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Clausewitz's "Remarkable Trinity":  
National Security Strategy  
and Presidential Command and Control of the Armed Forces

by

G. Stephen Hartley  
Lieutenant Colonel, USMC

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

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Within the structure of our form of government, the president has principal responsibility for articulating and guiding the United States through this new landscape.<sup>2</sup> As the United States moves into the twenty-first century, protecting its national interests may well require the president to consider the application of military force to deal with potential widespread regional instability.

The historical relationship among the president, the Congress, as the elected voice of the American people, and the armed forces is crucial to understanding how the country will deal with future regional crises. Critical to this assessment is a historical overview of the evolution of the president as commander in chief and questions of command, control, and war-making authority. As military leaders who will be required to take America's sons and daughters into harm's way when called upon by this nation's leadership, it is important for us to understand the relationship among the president, Congress, and the military.

Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "war is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a remarkable trinity [and] as an instrument of policy...the first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people, the second the commander and his army; the third the government."<sup>3</sup> This remarkable trinity, he stated, is "like three different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and yet variable in

their relationship to one another."<sup>4</sup> Critical, then, to the functioning of this trinity once the nation's armed forces are committed to war in support of a national security strategy, he stated "a theory [or policy] that ignores any one of [the components of the trinity] or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless."<sup>5</sup> As a final point he cautioned, "the passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which the play of courage and talent will enjoy ... depends on the character of the commander and the [armed forces]; but the political aims are the business of the government alone."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the remarkable trinity is like an equilateral triangle with three equal arms or components that require balance in order to maintain shape and produce an effective policy. The president is uniquely positioned to balance this trinity. As a preliminary concept for the employment of the armed forces, this theory establishes a basic structure to view presidential decisions regarding command and control of the armed forces.

#### Presidential Command and Control: A Historical Overview

Historians have suggested that one of the most notable gatherings of talent ever brought together in American history occurred when the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, in May 1787. During that long hot summer of bitter and protracted debate, this august body

of men, our Founding Fathers, hammered out the durable instrument known as the Constitution of the United States.

Throughout the months of debate over the contents of the Constitution, no more crucial problem confronted these men than that of establishing a three-branch federal government that incorporated, in a workable way, the concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances. Perhaps the thorniest and most complex issue met by the Framers was the relationship to be established between the executive branch, represented by the president, and the legislative branch, embodied in the Congress. And one of the most challenging and feared powers to be authorized was that of the command of the nation's armed forces. Who was to command the military and who was responsible for war-making were issues to be decided.

What emerged from the Framers' debates was the provision that the president was to be chief executive of the United States and, in addition, was to be commander in chief of the army and navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several states, when called into actual service of the United States. There was no elaboration beyond this statement. The Framers intention was clear. The president would command the nation's military.

The Founding Fathers were not at all ambiguous on the matter of who should possess the war-making power. In their judgment, prudence clearly dictated that this power should be given to the legislative branch. While under the Constitution the president

was accorded the power to act as commander in chief of the armed forces, it is clear that the Founders did not intend for this role to confer any authority upon him to declare war. Rather, as Alexander Hamilton noted, "It would amount to nothing more than the supreme command and direction of the military and naval forces, as first general and admiral of the confederacy."<sup>7</sup> In short, the president was to be in charge of the armed forces once they were committed to battle, but the decision on whether or not to commit them was to rest solely with the Congress as the principal voice of the people.

The allocation of the war powers established by the Framers had the virtue of guaranteeing civilian control of the military and, at the same time, providing unity of command during battle. Thus, at the outset, with civilian control of the military implicit and explicit in the commander in chief clause, the American form of government, while providing for a military system, was not likely to lead to a militaristic society. The armed forces were agencies of civil power, to be organized and disciplined with that purpose in mind, and not ends unto themselves.

Although the Constitution gives Congress the powers to declare war and to raise and support armies, it is nonetheless the power and duty of the president to wage war, once declared, and to command and control the armed forces in both peace and war. The reality of recent years, however, suggests that there is a variance between the power the Constitution authorizes and

the power the president actually exercises.

