, Carter was asked a question about naval readiness. Carter answered the question satisfactorily, providing a solid explanation about the navy, but failed to take the question as an opportunity to expound on improving general military readiness. Once again, Carter demonstrated himself to be a president that did many things to improve the actual defense capability, but missed opportunities to inform the public, thus failing to effect any change in its perception of the post-Vietnam military.[27]

Carter's support for the War Powers Resolution Act, however, may have contributed to an impression of military credibility. Although Carter's beliefs about presidential transparency with Congress and the public about entering wars seemed to be more tied to his personal values of honesty and openness, rather than a desire to improve military credibility, the result was the same.[28] By tying military action to

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[25] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, (address, Washington, DC, 19 January 1978), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245130.
[26] Jimmy Carter, The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, (address, Washington, DC, 23 January 1979), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-state-the-union-annual-message-the-congress-1.
[27] Carter (Remarks, Question-and-Answer Session at a Townhall Meeting, Dayton, Ohio).
[28] Jimmy Carter, "Ask President Carter," Remarks During a Telephone Call-in Program on the CBS Radio Network (5 March 1977), online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242900.

Constitutionally-sanctioned processes, Carter strengthened the image of the US military as representing strategic US interests and values, an especially timely contrast with the memories of previous presidential activities during the Vietnam War. This one action served to fill all three framework criteria: it tied the use of the military to US strategic interests, it aligned the military with American values of transparency and lawful government, and it strengthened the image of the military as a credible tool of a Constitutionally-bound government.

Carter's response to Eagle Claw, and his decision to take full responsibility for mission failure, likely prevented the incident from being a worse public relations disaster for the military than it was. Carter's efforts to shape the narrative around this event, although he kept his meeting with the Eagle Claw operations team secret, likely bolstered military credibility at a time where it could have suffered great injury.

Carter's failure to include military officers in state dinners, as described by Harold Brown, at worst, diminished the perceived credibility of the military and at best, missed an opportunity to grow military credibility. Carter's perception that military leadership was not essential to the affairs of the state likely weakened military credibility.

Reagan's efforts to depict the military as a credible, well-trained, and professional force were based on his belief that public faith in the military was a critical aspect to American strategic capability. To increase this public faith, he took great efforts to communicate the initiatives that he was sponsoring to improve military capability. This began at the beginning of his presidency: in October 1981, Reagan laid out his plans to revamp American strategic capabilities and the means by which he intended to do so.[29] By providing details about the military capabilities that he intended to augment and improve, he provided interested Americans with details that could inspire confidence in the new and technologically-improved military. In a similar vein, Reagan outlined his priorities for force modernization during his March 1983 "Star Wars" speech. By describing the planned fielding of a new Army tank, modernization details for the Air Force, and Naval fleet increases, Reagan provided concrete details that fed an image of a

[29] Richard Halloran, "Reagan Drops Mobile MX Plan, Urges Basing Missiles in Silos; Proposes Building B-1 Bomber," *The New York Times*, 3 October 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/03/us/reagan-drops-mobile-mx-plan-urges-basing-missiles-in-silos-proposes.html.

strengthened, modernized, and more capable military.[30]

Reagan's defense budgets fed a narrative of increased military capability. With such a substantial increase in funding and massive growth in combat arms equipment, it is hard to imagine the military becoming anything but more credible and professional. Reagan enhanced the perception of credibility by taking responsibility, rather than blaming the military, in several key instances. When Reagan took responsibility for the 1983 Beirut bombing, he minimized the perception that military incompetence had contributed to the event. In so doing, he avoided Beirut becoming a symbol of eroding military capability.

Whereas Carter failed to include military leadership in state dinners, Reagan took the opposite tack. General David C. Jones, the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was included in state dinners for both Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and the King and Queen of Spain.[31] With this small act of inclusion, Reagan reinforced the image of military credibility by showing the importance of military leadership to matters of the state.

Reagan summarized the efforts he had taken to rebuild military credibility in his February 1986 speech on national security. He detailed the hollow nature of the military at the beginning of his presidency and explained that his focused efforts had revitalized the military. The result was a resurgence of public pride in the military and capable, qualified servicemembers.[32] By providing these snapshot views of the old, post-Vietnam military and the new, post-Reagan revitalization military, Reagan created an image of a credible, qualified, and professional military worthy of public support.

