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THE TRUMAN-MacARTHUR TUG OF WAR—
A LINGERING AFTERMATH?

by

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Truman-MacArthur Tug Of War—A Lingering Aftermath?

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This paper briefly reviews the public disagreement between President Truman and General MacArthur over civilian control of the military, the strategic direction of the Korean war, and the political overtones of their clash. Additionally, it examines the aftermath of MacArthur's relief. Specifically, what effect, if any, did Truman's wartime relief of his senior field commander have on subsequent civil-military relations? Were later senior military leaders inhibited in presenting their views to their civilian superiors when those views conflicted with administration desires, preferred courses of action, or strategic decisions? Or, were the decisions of America's civilian leaders influenced or inhibited as they dealt with the desires, beliefs, and recommendations of their senior military leaders of the time?

At least one historian has written about the shadow of MacArthur and the lingering effect of his relief. That possible effect is explored by looking at four cases of civil-military conflict: (1) General Ridgway and Secretary Wilson, (2) General Westmoreland, the Joint Chiefs, and President Johnson, (3) General Singlaub and President Carter, and (4) General Powell and President Clinton.

The conclusion is that MacArthur's relief has not had an adverse restraining effect on civil-military relations when leaders of character and strength of will are involved—civilian and military. Ridgway was the closest in time to MacArthur's relief, but he was the least affected by it. Only during Vietnam, a similarly limited war with unclear national security objectives, did the shadow of MacArthur clearly affect America's senior leaders—particularly President Johnson and General Westmoreland.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Colonel Stephen A. Danner first visited Korea in 1982. His interest in that country has grown since that time and especially since his assignment there in 1986. Colonel Danner has visited many of the Pacific basin nations as part of the CINCPAC Operations staff, the CINCPAC Airborne Command Post, Team Spirit exercises, and during his tour of duty at Camp Pelham, Korea. Living in Japan in the late 1950s also sparked his interest in the Far East. He is a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College, and commanded a Field Artillery Battalion in the Federal Republic of Germany. Colonel Danner is a member of the Air War College class of 1993.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every war is unique in the sense that no previous war exactly equals a subsequent war. The same is true for the Korean War, but that war possesses several other significant claims to uniqueness. The Korean War was distinctly different from earlier twentieth century wars in both strategic scope and control of its strategic goals.

Unlike the Second World War with its recurring coalition strategy conferences at the highest level,¹ the Korean War strategy evolved during the initial year of the conflict. The coalition forces in Korea were operating under the authority of the United Nations (UN). More significantly, this was a limited war and of a far different nature than the unlimited warfare of its predecessor. There was no such clear objective of unconditional surrender as existed in World War II. Nor was there a Combined Chiefs of Staff organization to develop a strategy.² The United States, through its allies, worked to receive a mandate from the United Nations that became the original strategic objective and then developed, largely on its own, the military strategy to be used in prosecuting the war.³

The Second World War did not see a major civil-military clash between President Roosevelt and any of his senior field commanders. Conflicts existed and civilian and military leaders relieved generals, but President Roosevelt did not relieve any theater commander over a challenge to his strategic policy decisions. In the Korean War a major civil-military conflict between President Truman and General MacArthur developed over the national security strategy. Clausewitz aptly captured the true genesis of the Truman-MacArthur conflict when he said:

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.⁴

Obviously, Truman and MacArthur never had a meeting of the minds in answering Clausewitz's essential strategic question. The Korean war was also the first US war waged in the nuclear era—post Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This paper will briefly review the public disagreement between President Truman and General MacArthur over civilian control of the military, the strategic direction of the war, and the political overtones of their clash. This disagreement eventually led to the relief and retirement of MacArthur. Finally, I will explore the aftermath of MacArthur's relief. Specifically, what effect, if any, did Truman's wartime relief of his senior field commander have on subsequent civil-military relations? Were later senior military leaders inhibited in presenting their views to their civilian superiors when those views conflicted with administration desires, preferred courses of action, or strategic decisions? Or, were the decisions of America's civilian leaders influenced or inhibited as they dealt with the desires, beliefs, and recommendations of their senior military leaders of the time?

At least one historian has written about the shadow of MacArthur and the lingering effect of his relief.⁵ I will examine that possible effect over the last 42 years by looking at four cases of civil-military conflict: (1) General Ridgway and Secretary Wilson; (2) General Westmoreland, the Joint Chiefs, and President Johnson; (3) General Singlaub and President Carter; and (4) General Powell and President Clinton.