The president is the commander in chief of the armed forces and, as such, exercises command and control. What is meant by command and control? Command and control has different meanings for the military and the civilian. For the military, it may mean the actual application of forces and weapons systems against an enemy. To the civilian, command and control may mean that method whereby the civilian maintains control over the country's military. Both definitions are correct. The definition one uses in our society often depends on one's social, political, and military perspective. Command and control for the purpose of this paper is "the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned forces in the accomplishment of the mission."<sup>8</sup>

From this definition, one could argue, then, that the president could not exercise command and control in a military sense because he is not a commander. This argument is faulty. The commander in chief clause of the Constitution is an outstanding example of the Framers' mixing of political and military functions. In most societies, from nomadic tribes down to the Framers' time, it had been customary for the chief of state also to be the chief military commander. This had been true of the Greek city states, the Roman republic, and the European national monarchies, as well as Napoleonic France. At the time the Framers were developing the Constitution, virtually all the state constitutions made the governor commander in chief



of the militia. It was natural for this relationship to be assigned to the president. It could be argued that the Framers simply codified a historically based tradition.

The extent to which the Framers expected the president to exercise military functions may be seen in their failure to curb his authority personally to lead troops. As Samuel P. Huntington wrote, "Such a restriction was contained in the New Jersey plan and had the support of (Alexander) Hamilton. The Convention, however, explicitly rejected these attempts to limit his authority to command in person."<sup>9</sup> From these actions it is clear that the Framers and the people believed that the president could, if he desired, assume personal command of the army in the field. In fact, George Washington, while serving as this nation's first president, led troops in the field in 1794.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, no real distinction existed between political and military competence. Given the generalized, nontechnical nature of the military, it was thought that any man capable of being president was capable of command, the idea being that if he could handle the difficult and complex affairs of state, he could handle command of the armed forces. This view began to change, however, as the military became more technical and specialized, thereby requiring a more professional member. According to Huntington, "The President was no longer qualified to exercise military command, and even if he were qualified by previous training, he could not devote time to this function without abandoning his political

responsibilities. The political functions of the presidency became incompatible with the military functions of the commander in chief."<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the constitutional presumption that the president exercised command still remained.

The development of the role of the president as commander in chief continued until it reached the point where there existed a "balanced pattern" between civilian control and military command. As Huntington noted, "[this] balanced pattern assign(ed) to the president a purely political function: the decisions of the highest policy issues and the general supervision of the military establishment."<sup>11</sup> The president continued to be responsible for all policy decisions. These policy issues could, and did, among other things, include decisions regarding treaties, but would, most certainly, include the formulation of a national strategy to win a war. The balanced pattern concept meant only that the president no longer led the armies in the field. He still maintained responsibility for the command and control of the armed forces through his oversight responsibility.

In no area have the actions of recent presidents evoked greater controversy, however, than by presidential involvement in undeclared war making. Acting in his capacity as commander in chief, Lyndon Johnson committed the United States to a protracted war in Vietnam; Richard Nixon secretly committed air and ground forces in Cambodia; Ronald Reagan committed armed forces to action on the island of Grenada; and George Bush directed armed intervention against Panama and Iraq. History helps us

understand by what authority these presidents justified the commitment of human and material resources to such military undertakings.

That war making must rest with the Congress was recognized and adhered to by early presidents. In 1845, during the presidency of James Polk, the first of several blows were struck against the war making power of Congress. In an effort to provoke hostilities with Mexico, President Polk instructed General Zachary Taylor to proceed to Corpus Christi, Texas, and to position his army there. In directing the army, Polk was exercising legitimate powers as commander in chief; however, because Mexico regarded all of Texas as its own territory, this act constituted an obvious provocation. When Mexico showed restraint and did not engage Taylor's army in Texas, Polk directed Taylor to move his army to the Rio Grande. Not surprisingly, the Mexicans attacked Taylor's soldiers, whose presence they viewed as an invasion of their territory. Polk immediately asked Congress to recognize that a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico.<sup>12</sup> This event clearly demonstrated that, while Congress had the exclusive power to declare war, the president, as commander in chief, could nevertheless precipitate a provocative set of circumstances that would make war unavoidable, thereby giving Congress little choice in the matter. Several members of Congress, among them Abraham Lincoln, unsuccessfully challenged the constitutionality of Polk's actions.

But Lincoln's perspective on the chief executive's war-making power changed substantially once he became president. Without calling Congress into session, he ordered a naval blockade of the Confederacy. His authority to do so was ultimately challenged in the courts in a series of suits known as the Prize cases. In these suits, it was argued that a naval blockade constituted an act of war under international law and, since Congress had not declared war, Lincoln had no right to institute the blockade. The Supreme Court did not agree and instead ruled that an "invasion or insurrection created a state of war as legal fact" and thus the president did not have to wait for a congressional authorization before responding.<sup>13</sup> As Robert E. DiClerico reported, "Lincoln's actions have been cited as a precedent for presidential war making; this claim is in error, for the Court specifically stated that such action could only be constitutional in times of invasion or rebellion."<sup>14</sup> Also worth noting is that Lincoln never claimed that the right to take the nation into war was a routine power of the president. Rather, he repeatedly maintained that he was justified in exercising this power only because the very survival of the nation was at stake.<sup>15</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century the presidency further eroded the war-making power of Congress. In 1900, President William McKinley ordered five thousand troops to China in order to help put down the Boxer Rebellion. While he alleged that the purpose of intervention was to protect American lives and