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[30] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," (address, Washington, DC, 23 March 1983), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/32383d.

[31] Lois Romano and Donnie Radcliffe, "To Be Among the Chosen," *The Washington Post*, 6 February 1982, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1982/02/06/to-be-among-the-chosen/abcd7298-05d9-43d6-b0a5-f0dad67164fb/. Papers on visit of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia of Spain, *Presidential Briefing Papers,* 13 October 1981, Folder 043566, Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/digitallibrary/smof/president/presidentialbriefingpapers/box-008/40-439-5730647-008-002-2016.pdf

[32] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on National Security," (Washington, DC, 26 February 1986), *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/22686b.

Overall, Reagan's narrative met all three of the framework criteria. At times, even individual speeches met all three criteria, as did the speech he gave in honor of D-Day in 1984. In this speech, he described the actions of the soldiers who participated in the landing at Normandy as aligned with US strategic interests and motivated by American values and ideals. He emphasized that American popular support for the force and the mission provided credibility, demonstrating the importance of the relationship between the public and the military. Finally, he was careful to assert that this was not just a historical event. He described the contemporary conflict with the Soviet Union as similar to the challenge that faced the United States during World War II. This speech was a masterful example of Reagan cultivating a compelling narrative about the relationship of the public and the military being crucial not only to military success, but also strategic American success.

When we compare Carter's and Reagan's narratives against the framework, Reagan is the sure winner. With regards to improving public perception of the military, he met and exceeded each criterion. He consistently and eloquently spoke about the requirement for a strong military to ensure national security, described the military as sharing desired American values, and painted an image of a military transformed into a first-rate fighting force. Carter's performance with regards to the framework is more nuanced. He took many of the same actions as Reagan: he grew the defense budget, increased support to veterans' programs, talked (at times) about military servicemembers embodying the values that he held dear, and took efforts to improve military credibility. His "malaise speech" indicated that while he believed the division between society and the military to be affecting the nation's morale and confidence, he did not offer a counter-narrative or a recommended solution during this speech. Translating his beliefs and actions in a coherent and convincing narrative eluded Carter. As has been described, he struggled to develop effective narratives on all topics, and when it came to influencing public opinion, it limited his effectiveness.

The utility of the framework used in this paper cannot be formally measured, but the results can be compared to the one quantitative measure of public opinion of the military that exists for this time period. When Carter entered office, Gallup polling revealed that 57 percent of surveyed Americans had "quite a lot" or a "great deal" of

confidence in the military. This number fluctuated during Carter's presidency, ultimately slipping to a 50 percent confidence level by 1981, the end of Carter's term in office. During Reagan's presidency, Gallup polling showed that confidence in the military rose: in 1985, 61 percent of polled Americans had "quite a lot" or a "great deal" of confidence in the military, and in 1989, at the end of Reagan's presidency, 63 percent of polled Americans had "quite a lot" or a "great deal" of confidence in the military.[33] While this increase in public confidence in the military cannot be exclusively attributed to the effectiveness of Reagan's narrative skills, the Gallup polling substantiates that public support of the military rose during Reagan's presidency.

The degree of presidential influence on public opinion is difficult to assess, but some research suggests that a simple presidential message is more likely to gain support from the public.[34] This is a potential reason for why Reagan was able to garner more popular support for the military than was Carter; he was a master of creating simple, clear, and consistent messaging. Carter did a great deal to improve the credibility and capability of the military, but he did not focus on changing public opinion. Comparing his approach to Reagan's raises the question as to why he did not devote much attention to this matter. Ultimately, Carter and Reagan seemed to have placed different value on public support of the military. Reagan recognized that society's feelings about the military mattered. More than just a domestic nicety, public support for the military directly translated to strategic capability against the Soviet Union. Scarcely a page of Reagan's writings and speeches about the military, as well as the memoirs of Weinberger, failed to highlight public perception of the military as a problem that needed a remedy. Carter never made this connection. Though Carter noted the divide between the military and society with sadness and dismay, he did not prioritize it and took little action to mend the divide.

[33] "Military and National Defense: Confidence in the Military," Gallup poll, 1975-2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1666/military-national-defense.aspx.
[34] Drury et al., "'Pretty Prudent' or Rhetorically Responsive? The American Public's Support for Military Action," 84.