CHAPTER II

THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur ruled supreme in the Far East. One was called him the Shogun of Japan, but his real titles were not so imperial. He was the American proconsul in Japan, the Commander in Chief of the Far East Command, Commanding General of the United States Army, Far East, and the Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP). Shortly after the beginning of the Korean War he assumed even more responsibilities as the Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command.⁶

The peaceful situation in the Far East changed in the early morning hours on June 25, 1950, when the North Korean People's Army invaded South Korea. The invasion forced Truman and his advisors to face the decision on whether to commit American military forces to defend Korea. As Truman wrestled with this decision, he received a message from Chiang Kai-shek offering 33,000 troops for operations in Korea.⁷ That offer would create the first split between Truman and MacArthur as MacArthur wished to exploit the offer. Truman, however, was concerned that any use of Chiang's troops would lead to war with mainland China and possibly to a third world war.⁸ At the end of July the President sent MacArthur to Taiwan to discuss the defense of the island before making any decision concerning commitment of Chiang's troops to Korea. MacArthur's specific feeling is clear in his statement that 'We should fight the communists every place—fight them like hell!'⁹ The President understood that while MacArthur disagreed with his policy of neutralizing Chiang Kai-shek on Formosa he would accept it as a dutiful subordinate.¹⁰

Truman's intent was to limit the area of conflict in the Far East. By itself MacArthur's disagreement over the use of Chiang's troops would have left a slight chilling in the relationship between Truman and MacArthur, but no serious harm would have been done. However, in mid-August MacArthur went a step further, and sent a message to the National Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) which was released to the public. In this message MacArthur

had "implied not only that the Chinese Nationalist leader was a loyal ally, but that the United States should aid him in order to prevent the loss of Chiang's unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender."¹¹ He further argued for full support to Formosa to prevent the forfeiting of the "fruits of our Pacific victory to a potential enemy."¹² Finally, his message said, "Nothing could be more fallacious than the threadbare argument by those who advocate appeasement and defeatism in the Pacific that if we defend Formosa we alienate continental Asia."¹³ This was a public repudiation of the President's Formosa policy. Truman saw this as totally inappropriate from a field commander and sent a message to MacArthur directing that the message to the VFW be withdrawn as 'various features with respect to Formosa are in conflict with the policy of the United States.'¹⁴

At this point the differences between Truman and MacArthur were serious and even more so because MacArthur did not recognize the seriousness of the breach. Truman later wrote that he "gave serious thought to relieving General MacArthur as our military field commander in the Far East."¹⁵ At the same time MacArthur said that he "sent for a copy of the message and re-examined it, but could find no feature that was not in complete support of the President."¹⁶ This illustrates the heart of the problem between these two leaders. MacArthur either could not or would not recognize that his statements and actions gave the clear impression of disagreement with Presidential policies. This situation had the potential for disaster, but the subsequent success at Inchon defused matters. It was hard to argue with stunning victory and thus the tension between Truman and MacArthur was considerably relieved.¹⁷

CHAPTER III

JUST CAUSE

There was great frustration on MacArthur's part and that of his senior commanders over the limitations placed on the use of force in the Korean theater.¹⁸ The restrictions against crossing the Yalu and bombing the Chinese Communist bases in Manchuria were particularly objectionable. However, they also became ready scapegoats for the November reversals.¹⁹ The President was not insensitive to this situation, but he was determined to limit the scope of the war. He acknowledged that Communist Chinese Forces were attacking UN forces from a privileged sanctuary. At the same time he insisted on operating within the limits of United Nations policy in Korea. He assured the world, and Communist China in particular, that America never had the intention of carrying hostilities into China.²⁰

This divergence in views was largely based on their individual views of the world. MacArthur was keenly concerned with the Far East, and believed in confronting and utterly defeating communism where it had attacked. He believed that defeating communism in Korea and keeping Formosa strong would contribute to world stability. This would include the Soviets and any aggressive intentions they might harbor toward western Europe.²¹

Truman saw the world from a broad perspective as a President should. He saw the communist center of gravity to be in western Europe and not in the peripheral area of the Far East. His principal concern was that an expansion of the war in Korea would encourage Soviet aggression in Europe. With only one uncommitted active duty division remaining in America as a strategic reserve, he did not want to run that risk.²² His advisors told him that if America attacked China directly then 'Russia would cheerfully get in it.'²³ Truman directed his entire foreign policy toward avoiding direct conflict with Russia so he utterly opposed any action that would virtually guarantee war. That was the crux of his position on the application of power in Korea, and it became a position that MacArthur was less and less able to accept.²⁴