property, in fact his motives were purely political. Although the approval of Congress was never sought by McKinley, Congress did not raise any objections, despite China's prompt declaration of war against the United States.<sup>16</sup> This event marked the first time an American president committed troops to combat against another sovereign state outside the Western Hemisphere.

The need to protect lives and property were also used by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as a pretext for intervening militarily in the political affairs of several Caribbean countries. Their actions were taken without consulting Congress. Because most of Congress supported such actions, Congress chose not to dwell on the legality of the presidents' actions. Future presidents would rely on this example in order to commit troops. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson resorted to this justification when he sent American soldiers to the Dominican Republic, although he admitted privately that the real reason for his action was to avoid a Communist takeover of its government.<sup>17</sup> Ronald Reagan committed troops against the government forces on Grenada under the justification of protecting American lives. Like Johnson, he included, as an additional motive, maintaining a democratic government on the island.

The war-making powers of Congress suffered additional setbacks during the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. The boldness of his actions, however, may well have been encouraged by a Supreme Court decision in the Curtiss-Wright case, which was handed down at the end of his first term.<sup>18</sup> This case was an

attempt to limit the authority the president exercised in the formulation of foreign policy. The Court contended that the president must be given inherent authority in foreign affairs because only he has adequate knowledge in this area. Just exactly what these powers were the Court never made clear, but future presidents would draw on this "inherent authority" as one of their justifications for committing American troops to combat.

Before the entry of the United States into the Second World War, Roosevelt undertook several actions of doubtful constitutionality. The most notable of these was his "shoot-on-sight" order to American naval vessels convoying war materials to Great Britain. This order grew out of a September 1941 incident in which a German submarine fired two torpedoes at the U.S.S. Greer while she operated off the coast of Iceland. When Roosevelt reported this incident to Congress, he failed to acknowledge that the Greer was not operating innocently. Rather, she had been tailing a German U-boat and reporting the submarine's location to a British plane that dropped depth-charges in an attempt to sink the U-boat. Nor did Roosevelt report that the ship and her personnel suffered no damage or injuries. Finally, he issued his order to attack German vessels without seeking congressional authorization. Thus, as historian Merlo Pusey suggested, "From the date of the Greer incident... the United States was engaged in a de facto naval war with Germany on the Atlantic Ocean."<sup>19</sup>

Under the presidency of Harry Truman, congressional war-

making power was dealt one of its most severe blows. Two days after being informed that North Korea had invaded South Korea, Truman ordered American air and naval forces to the area to support the South Koreans. Several days after his initial commitment of air and naval forces to the area, he made the decision to commit ground forces as well.

When Truman met with congressional leaders to inform them of his decisions, the idea of asking Congress for a joint resolution giving approval for his actions came up. After consulting with his advisors, he concluded that no such act was required. Rather, he argued that his role as commander in chief provided him with the necessary authority to commit armed forces to combat.<sup>20</sup>

For the first time in American history, a president asserted that his responsibilities as commander in chief provided him with the constitutional authority to commit armed forces in a major war against another sovereign state without congressional approval. The boldness of Truman's actions takes on greater significance when one considers, first, that Truman gave his orders even before South Korea made any request for such assistance, and second, that the United States was not bound by any mutual defense pact to come to the aid of South Korea.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, one year before the Korean conflict, the secretary of state did not even mention South Korea when discussing those countries in the Pacific that were deemed vital to United States national security.<sup>22</sup> Finally, as Robert E. DiClerico said,

"While some members of Congress questioned Truman's authority [to make war], they were overwhelmed by the vast majority who acquiesced."<sup>23</sup>

Once again, Congress had willingly surrendered its constitutional authority to the president. Ultimately, it would take the Vietnam War to force Congress to reassess the desirability of presidential encroachment upon its war-making power. As DiClerico suggested, however, "This reconsideration grew not only out of the apparent futility of our policy in Vietnam, but also out of the deception with which this policy had been undertaken."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the point had been reached where presidential usurping of congressional war-making powers, coupled with the outright deception of the nation under the guise of authorized presidential power, tilted the balance of power far outside congressional levels of tolerance. Presidents would be held responsible to the nation by Congress for what they were doing, as well as why they were doing it.

