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**THE "CRISIS" IN AMERICAN CIVIL- MILITARY RELATIONS:
A SEARCH FOR BALANCE BETWEEN MILITARY
PROFESSIONALS AND CIVILIAN LEADERS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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American civil-military relations have been widely criticized as in a state of crisis for several years. A firestorm of critical articles in the last decade has accused the U.S. military of inappropriate behavior and insubordination to civilian control, followed by a prolonged debate about the nature and sources of this alleged crisis. Evidence has surfaced that a "gap" has developed between the military and civil sectors of the United States. Some scholars studying this issue have abhorred a perceived increase in American military independence. In effect, they sounded an "alarm" that important changes in the American civil-military relations indicated that healthy civil-military relations are in jeopardy. These "alarmists'" charges often lump together vastly different elements of civil-military relations thus confusing the debate, contain uncritically accepted assumptions of the proper norms that should be applied to military behavior, focus attention primarily on anecdotal evidence rather than carefully considered data, and both distort and ignore the historical record concerning the American civil-military tradition. The result radically misrepresents the true nature of American civil-military relations. While the alarmists do highlight evidence of problems demanding attention, these issues are more symptomatic of the traditional ebb and flow of American civil-military relations. Careful scholarship rather than anecdotal evidence refutes allegations of civil-military crisis and places alarmists' charges into both historical and theoretical perspective. The American civil-military tradition was forged in the long and bitter Revolutionary War struggle for independence by its leader, General George Washington, who along with George Marshall, provides the American model for respectful but fully engaged military interchange with civilian governmental leaders. On close examination, the alleged civil-military crisis reflects the natural dynamic state of strain between the civilian and military sectors, and the inevitable tension inherent in the citizen-soldier duality of all American military service members.

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PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of several colleagues and professors in my efforts to complete this project. First, my project advisor and professor of civil-military relations, Dr. Marybeth Ulrich, offered invaluable advice and patient coaching on several earlier drafts of this paper. Her vast knowledge in the area of civil-military relations and scholarly research greatly improved this product. In addition, her guidance of our classes on civil-military relations expanded my own understanding of the complexity of this important issue well beyond my earlier familiarities with U.S. and Latin American models of civil-military norms and problems.

Additionally, my colleagues and friends, Dr. Martin Cook and LTC (Dr.) David Gray read earlier versions of this paper, offering many insightful comments and criticisms that have greatly assisted me in refining and improving this paper.

My numerous discussions of civil-military relations with several student-colleagues at the U.S. Army War College, especially LTC John "Paul" Gardner greatly informed my thinking on this issue as well. To them I am grateful for indulging my desire to discuss this topic.

Of course, the end product is my own effort, and any shortcomings contained herein are purely mine.

THE "CRISIS" IN AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: A SEARCH FOR BALANCE BETWEEN MILITARY PROFESSIONALS AND CIVILIAN LEADERS

American civil-military relations have been widely criticized as in a state of crisis for several years. Richard Kohn's 1994 National Interest article "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations"¹ sparked a firestorm of critical articles accusing the U.S. military of inappropriate behavior and insubordination to civilian control, followed by a prolonged debate about the nature and sources of this alleged crisis. Following Kohn, many close observers of the American military detected worrying signs that a "gap" was growing between the military and civil sectors of the United States. These authors mostly abhorred a perceived increase in independence of American military leaders from civilian control, touching off a flurry of articles, conferences, and studies.² Viewed in their totality, these scholars effectively sounded an "alarm" that important changes are occurring in the American civil-military fabric, indicating that healthy civil-military relations are in jeopardy.

The debate initiated by these "alarmists"³ is based on charges that have a healthy dose of truth in actual facts. However, the alarmists' charges often lump together vastly different elements of civil-military relations thus confusing the debate, contain uncritically accepted assumptions of the proper norms that should be applied to military behavior, use exaggerated rhetoric apparently designed to excite opposition to alleged military insubordination, address primarily anecdotal evidence rather than carefully considered data, and both distort and ignore the historical record concerning the American civil-military tradition. The end result is a body of literature that radically misrepresents the true nature of American civil-military relations, thereby vastly overstating the alarmist case for reining in the military.

While the alarmists do highlight evidence of problems demanding attention, these issues are more symptomatic of the traditional ebb and flow of American civil-military relations. A growing group of respondents to the alarmists' charges has produced a body of literature based on careful scholarship rather than anecdotal evidence, placing allegations of civil-military crisis into both historical and theoretical perspective, illuminating the alarmists' anecdotal evidence of "crisis" as overwrought. Any study of a country's civil-military relations must also be informed by its culture and tradition. In the American case, its civil-military tradition has its roots in English colonialism, but was forged in the long Revolutionary War struggle for independence. The military leader of this epic struggle, General George Washington, provides the American civil-military model for respectful but fully engaged military interchange with civilian governmental leaders.

On close examination, the body of evidence on civil-military crisis is not indicative of a rebellious military. Rather it reflects the natural dynamic state of strain between civilian and military sectors, and the inevitable tension inherent in the citizen-soldier duality of all American military members, who are not merely service members in uniform, but citizens of the larger American democratic society as well.