MacArthur's private feelings are his to hold as he desires, but the public release of those views created a turmoil in the Truman administration. An early December interview with *U. S. News and World Report* and a message to the United Press contained implied criticism of the Truman administration and UN policy.²⁵ Truman commented that MacArthur would have court-martialed any young lieutenant who gave press interviews expressing disagreement with the theater strategy in Korea. What did he now expect of the President?²⁶

Truman said, "I should have relieved General MacArthur then and there. The reason I did not was that I did not wish to have it appear as if he were being relieved because the offensive failed. . . . He had to be told that the kinds of public statements which he had been making were out of order."²⁷

To this point the disagreement between Truman and MacArthur revolved around the strategic objective in Korea. However, that changed in early 1951 when MacArthur introduced an element of political intrigue into the situation.²⁸ He was frustrated by his inability to persuade the President to provide him more forces so he could prosecute the war more actively. When the government announced the transfer of four divisions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in February of 1951 MacArthur was especially upset.²⁹ At that time he acquired an influential friend in the form of the Republican Minority Leader in the House of Representatives, Joseph Martin. This was a dangerous alliance between a field commander and a powerful opposition politician. It proved to be the final step in the undoing of MacArthur.

Representative Martin allied himself and the Republican party with MacArthur's views in an address delivered in mid-February.³⁰ MacArthur followed up with a statement that urged the reduction of the Chinese Communist forces superiority by removing the "unprecedented military advantage of sanctuary protection" and pressing the attack against China.³¹

Truman informed MacArthur in March that as the UN forces approached the 38th parallel he had a strong desire to further the policy of containment by negotiating with the Chinese to end the conflict with the parallel as the boundary.³² MacArthur responded on March 24 with an extraordinary public announcement of his own. He preempted the administration announcement and made his own offer to negotiate.³³ This statement hinted that the UN might commit the full preponderance of its power against China if negotiations were not accepted.³⁴

Truman reacted as follows:

This was a most extraordinary statement for a military commander of the United Nations to issue on his own responsibility. It was an act totally disregarding all directives to abstain from any declarations on foreign policy. It was in open defiance of my orders as President and as Commander in Chief. This was a challenge to the authority of the President under the Constitution. It also flouted the policy of the United Nations. By this act MacArthur left me no choice—I could no longer tolerate his insubordination.³⁵

MacArthur had clearly issued more than a statement of military policy. He had committed a political act.³⁶ However, he vigorously defended his statement. Barton Bernstein properly called this and other such disingenuous behavior by MacArthur as an attempt "to stretch and twist Washington's orders, to feign innocence . . . and to continue guilefully to push for the policies he desired."³⁷

At this same time Congressman Martin read a series of letters into the congressional record that he and MacArthur had exchanged. MacArthur fully introduced partisan politics into the disagreement between Truman and himself over the strategic direction of the war in Korea.³⁸ MacArthur wrote:

It seems strangely difficult for some to realize that here in Asia is where the Communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest, and that we have joined the issue thus raised on the battlefield; that here we fight Europe's war with arms while the diplomats there still fight it with words. . . . There is no substitute for victory.³⁹

Truman clearly saw this as a public contradiction of his policies, and a challenge to his authority as President and Commander in Chief.⁴⁰ He requested the views of all of his principal advisors on whether or not to relieve MacArthur. Marshall, his Secretary of Defense, was at first hesitant, but after reviewing the various communications between MacArthur and the JCS, he too recommended relief.⁴¹

On April 11, 1951, Truman released the following statement:

With deep regret I have concluded that General of the Army Douglas MacArthur is unable to give his wholehearted support to the policies of the United States Government and of the United Nations in matters pertaining to his official duties. . . . I have, therefore, relieved General MacArthur of his commands.⁴²

CHAPTER IV

THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

There was a large uproar over the relief of General MacArthur, the Republicans complained bitterly about the unfairness of it, the media had a field day, and the Senate conducted a joint hearing.⁴³ Secretary of State Acheson warned Truman that he would have "the biggest fight of your Administration" if he relieved MacArthur.⁴⁴ An examination of the essential elements of this divergence of views on the conduct of war and the national strategy reveals a clear civil-military power struggle between the President, and a powerful and popular field commander. The Constitution is clear on the matter and Truman addressed the heart of the situation with these words:

If there is one basic element in our Constitution, it is civilian control of the military. Policies are to be made by the elected political officials, not by generals or admirals. Yet time and again General MacArthur had shown that he was unwilling to accept the policies of the administration. By his repeated public statements he was not only confusing our allies as to the true course of our policies but, in fact, was also setting his policy against the President's. . . . If I allowed him to defy the civil authorities in this manner, I myself would be violating my oath to uphold and defend the Constitution.⁴⁵

Eight days after his relief General MacArthur addressed a joint meeting of the Congress. In this address he presented his views on the situation in the Far East. He clearly explained why he felt the war should be expanded to include mainland China, the removal of the use of force restrictions and the involvement of the Republic of China forces in Formosa. He said, "There are some who for varying reasons would appease Red China. They are blind to history's clear lesson. For history teaches with unmistakable emphasis that appeasement but begets new and bloodier war"⁴⁶

The President addressed the nation concerning the situation in the Far East. He restated his position concerning the war in Korea and the strategic direction America was taking. His aim was to avoid spreading the conflict and initiating World War III. Truman felt that he should limit

the war to Korea to ensure that the precious lives of the American military, and the security of the country and the free world would not needlessly be jeopardized.⁴⁷

Richard Lowitt concludes his book, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy*, with a summary of the differences between General MacArthur and his superiors in Washington. These differences

concerned primarily the policy question of whether the United Nations, with American forces bearing the brunt of the burden, should wage an aggressive war by bombing in Manchuria over the Yalu River and by conducting reconnaissance over China itself, or whether the fighting should be confined to Korea alone. Inextricably interwoven into this policy question were related problems: priority of European or Asian Affairs.⁴⁸

The essence of the Truman-MacArthur conflict was over civil versus military control of the strategic direction of the war, and similarly, who determines the national objectives.⁴⁹ It was not a simple misunderstanding over the release of a private letter as David Lawrence maintained.⁵⁰ Truman's statement concerning civilian control based on the constitution provides the correct answers to the conflict. General MacArthur clearly had the right and the responsibility to express his views on the best manner to prosecute the war in Korea. However, he took an oath, as do all commissioned officers, to defend the Constitution and that clearly means following the dictates of the President or resigning. He chose to do neither.

Historians often quote MacArthur as saying, "War's very object is victory, not prolonged indecision. In war, there can be no substitute for victory."⁵¹ That belief is true for total war under the concept as espoused by Clausewitz,⁵² but it is not necessarily so for limited war as President Truman directed in Korea. MacArthur's two key errors were to publicly dispute the wisdom of the dictates of his civilian superiors and adhering to a seriously myopic point of view. His limited point of view caused him to fail to realize that his policies "would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."⁵³

CHAPTER V

THE SHADOW OF MacARTHUR

A major question remains concerning the relief of MacArthur. However, it is not the obvious question about the correctness of President Truman's decision. While I feel that President Truman was fully justified in relieving General MacArthur, there are others who disagree. It seems likely that the appropriateness of Truman's action will be debated as long as these men have their respective critics and loyalists. However, the unanswered significant question is what effect did MacArthur's relief have on future senior US military and civilian leaders? Would the JCS and theater commanders of the future continue to forcefully present their honest views—although less publicly—when in conflict with their civilian leaders? Would America's civilian leaders be more circumspect in dealing with senior military leaders; would they alter their decisions to avoid a potential political embarrassment over a policy disagreement? Is the shadow of MacArthur still with us, or is it long since buried? The following cases provide some insight into the answers to those questions.

GENERAL RIDGWAY AND SECRETARY WILSON

General Ridgway's actions after Truman's relief of MacArthur are especially interesting as he was intimately familiar with the details of their conflict. Before assuming command of the Eighth Army in Korea he was the Army's Vice Chief of Staff and was privy to the administration's concerns over MacArthur's actions. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) selected him to replace MacArthur based on his professional competence and understanding of the President's strategic goals.⁵⁴ Ridgway clearly understood the genesis of the Truman-MacArthur conflict, and he intended, therefore, to win the war while keeping it contained.⁵⁵

Ridgway held the SCAP position for 13 months before being reassigned as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. In the spring of 1953, he became the Chief of Staff (COS) of the Army. The Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) was Charles Wilson. It would be logical to assume that his

assignment in NATO sharpened his political sensitivities as did his understanding of the conditions that led to MacArthur's relief. However, Ridgway was not especially accommodating to his civilian superiors when his professional judgment was involved.