In August 1964, North Vietnamese patrol boats fired two torpedoes at the U.S.S. Maddox while she was cruising in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. The secretary of defense stated that this attack was "deliberate and unprovoked."<sup>25</sup> At the request of President Johnson, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, authorizing the president to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against United States forces and to prevent further aggression.

Not until several years later did the Congress discover that



the circumstances surrounding this incident may have been different than initially reported by the president. For example, Congress learned that the commander of the U.S.S. Maddox had sent the following cable back to the Department of Defense immediately after the incident: "Review of action makes many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful....No actual visual sightings by Maddox. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action."<sup>26</sup>

Yet despite the uncertainty of the situation as evidenced by the cable, Johnson ordered fifty bombing strikes against North Vietnam. Congress also learned later that the U.S.S. Maddox was not lying inoffensively in the waters of the Tonkin Gulf. Maddox was, as John Hughes observed, "collecting military intelligence and collaborating operationally with South Vietnamese patrol boats shelling the northern coast."<sup>27</sup>

While Johnson did see fit to seek the approval of Congress for his actions, it seems clear that he did so for political rather than constitutional reasons. Four years after Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, he stated the following: "We stated then, and we repeat now, we did not think the resolution was necessary to what we did and what we're doing."<sup>28</sup> Rather, he based his action partly on precedents set by earlier presidents, and more important, on the right of the president to repel a sudden, unprovoked attack on American territory, personnel, or armed forces. Certainly the Founding Fathers had in mind for the president to be able to repel sudden attacks; however, clearly

they had in mind a sudden attack on the territory of the United States. In essence, then, based on Johnson's actions and interpretation of his power, it appeared that a president could commit American troops anywhere and at any time he thought the security of the United States was threatened.

Richard Nixon came into the presidency inheriting the Vietnam War, and his attempts to deal with it were equally controversial. During the course of troop reductions in Vietnam, he authorized American combat action inside Cambodia in order to eliminate enemy sanctuaries there. He believed that these sanctuaries were inhibiting the safe withdrawal of American troops. This decision to conduct combat operations inside a neutral country was made without consultation with Congress either before or after the authorization was granted. Nixon justified his actions on the grounds that as commander in chief he had a responsibility to protect the lives of American troops legitimately engaged in combat.

Equally controversial was his decision to conduct secret bombing raids on Cambodia from March 1969 to May 1970. These raids were undertaken, again, without any prior consultation with Congress. Additionally, the administration did not even inform Congress after the fact. When Congress did learn of the bombings two years later, this information came from a radar operator who disclosed the operation to Senator William Proxmire.<sup>29</sup>

While President Nixon's actions could be challenged on constitutional grounds, so also could those of many other

presidents. Where Nixon differed from previous presidents was not so much in what he did, but rather in the way he did it. Nixon sought neither the advice and consent of Congress before nor after he committed American troops into Cambodia. And with respect to the secret bombings in Cambodia, he chose not even to inform Congress.

Although the erosion of the congressional war-making power was a gradual process, it took the experience of the Vietnam War for Congress to realize its power was completely lost. Indeed, only after the Vietnam War did Congress begin to reassess its own role and that of the president with regard to war-making power. This reassessment led, in 1973, to passage of legislation known as the War Powers Resolution. The major provisions of the act were:

1. The president in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States armed forces into hostilities, or situations where imminent involvement may occur.

2. Within forty-eight hours after introducing troops into the previously described conditions, the president shall submit a report to Congress explaining his actions.

3. Within sixty days after the report, the president shall terminate the use of such armed forces unless Congress has: (a) declared war; (b) or extended the sixty-day period; (c) or cannot meet because of an armed attack upon the United States.

4. Notwithstanding anything said in the above provisions, at any time the United States armed forces are engaged in

hostilities outside the United States without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed if Congress so directs.

Note that the president is not absolutely required to consult with Congress before introducing armed forces into combat. Rather, he is to do so "in every possible instance." Whether it is possible will be left up to the president. Furthermore, the term consult is not clearly defined.

Since the passage of the War Powers Resolution, there have been at least ten occasions where presidents have committed American forces abroad.<sup>30</sup> Although there have been grumblings over the degree of presidential compliance with the War Powers Resolution with regard to these actions, Congress has thus far shown no inclination to make a major issue out of the matter. In part, this reluctance may be explained by continuing congressional ambivalence over what Congress's role should be in decisions to commit American forces into combat. Additionally, if a president takes swift, limited action and succeeds, the public approval that follows will likely discourage any vigorous objection on the part of Congress, regardless of any doubts about the legality of the actions. And if the action fails but the public supports the attempt nevertheless, Congress is, again, unlikely to take action.