Conclusion

The Vietnam War left its mark on the military institution, both in terms of its capability and its relationship with the American public. The distrust and lack of confidence with which the public regarded the military was particularly problematic in light of the newly-created all-volunteer force. Memories of My Lai, free fire zones, and "fraggings" darkened the perceptions of the average American. Without a draft to compel service, the military had to make a case to the wider population that it was a valid career option. If it failed to do so, recruitment and retention would suffer, and the military would be undermanned both in numbers and quality of service members. Additionally, public support for the military was essential to the overall US ability to counter the Soviet threat. The Vietnam War had reinforced the lesson that without public support for the military and the operations in which it engaged, the United States could not sustain resolve. The post-Vietnam military, then, was faced with insufficient budget, aging equipment, underqualified personnel, and a negative relationship with society. All in all, this was the "hollow army" that General Meyer described to Carter.[1]

Carter and Reagan each were faced with the challenge of modernizing the military in the context of a Soviet threat and economic challenges. Comparing how they addressed these problems, particularly how they messaged the credibility of the military to the public, provides insight on how each was able to influence an important aspect of civil-military relations. Using a framework that evaluates how well each president's narrative put forth an image of the military as aligned with US strategic interests, motivated by American values, and characterized by credibility and professionalism, suggests how much each president was able to affect public perception of the military.

Both Carter and Reagan increased the defense budget and focused on technological modernization, although they diverged on which specific technological solutions were appropriate to meet security challenges. For example, while waiting for stealth technology to develop, Carter stopped production of the B-1 in favor of an

[1] Frank L. Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised: President Carter, Defense Budgets, and the Politics of Military Readiness*, Letort Papers, no. 54 (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012), 2.

updated version of the B-52. To much fanfare, Reagan reversed this decision.

Carter and Reagan both viewed the divide between the military and society as problematic. For Carter, this was perhaps even more personal. His military service was more recent, and his son had served in Vietnam and experienced a hostile response upon his return. Despite his personal feelings about the civil-military divide, Carter did little to overtly address the problem. Although he sponsored veterans support initiatives and occasionally spoke about the honor with which military members served, he did not present a comprehensive narrative to the public that would mitigate negative post-Vietnam public sentiment. In general, Carter was not skilled in the creation or delivery of narratives, but he also seemed to fail to recognize that domestic support to the military was essential for overall US credibility with the Soviet Union. Instead of trying change negative public opinion, Carter simply tried to sidestep it, as when he put off presenting a Medal of Honor to a Vietnam War veteran.

Faced with almost the same problem of civil-military discord, Reagan took a markedly different approach. Although his response to building up the military was similar to Carter's, Reagan presented a strikingly different narrative. In almost every speech, Reagan spoke about the criticality of the military to ensuring national security, the values and ideals with which servicemembers served their country, and the growing credibility and capabilities that came about since he had increased the defense budget and modernized inventory. Reagan's belief in the importance of changing domestic opinion was well-documented in both his writings and those of Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense. Vietnam had reinforced their understanding that without public support for the military, the country was at a disadvantage in a sustained conflict – exactly the type of conflict that the Cold War with the Soviet Union was.

Gallup polling measuring confidence shows that the public began to view the military more favorably by 1985, several years into Reagan's presidency.[2] Although Reagan's narrative about the military was not wholly responsible for this change, it is likely that his simple, consistent messaging was able to influence the public, making them see the military of the 1980s as one that was different from the Vietnam War-era

[2] "Military and National Defense: Confidence in the Military," Gallup poll, 1975-2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1666/military-national-defense.aspx.

version. In fact, Reagan's narrative was so effective that some have suggested that he was responsible not just for the improvement in public perception of the military, but also for the impression that the military was weak during the Carter administration. While campaigning, Reagan portrayed the military as in crisis, saying "we're in greater danger today than we were the day after Pearl Harbor. Our military is absolutely incapable of defending this country."[3] While capability and credibility would increase with continued modernization and funding, Carter had already grown the defense budget, pursued technological modernization, improved support to veterans, and increased pay and benefits. What Carter had not done was effectively message these efforts to the American public. Always the "great communicator," this was what Reagan could do that Carter could not. Motivated by his priority of improving the public's perception of the military, Reagan's corresponding positive narrative increased public confidence in the military that trended upwards through the Gulf War and still resonates today.

[3]Richard Stubbing, "The Defense Program: Buildup or Binge?," *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 4 (Spring 1985).

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