He and the SECDEF did not agree on several matters—budgetary and policy. Ridgway went out of his way in his autobiography to point out that he voluntarily retired and denied that the administration forced him to do so. However, he does acknowledge that his superiors most likely accepted his retirement with a sense of relief "as my views on military matters did not coincide, in many fields, with those of my civilian superiors."⁵⁶

Ridgway felt strongly that he owed his superiors his honest objective professional opinions until the moment they announced their decisions. His essential belief was that

the civilian authorities must scrupulously respect the integrity, the intellectual honesty, of its officer corps. Any effort to force unanimity of view, to compel adherence to some politico-military 'party line' against the honestly expressed views of responsible officers, I pointed out, is a pernicious practice which jeopardizes rather than protects the integrity of the military profession.⁵⁷

He felt that Secretary Wilson repeatedly pressured him to support budget cuts that the assigned missions and commitments of the army did not justify. Ridgway continuously objected to the arbitrary cuts in the army's budget. Eisenhower's announcement that the Joint Chiefs had unanimously recommended the defense budget for 1955 was a total surprise. Ridgway had not concurred, and Eisenhower had simply assumed that he had the total loyalty and support of his Joint Chiefs. In fact, Eisenhower wanted only yes-men as the Joint Chiefs!⁵⁸ Such budgetary disagreements with civilian superiors do not exactly parallel the disagreements between Truman and MacArthur. The US was not at war, and budget decisions are not necessarily within the military area of expertise as warfighting decisions are.

Two other areas more closely involve the area of military expertise. First is the reduction in the strength of combat divisions. The SECDEF suggested reducing divisions to 85 percent

strength, or even to a cadre level. Ridgway was mindful of the hollow force that existed at the outbreak of the Korean War and staunchly refused to accept this "suggestion." The SECDEF brought additional pressure to bear by pointing out that President Eisenhower had also suggested reducing unit strength. Being in the position of taking issue with the Commander in Chief did not sit well with Ridgway. However, he decided that he would adhere to his decision to oppose such a reduction "until purely military arguments proved me wrong. I would not be swayed by arguments that what I advocated would be politically unacceptable."⁵⁹

He based his decision to oppose such a reduction on his honest, objective estimate of what the army required to serve the national interest. He countered the presidential pressure by repeating President Eisenhower's own words in testimony to the Congress. Eisenhower had said that he was a professional soldier and could only provide a soldier's advice regarding the national defense. Advice that went beyond that was outside his area of expertise, and qualification.⁶⁰

The second area involving military—and political—expertise was the potential decision to send troops into Vietnam after the French defeat at Dienbienphu in 1954. Ridgway opposed this on military grounds. He argued that there was no existing infrastructure within Vietnam that would provide adequate support which modern forces find essential to waging and winning war. This recommendation flew in the face of the politicians who wished to "test the New Look" and aid the French. Ridgway explained the difficulty of fighting in Vietnam, and President Eisenhower supported his conclusion—Eisenhower had never wanted any part of a war in Indochina.⁶¹

Common sense would suggest that Ridgway's closeness to MacArthur's relief and the recentness of it would tend to make Ridgway the least likely to challenge his civilian superiors. That assumption may be perfectly valid for lesser men, but it was not applicable to Ridgway. The potential for the "shadow of MacArthur" to blunt his actions and recommendations was there, but so was the strength of character and personal integrity of a professional senior officer. Ridgway was not, however, a bull in a china closet. He was very sensitive and careful concerning the

prerogatives of his civilian superiors. Nevertheless, whether fighting for a larger army budget or against the unsound commitment of ground forces, he simply refused to compromise his view of his responsibilities to those superiors.

In Ridgway's case there was no apparent long term inhibiting effect from MacArthur's relief. Any possible effect on his civilian superiors—avoiding a direct confrontation that could result in Ridgway's firing or transfer—has yet to be discovered.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND, THE JOINT CHIEFS, AND PRESIDENT JOHNSON

Several striking similarities exist between the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Both were limited wars where the US did not bring its full military might to bear.⁶² The avowed administration policy was to prevent the conflict from spreading or becoming World War III. Senior civilian leaders worried that battlefield actions might prompt Soviet or Chinese intervention.⁶³ Finally, the strategic direction of both wars was not clear, and the strategic goals changed more than once during the course of the conflicts.