The Framers of the Constitution intended a sharp division of power and authority between the executive and legislative branches. Congress was to possess war-making authority and the

president to serve as commander in chief. As has been shown, congressional war-making power has been virtually eliminated despite a half-hearted attempt by Congress to recapture its authority in the aftermath of Vietnam. The president not only serves as commander in chief but, with little worry about congressional oversight, has the power to decide when and where to commit American armed forces. What does this mean to presidential command and control of the armed forces?

Certainly the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces. By assuming congressional war-making authority, however, the president is vulnerable to congressional rebuke. Presidential decisions regarding the employment of this nation's armed forces must have the support of Congress. Congress, the elected voice of the people, represents an important component in Clausewitz's remarkable trinity. Any president who ignores this relationship when committing the armed forces of this nation does so at the risk of his or her political life and does so at great risk to the fabric of this nation. Congressional censure with respect to presidential war-making will, then, be an issue of accountability, and, as such, is rightly justified.

#### The President and the Military

The next component or equilateral leg in Clausewitz's remarkable trinity is the relationship between the president and the military. While the political aim of the nation is the business of the government as articulated by the chief executive,

the actual execution of the military towards the accomplishment of articulated military objectives defined as a part of the political aim is the responsibility of the military. As Clausewitz explained, however, there is not a fixed relationship between these two legs. Rather a balance must exist between the two. A poorly articulated policy that makes unclear the proper application of the armed forces or a clearly stated strategy that is poorly executed by the military are examples that upset the balance. What is clear in understanding this balance is that the military must be competent and the government, in the form of the president as commander in chief, must exercise oversight responsibility.

There are numerous examples of such imbalance in United States history. The interaction of Franklin Roosevelt and the senior military leadership in the formulation of an American strategy at the beginning of the Second World War is one such example as is Lyndon Johnson's personal decisions about tactical bombing during the Vietnam War. Much has been written about these situations. A better American example of a complete breakdown in the balance between these military and government components and the severe consequences it caused, however, occurred during the Civil War.

Jefferson Davis, as commander-in-chief of the Confederate States of America, was responsible for the articulation and implementation of this new nation's military strategy. History records that in the first of these tasks, the articulation of

strategy, he shone. In the second task, oversight of the military's implementation of the strategy, he failed. The Western Theater of the Confederacy illustrates Davis's command and control decisions and reflects his strengths and weaknesses during this period of the war.

While Jefferson Davis was not a United States president, he was the head of a new country that structured its constitutional government along the lines of the nation from which it had recently seceded. If the South was to be victorious, Davis, using his constitutional authority as president and commander in chief, had to formulate and articulate a successful national strategy. As Steven E. Woodworth wrote, "The task of defending the Confederacy was one of staggering proportions, involving a military frontier that stretched from the Virginia tidewaters westward across the Appalachians, the hills and rivers of Tennessee and Kentucky, and the Mississippi River to the Great Plains beyond. Besides this there was a coastline of several thousand miles to guard against an enemy whose naval superiority gave him the potential of descending in force on any point on the coast at any time."<sup>31</sup>

In the formulation of a national strategy, Davis made the decision early on that the Confederacy would attempt to hold as much of its territory as possible rather than maintain a more flexible defense such as was used by the Americans during the Revolutionary War. There were many reasons for this strategy. Davis recognized that this war was going to require large armies

and these armies were going to need copious amounts of supplies. Consequently, the more territory the Confederacy lost, the less it would have to provide for its armies. Another reason for this strategy was slavery. The issue of maintaining the "institution" of slavery was important to the South. This institution was probably too fragile to endure evading armies from the North. Then there was the issue of legitimacy of a new country in the eyes of the world. To give up part of the South, a "sovereign nation," without a fight could negatively affect world recognition. Additionally, a rigid defense designed to stop the enemy at the borders allowed Davis to establish defensive priorities instead of having to answer the often self-serving demands of the local or state politicians who called for defense of their area first.<sup>32</sup> Finally, a Confederate victory would change the North's character and could well lead to the breakup of the truncated remainder of the Union.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, Davis distributed the available forces of the Confederacy around the borders of the South. This strategy well suited the military, economic, and industrial realities of the region. It was a strategy fitted to the defense of a land frontier and it would make the North's supply lines and lines of communication vulnerable to attacks.

The Western Theater turned out to be a far more difficult area for Davis than the east. As Woodworth recorded, "The front was larger and vastly more complicated, and Davis was never able to find a winning team of generals for it. In the West, Davis's



abilities as a strategist, a commander, and a judge of men was put to their greatest test."<sup>34</sup>

To organize the Western Theater initially, Davis had the help of two men. One was Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker, an Alabama lawyer and politician with no military training or experience whom Davis had appointed in response to political pressure. Competent in matters of business, Walker was no help in matters of military strategy. As a result of Walker's performance, Davis resolved to decide military affairs himself while allowing "some politician" to handle the routine business.<sup>35</sup>

The second man who assisted Davis in organizing the Western Theater was General Samuel Cooper. Cooper and Davis had worked together closely in 1852 when Davis was secretary of war. In appointing Cooper as adjutant and inspector general of the South, Davis dismally misjudged the man's character and ability. As Woodworth pointed out, "A partial reason for this mistake was that Davis's previous association with Cooper had been in the day-to-day administration of a peacetime army less than one-tenth the size of the one the Confederacy was now attempting to sustain. The pressure of war demonstrated that Cooper had been fit for nothing more rigorous than the peacetime routine."<sup>36</sup> As the war progressed, Davis realized Cooper's inadequacy, but, he did not remove him. Rather, he allowed the critical position, for which he had selected Cooper, to sink into decrepitude. In so doing, Davis made it difficult, if not impossible, for the

South to exploit the command system it so required, with the result that Davis's personal burden of command and control grew.

From neither Walker nor Cooper could Davis expect much help in the formulation and management of a military strategy in the Western Theater. Unfortunately, Davis's initial selection of generals to execute this strategy proved, also, to be faulty. The task of securing the mouth of the Mississippi River and New Orleans was given to Brigadier General David Emmanuel Twiggs, commander of the Army of Tennessee and Davis's old Mexican War division commander. The appointment of Twiggs was based on this friendship and was supported by the leading citizens of New Orleans. By autumn of 1861, however, these same citizens were calling for Twiggs's removal. In firing Twiggs, Davis revealed a character shortcoming that colored his presidential performance throughout the war. As Woodworth described, "Davis, who was never very good at owning up to his mistakes, irritably complained that it was all the fault of those citizens of New Orleans who had recommended Twiggs: They should sooner have informed me of the mistake they had made."<sup>37</sup> At any rate, Twiggs was replaced by Braxton Bragg and time needed for the organization of this area was lost.

The next appointment Davis made proved to be the worst by far. To head up the area of the northern end of the Mississippi Valley, Davis again selected a former acquaintance, Leonidas Polk. A former West Point classmate of Davis, Polk was, at the start of the war, a Louisiana Episcopal bishop. He had no

military experience of any sort before the war. His selection was purely political because, as Woodworth stated, "by any standard, Bishop Leonidas Polk's military credentials were not impressive. He was barely qualified to serve as a second lieutenant, yet in the emergency facing the South, there might have been justification for making him a major or even a lieutenant colonel. Jefferson Davis made him a major general."<sup>38</sup> Polk's performance proved to be disruptive to the South. Early in the war, he conducted an unauthorized attack on Columbus, Kentucky, alienating undecided sentiment in that state and destroying whatever chance the South would have had in gaining Kentucky's support.

In arranging for the defense of the Western Theater, one area required immediate attention, the northwestern frontier. This area was critical for it included two key border states, Missouri and Kentucky, that were teetering between remaining in the Union or joining the South. To arrange for the defense of this area, Davis selected Gideon J. Pillow. A Tennessee veteran of the Mexican War, Pillow had been appointed a major general and commander of the Army of Tennessee when Tennessee withdrew from the Union. In selecting Pillow, Davis yielded to the political pressure of the moment. He made him a brigadier general and posted him with the responsibility for the defense of Tennessee. Davis, however, arranged the chain of command in this region so that Pillow, a former soldier, would have to report to a major general. Unfortunately, this major general, at the time, was

Polk, a man of dubious military skill and experience.

Davis's overall performance in organizing the Western Theater shows that he could and did take positive action. He created a position, adjutant and inspector general, which, in theory, would provide an effective system of high command. He recognized the need to take immediate steps for the defense of the crucial Mississippi and Tennessee rivers, which offered the North a north-south passage into the South. He, also, coordinated the defense of the region under a unified command.