Vietnam provides the first major US military involvement since Korea where any possible effect of MacArthur's relief on strategic warfighting decisions can be examined. Such an examination provides clear evidence that the shadow of MacArthur was present during the Vietnam War, and served to restrain senior military leaders in their relations with President Johnson. President Johnson felt just as powerfully restrained in dealing with his senior field commander and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

President Johnson lived in terror of a military revolt and did everything in his power to avert it.⁶⁴ During the February 1966 Honolulu conference Johnson apparently feared a MacArthur type challenge to his authority by General Westmoreland. He cautioned Westmoreland by saying, "General, I have a lot riding on you. I hope you don't pull a MacArthur

on me."⁶⁵ Westmoreland had no intention of challenging the President and remained silent.

President Johnson then

carefully sized him up, eventually satisfying himself that *his* general was 'sufficiently understanding' of the constraints imposed on him and was a reliable and straightforward soldier who would not get involved in the politics of war.⁶⁶

The "shadow" was on Westmoreland in April of 1967 when the President recalled him to Washington to brief his new strategy. This new strategy would require additional American forces in Vietnam, but offered a real possibility for winning the war. He proposed expanding the ground war into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. That strategy would cut the Ho Chi Minh trail and bring the war to the people and leaders of the North.⁶⁷ While in Washington, he explained the strategy and its rationale directly to the President.

Westmoreland was cautious when presenting his new strategy to President Johnson. He did not forcefully present his views, and stopped short of fully justifying American combat operations in Laos and North Vietnam. Consequently, he missed an opportunity to provide Johnson the full benefit of his on scene insights and expertise. Charles Brower asserts that "Westmoreland's own fear of recreating even the perception of a MacArthur-like challenge to presidential authority" served to inhibit him.⁶⁸ However, his omission may have been a prearranged tactic, between himself and CJCS Earl Wheeler, to avoid any perception of a MacArthur-like challenge to the President. General Wheeler was very supportive of Westmoreland's plan and actively pushed for its adoption. This tactic had the advantage of preventing a more direct challenge to national policy on the conduct of the war from America's senior field commander. Any similarity to the MacArthur and Truman conflict was avoided and intentionally so, but very likely at the cost of adopting a potentially winning strategy in the war.⁶⁹

George Herring points out that other senior military leaders had learned their lessons well from Korea—particularly the Joint Chiefs. The Joint Chiefs carefully avoided anything even

remotely similar to MacArthur's direct challenge to civilian authority, and refused to air their case for escalation in public.⁷⁰ However, they clearly chafed under the restraints imposed on them by their civilian superiors. They generally put their own differences aside to present a united front to their civilian superiors with the hope of gradually gaining greater strategic freedom through a "foot in the door" tactic.⁷¹

President Johnson's desire for consensus within his administration further complicated the civil-military relations of that era. He claimed in late 1967 that there were no divisions in his administration. With some pride he declared, "We may have been wrong, but we have not been divided."⁷² This desire to avoid dissent, and direct conflict with the Joint Chiefs, prompted Johnson to constantly steer the middle road and avoid the toughest decisions.

President Johnson's tactic in dealing with his senior military leaders was to co-opt them into accepting his strategic views. His method was to reject their strategic recommendations concerning expanding the war, but to provide some element of what they requested. For example, Johnson rejected Westmoreland's 1967 request for 200,000 additional troops, and an expansion of the war. However, he did approve an increase in troop strength of 55,000, set no ceiling for future troop levels, and authorized continued bombing with an expansion of the approved target list.⁷³ The implication was that they might receive more at a later date. In that manner he avoided provoking a military revolt, and was able to obtain the support of his military leaders—albeit reluctantly.⁷⁴

The clear inference from the actions of senior leaders, civilian and military, was that MacArthur's relief was on the minds of all of them and served to restrain their actions. Strategic policy decisions were involved and neither the President, the Joint Chiefs, nor Westmoreland were entirely honest in providing their views, recommendations, and expertise. The national security decision making process suffered from this inhibition.

GENERAL SINGLAUB AND PRESIDENT CARTER

The *Washington Post* newspaper published a story on May 19, 1977, that created the impression that a senior general officer in Korea had directly and publicly challenged President Carter's plan to withdraw most US troops from Korea.⁷⁵ This raised the specter of MacArthur's challenge to civilian control of the military in the same theater some twenty-six years earlier. The truth of the situation is not quite so clear cut.