In selecting generals for these defenses, however, Davis's performance was less impressive. The closer his personal association with the selection, the less reliable was his judgment. Cooper and Twiggs were unfit for their positions. Pillow's appointment was largely political and Davis intended to limit the amount of damage he could do by having him report to a senior commander. The problem was that this commander, Polk, possessed questionable military qualifications. Polk's incompetence taxed Davis's abilities to be an effective commander in chief.

During the initial experimental phase of the war, Davis selected, as overall commander of the Western region, his old friend, Albert Sidney Johnston, who was both professional and competent. With Johnston in charge of the West, Davis focused on other parts of the Confederacy. His reliance on Johnston, however, would prove to be detrimental for two reasons. First, Johnston's military genius allowed him to accomplish much with

the meager resources Davis supplied, thereby creating a sense that only a minimum force was required to achieve victory in the theater. Second, when Johnston was killed on April 6, 1862, at the Battle of Shiloh, Davis's interaction with his generals in this region became vastly more complex and problematical because he had become too dependent on one man.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout military operations against the North in the Western Theater, Davis acted indecisively, neglecting shortcomings in field officers, failing to coordinate the actions of the armies of that region, and delaying the shifting of troops from other armies into this region. Only after the ruinous Chickamauga and Chattanooga campaigns, did Davis finally authorize the transfer of major forces to the west. This action, however, was too late. These failures are the principal examples of Davis's shortcoming as commander in chief.

Jefferson Davis was responsible for the formulation of the national strategy to win the war for the Confederate States of America. Assessing him is not easy. He faced enormous tasks, including creating a new government and leading this new country to war and victory. In creating the initial national strategy for the South, he showed a masterful understanding of how strategy was to be developed. But Davis's worst fault was, with the exception of Johnston, allowing his inordinate loyalty to his friends to color his judgment. As Woodworth noted, "the Confederate president found it almost impossibly difficult not to be hesitant and indecisive. He hesitated to compel cooperation

between his generals when only he was in a position to see the need for such cooperation. ...Such vacillation on the part of Davis can be seen somewhere in most of the Confederacy's great failures during the war."<sup>40</sup>

Far from a mediocrity, Jefferson Davis was a remarkable man. Given the magnitude of his tasks, he fell short only by the narrowest of margins. From Davis's example we realize that a commander in chief must exercise effective leadership and he must understand the importance of effective military leaders. When the military leaders' actions fail to support the implementation of the national strategy, the president must take decisive action. The Confederate presidency of Jefferson Davis illustrates an imbalance between the governmental component or leg of the remarkable trinity and the military component, with the result that accomplishment of the national strategic objectives is impossible.

#### The President and the People

Clausewitz wrote of three components of the remarkable trinity - the government, the military, and the people. The last component of the remarkable trinity requiring review is the relationship of the president to the people of the nation.

Congress, representing the people, provides oversight responsibility of presidential decisions. Because the president is elected by a popular vote from across the nation and members of Congress from individual districts and states, it is necessary

to identify a case where a policy so shook the nation that an imbalance occurred between the president, as representative of the whole electorate, and the people. That imbalance can be found in America's longest war, Vietnam. For purposes of brevity, only certain actions of Lyndon Johnson during America's twenty-five-year involvement in Vietnam will be discussed.

As American involvement in the war increased under Johnson's administration, popular support for the conflict decreased. There were many reasons for this occurrence, foremost among them being a lack of a clearly articulated national strategy.<sup>41</sup> By 1967, popular unrest and demonstrations against the war had reached the point where Johnson directed government action against the people involved.

As George C. Herring observed, "Johnson was alarmed by the position he found himself in, stung by his critics, and deeply hurt by the desertion of trusted aides such as [Secretary of Defense] McNamara."<sup>42</sup> Johnson recognized that he could not ignore the opposition so, believing that the peace movement was turning the public against the war, he set out to destroy it. As Herring noted, he instructed the CIA to institute a program of surveillance of antiwar leaders to prove his suspicions that they were communists operating on orders from foreign governments. This program, called Operation CHAOS, was a violation of the CIA's charter. It eventually led to the compilation of files on more than 7,000 Americans.<sup>43</sup> When the CIA was unable to prove the links he suspected, Johnson leaked information to prowar

members of Congress, leaving it up to them to issue public charges against the peace movement. Johnson escalated the domestic war against the peace movement as actions shifted from surveillance to harassment and disruption. Actions included indicting antiwar leaders and infiltrating the peace movement in hopes of causing its members to conduct activities that would result in criminal convictions, thereby discrediting them in the eyes of the larger American public.

The irony of Johnson's actions is apparent when compared to the military advice he received at the same time. Even as he was escalating the secret and illegal war against the American public, Johnson was being pressed by his civilian advisers, who were increasingly disillusioned with the high cost of military actions and lack of results, to adopt a new strategy that would be more cost effective and would reduce military casualties. At the heart of the recommendation was to find military operations in the South Vietnam that would reduce American casualties and force the South Vietnamese to assume a greater burden of the fighting.

Johnson was advised, by both the military and its civilian leadership, that the seemingly endless and inconclusive fighting was "the most serious single cause of domestic disquiet."<sup>44</sup> He did begin to consider a change in strategy, but, he did not reevaluate his essential goals in Vietnam. As Herring pointed out, "to take such a step would have been difficult for anyone as long as there was hope of eventual success. It would have been



especially difficult for Lyndon Johnson. It was not a matter of courage, ... it was primarily a matter of pride."<sup>45</sup> He had not wanted the war in Vietnam but he chose to stay the course in 1967 for the same reasons he had gone to war. He saw no alternative that did not require him to admit failure or defeat. Johnson thought of himself as the leader of the people, and as President, constitutionally he was, and he could not accept that his policies were opposed by the people. His unwillingness to change created such an imbalance between him and the people that he declined to seek reelection as president and left the office a bitter man.<sup>46</sup>

Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam demonstrate that presidential decisions regarding the employment of the nation's armed forces must have the support of the people. The people and Congress, the elected voice of the people, represent an important component in Clausewitz's remarkable trinity. In describing the relationship among the components of the remarkable trinity, Clausewitz wrote that any policy that ignores any one component or attempts to fix an arbitrary relationship between any of the components will prove ineffective. Lyndon Johnson's example is evidence that any president who ignores the people when committing the armed forces of this nation is doomed to failure. Balance between the president and the people is critical.

### Future Implications

As old certainties crumble in today's changing political world, Clausewitz's remarkable trinity may be more valid than it was in the nineteenth century. As the examples in this paper have shown, the importance of maintaining balance among the three components is critical to the accomplishment of any national security policy. Given the rise of regionalism, and the subsequent shift away from globalism, only two things seem certain: the international order of the future will depart in significant ways from that of the past four decades; and the United States will need to modify its national security policy to ensure its interests are protected.

America will require a clear purpose and, by carefully measuring the interaction of the components of the remarkable trinity against the purpose, an unclouded direction can be reasonably assured. The significant domestic agenda facing the nation will invariably mean smaller defense forces and lower military budgets and may cause too much inward-looking. National leadership must guard against this. Critical to the future of our nation will be the ability to maintain an international perspective and, because of limited resources, a strong alliance posture.

To state that the world has changed is an understatement; the contemporary world does not resemble the 1950s, or for that matter 1987. Geography no longer provides the security it once did. The revolution in, and proliferation of, military

technology can harm our national interests faster than ever before. An era of transnationalism, multipolarity, and interdependence does not permit isolationism, but instead prescribes a realistic transnational approach in order to confront the challenges of the post Cold War era that lies in the future.

As we navigate our way into the future, competent presidential command and control of the military will continue to be as important as before. In measuring effectual presidential command and control, it is important to keep in mind the "remarkable trinity." As Clausewitz has shown, the three components of the trinity are like three different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and, yet, variable in their relationship to one another. One cannot say that one component is more important than the other. Nor can one argue, in developing a policy like national security strategy and understanding presidential command and control, the relationship of the military to the people or the relationship to the government will always be this way or that. What can be said absolutely, however, is, that in the formulation of this nation's security strategy or in presidential command and control, a strategy or presidential action that ignores any one of the components of the trinity is doomed to failure. And failure in this area may well mean the loss of America's prosperity and freedom.

## ENDNOTES

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14. Robert E. DiClerico, The American President (Second ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 38.

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30. For a discussion of eight of these incidents see DiClerico, American President, 45. The other two incidents suggested by this author include operations by Ronald Reagan in Lebanon and Grenada.
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32. Woodworth, Davis and His Generals, 19-20; James McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 337; Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, William N. Still, Jr., Why the South Lost the Civil War (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 156-157; Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy. The Process of Victory and Defeat (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 128-137.

33. Beringer, et al., Why the South Lost the Civil War, 156-157.
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35. For a detailed discussion of Jefferson Davis's Cabinet see Rembert W. Patrick, Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944).
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37. Ibid., 25; For a more detailed discussion of the Twiggs affair see Dunbar Rowland, ed., Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers and Speeches, 10 vols. (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), 5: 136-137.
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46. For a flavor of how Johnson viewed the Vietnam War, see Lyndon Johnson, The Vantage Point (New York: World Press, 1971).