At the time of the story General Singlaub was the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Command, US Forces, Korea, and Eighth Army. Singlaub said in his autobiography that John Saar of the *Washington Post* interviewed him in his office in Korea. Singlaub thought the interview was to be off the record as part of a background briefing that Saar was receiving from a civilian special adviser. With that understanding, Singlaub was very candid with Saar and provided what he saw as truthful statements concerning military forces in Korea.⁷⁶ Saar did not consider the interview as off the record and when contacted by Singlaub's public affairs office he made that clear. Saar felt entitled to print the interview unless Singlaub retracted his statements. Singlaub reflected on what he had said and let his statements stand.⁷⁷

It remains uncertain whether President Carter had already made a firm decision to withdraw ground troops from Korea when Saar interviewed Singlaub. However, Carter was seriously considering it, and had solicited JCS input on three withdrawal schedules. Singlaub believed the President had not yet made a decision, and his statements in the interview clearly opposed any withdrawal. He noted that North Korea was much stronger than previously thought, that a pull out was not wise, and could trigger a North Korean invasion as in June of 1950. He also added that President Carter had many factors to consider and that other non-military factors may be of overriding concern.⁷⁸ Saar also quoted Singlaub as saying, "If we withdraw our ground forces on the schedule suggested it will lead to war."⁷⁹

After reading the Saar story, President Carter directed Singlaub to report to him in Washington. Carter was angry at being challenged by a subordinate on his military policy. After meeting with Singlaub, Carter directed that he be reassigned from Korea—he fired him.⁸⁰ The *Washington Post* called this "the first such disciplining of an American general since President Truman recalled and fired Gen. Douglas MacArthur."⁸¹

Did General Singlaub directly challenge the authority of his civilian superiors? I think clearly he did not. Was he critical of the strategic military policy made, or being considered? Equally clearly, he was. But, the real question is whether the Korean War relief of MacArthur had any lingering effect. Was Singlaub muzzled in opposing troop withdrawals, or was Carter hesitant in taking action to avoid a MacArthur-like confrontation? Singlaub's view on the role of senior military leaders was very similar to Ridgway's. In reference to the troop withdrawal, Singlaub said, "If the decision is made we will execute it with enthusiasm and a high level of professional skill. But, . . . it's imperative that the military provide their best judgment and advice. We feel it's our obligation to do so until a decision is announced."⁸² This highly publicized event does not support the conclusion that either Carter or Singlaub was unduly restrained by MacArthur's relief.

Singlaub's relief does provide insight into civil-military relations and the balancing that occurs between control and intolerance of differing views. James Webb commented on the importance of this event with notable perception. He pointed out that political control of the military is desirable, but not at the cost of turning military leaders into mindless automatons. Webb said,

The greatest danger of all is a military whose right to question has become completely stifled by the political organism that controls it. If this occurs, we will have avoided the Japanese extreme of World War II by reaching the German one: We will have created the plausibility of politicians' abusing their right to control the military, with no internal checks.⁸³

GENERAL POWELL AND PRESIDENT CLINTON

A more recent and ongoing example of the tug of war in civil military relations concerns the debate over allowing homosexuals into the armed forces. President Clinton pledged to open the military to homosexuals during his election campaign. That pledge created deep concern in the Joint Chiefs and many other senior leaders. The Joint Chiefs oppose lifting the ban on gays, but are split on how to proceed.⁸⁴

Prior to Clinton taking office the opposition to lifting the ban had become strident. General Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, strongly opposed removing the ban, but sought to reduce the unreasonableness of both support and opposition to the ban. He pointed out that the US military would "handle this the American way." His meaning was unmistakable. The armed forces would take their instructions from the President and the Congress, and execute them with vigor.⁸⁵ At the same time he noted that part of his responsibility as the CJCS was to provide his best professional military judgment to the President and Congress, which he fully intended to do.⁸⁶

The reported threat of resignation by a service Chief of Staff highlighted the seriousness and emotionalism involved in this issue. Several Pentagon sources confirmed that General McPeak, the Air Force COS, was ready to resign over the issue.⁸⁷ Indeed, the Joint Chiefs uniformly oppose lifting the ban on military readiness and unit cohesion grounds. Their position directly opposes that of President Clinton.

Since taking office, the President has met with the Joint Chiefs and listened to their views, concerns, and advice. I seriously doubt that their military judgment was "clouded by a homophobic haze" as Clinton Collins asserted in a letter to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.⁸⁸ The result of such consultations with the Joint Chiefs and Congress was a presidential directive to conduct a six-month study to investigate the impact of lifting the ban and explore the operative rules for conduct in the military.⁸⁹

Clinton Collins raised the issue of the Truman-MacArthur conflict and its applicability to the Powell-Clinton disagreement on the homosexual issue.⁹⁰ However, any such comparison is stretching reality. What has occurred is an ongoing discussion about the issue, which increased when Clinton was elected, continued during his President-elect status, and persists today. The discussion may have been heated and even rancorous in some cases, but it did not approach military insubordination toward the President. This is a significant issue with long-term impact on the armed forces that the current period of force draw downs and budget reductions only heighten. I would argue that regardless of one's position on the issue, this is "the American way" of resolving such important controversies. David Jonas and Hagen Frank aptly captured the essence of this issue with these words:

The suggestion that the service chiefs should accede without protest to an idea they believe would severely undermine our military capability is directly contrary to an essential aspect of American military leadership. Carried to its logical extreme, the notion that the Joint Chiefs owe a duty of unquestioning obedience to the president is a frightening prospect. It would effectively turn the world's most potent military force into the president's Praetorian Guard.⁹¹

This issue does not parallel, however, the Truman-MacArthur conflict. There is no ongoing war nor military strategy issue. The CJCS has correctly noted his responsibility to provide his best professional judgment on an issue that will significantly affect the military. He clearly has not hesitated to speak out against the issue of gays in the military before or after Clinton took office. However, his advice to the armed forces concerning the gay issue was to comply with the President's final decision or resign.⁹²

As for Clinton, he made a campaign promise to lift the ban on gays and took steps to deliver on that promise during his first week as President. The strength of the opposition from the military and Congress seemed to have caught him by surprise. Without the support of such key players, and the potential for Congressional gridlock, he simply deferred any action for six months.⁹³ While he surely would have preferred the support of the Joint Chiefs, he did not

hesitate to immediately raise the issue upon assuming office. The shadow of MacArthur was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In reviewing the principal players in the cases just discussed, several similarities and striking differences emerge. Ridgway and Powell are very straight forward in the role that they believe a professional military officer must play. Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs of his era were men of a more accommodating code of ethics and responsibility. Singlaub's removal from Korea received intense media scrutiny and the media made comparisons to the MacArthur relief. However, in his case it was much ado about little or nothing—there was no direct challenge to Carter.

The civilian leaders in these cases all have one thing in common—they wanted the support of their senior military leaders for their own political agendas. That is the basis for much of the civil-military tension that exists in our national security decision making process.

Alan Sabrosky, an Assistant Professor of Politics at The Catholic University of America, captured the essence of this dilemma for the military with these words:

If they acquiesce in a policy they believe to be utterly wrong, they risk being vilified as cowardly, amoral careerists if that policy ends in disaster. If they resign rather than implement such a policy, their opposition loses much of its legitimacy in the public sector and all of its effectiveness within the military itself. Yet if they make their opposition known when still in command all the while acknowledging their determination to execute that policy if it remains unchanged, they are attacked for threatening the principle of "civilian supremacy" and dismissed or transferred.⁹⁴

The one area where the "MacArthur syndrome" played a role was during the Vietnam War. Westmoreland was very restrained in presenting his alternate strategy to President Johnson, and in prosecuting the war under the limitations imposed by Johnson. This was true despite his resentment of excessive civilian control. He said,

However desirable the American system of civilian control of the military, it was a mistake to permit appointive civilian officials lacking military experience and

knowledge of military history and oblivious to the lessons of Communist diplomatic machinations to wield undue influence in the decision-making process. Over-all control of the military is one thing; shackling professional military men with restrictions in professional matters imposed by civilians who lack military understanding is another.⁹⁵

The one individual who was the most constrained by the shadow of MacArthur and the least tolerant of dissent was President Johnson. His leadership style was consensus oriented, dissent averse, and intolerant of debate. By making concessions to both sides on an issue, without giving any side exactly what it wanted, he was able to manage dissent and controversy. Within his administration, dissenting memos were treated as "poisonous snakes" and considered "next to treason." His fear of a Joint Chiefs revolt and a MacArthur-like challenge from Westmoreland highlights the confining nature of his relationship with the military.⁹⁶

The ultimate long-term effect of Truman's relief of MacArthur remains unclear. It appears not to have had an adverse restraining effect on civil-military relations when leaders of character and strength of will are involved—both civilian and military. History clearly shows that it did not prevent subsequent civil-military disputes. Only in another limited war with unclear national security objectives did the shadow of MacArthur serve to restrain America's senior leaders in fulfilling their responsibilities. The greatest positive effect of MacArthur's relief is the increased sensitivity of political and military leaders to the interests and responsibilities of the other.

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