THE MEANING OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Before addressing the charges made by the alarmists, it is first important to outline in its broadest sense what the concept of civil-military relations entails in the context of the United States. While theorists and students of civil-military relations do not agree on a precise definition, several important elements are common to the theory of civil-military relations, and which inform the uniquely American variety outlined below. Civil-military theory accepts that military institutions and leaders have dual imperatives – a functional imperative to secure society from threats to its existence using military expertise and capability, and simultaneously a societal imperative to uphold the values, beliefs and ideologies of the nation – which require the military function to be carried out with least impact on society's values.⁴ In executing its functional imperative, the military has three responsibilities specifically to the state – to *represent* requirements for military security to government authorities, to *advise* such authorities on the “implications of alternative courses of action” from the military viewpoint, and to *execute* state decision regarding military policy “even if it is a decision which runs violently counter to [its] military judgment.”⁵ S. E. Finer further refines this model by insisting the military must respect the principle of civil supremacy as the key for appropriate civil-military relations in any society.⁶

Kenneth Kemp and Charles Hudlin expand on this by identifying responsibilities from which the military is generally excluded – doing routine police work, running courts, and making policy. They focus on the “the principle of civil control over the military” as a subsidiary but crucial principle to Finer's civil supremacy, where “civilians make policy, and the military implements it.” However, they assert that the military has decision authority in “the means” of policy implementation, and since there is a sort of ends-mean dialectic in which one organization's ends is another's means, they acknowledge that the military has its own sphere of appropriate control.⁷ Understanding and acknowledging that the military has an appropriate, albeit circumscribed, sphere of control is crucial to examining alarmist charges of an alleged crisis in American civil-military relations. However, the alarmists' charges do not deal exclusively with the policy-making arena, although that is a focal point of concern. Deborah Avant clarifies a more expansive consideration of civil-military relations by “disaggregating” the

alarmists' indicators into three general categories: "the level of military influence on policy ... the degree to which the military is representative of society ... and the amount of friction in day to day interactions between civilians and the military."⁸ Rebecca L. Schiff further clarifies the full nature of civil-military relations by pointing out that civil-military relations not only comprise the institutions of the military, the citizenry and the body politic, but that "the important influences of civilian society and culture" must be considered as well.⁹ Thus, civil-military relations theorists form a general consensus that civil-military relations are based on dynamic interactions between political, military, and societal institutions and leaders trying to balance the dual functional-societal imperatives. These interactions, occur via a means-ends dialectic with circumscribed and changing spheres of control over their respective affairs, and reflect the historical and cultural traditions of the nation.

The essential dilemma of American civil-military relations – a dilemma faced by all societies which aspire to democratic principles of self-government and individual liberty – is to ensure adequate military capability to deter and respond to security threats while sustaining the cherished fundamental liberties embodied in the Constitution. From this freedom-security dialectic has emerged, over 200 years, governing and military/security bureaucratic apparatuses. Civil-military relations consist of the interactions and dialogue between the military institutions and the sectors of society, especially governmental institutions representative of society and responsible for national security issues, which the military is designed to protect and defend. These relations consist of a broad range of power and control mechanisms, which mutually influence each side of the relationship.

The relationship is not constrained to civil-military governmental institutions, however. Although a separate and distinct institution, the military is simultaneously embedded in, and its members emerge from (and return or retire to), American society at large. Thus military relations with society must be considered to comprehend the dynamic of the issue. Critical to understanding this aspect of American civil-military relations is the duality of the military member as both soldier sworn to protect and defend the Constitution, and as citizen who cherishes the values and liberties enjoyed by all Americans. Thus, contrary to popular thought, the citizen-soldier is not constrained to service in the militia, whose modern day equivalent is the National Guard or the Reserve Forces. Rather, the full time professional soldier, who is inherently a citizen also in the American body politic, retains those rights adhering to all citizens, with the exception of those few rights appropriately curtailed because they are related to partisan politics.

ALARMIST CHARGES AND CRISIS INDICATORS

Kohn's 1994 article dramatically charged "the U.S. military is now more alienated from its civilian leadership than at any time in American history, and more vocal about it."¹⁰ Some of the indicators Kohn cited to support this startling claim include the jeering of a "respected Congressman" by officers at the Army's Command and General Staff College, examples of general officers vocally expressing disdain for civilian control, an alleged military conspiracy to oust Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, Admiral William Crowe's efforts to weaken President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, Generals Powell's and Schwartzkopf's resistance to some civilians' proposed timing of the Gulf War land campaign, and Powell's public opposition to both U.S. military involvement in Bosnia and homosexual service in the military, among many others.

Other scholars and observers of the American military who had noted indicators of a disquieting shift in America's civil-military relations joined Kohn in charging that something was amiss in the American civil-military relationship. Unfortunately the critics' hodge-podge treatment of different issues regarding the civil-military character in America today, some focusing on the military, others on civilian elites, and others on the interaction between society and the military, constrains effective debate by confusing separate issues relating to civil-military relations. In order to evaluate the alarmists' charges, then, we must first separate them by subject matter to assess what they believe the problems to be, before we can assess the validity of the alarmist's claims and the basis for their charges.

THE MILITARY-POLITICAL GAP.

The first category of charges indicates a growing gap between the military and civilian politicians exists. The alarmists charge military professionals with increased and sinister politicization and cite military reluctance to carry out particular policies as prima facie evidence of insubordination. For example, Kohn highly criticizes General Powell's public opposition to homosexual military service after candidate Clinton, a vocal advocate of homosexual military service during the 1992 campaign, was elected but before he was sworn into office. Kohn also takes Powell to task for his New York Times editorial opposing U.S. military involvement in Bosnia. The criticism is that Powell failed the test of military subordination on three counts: first, that he *publicly* voiced his policy recommendations at all, rather than keep his counsel private; next that his advocacy on policy issues illuminates a general trend toward the politicization of the officer corps, and sets a bad example for other officers to emulate; and finally, that his

methods effectively attempted (and succeeded in getting) a veto over elected officials' political policy judgment.¹¹

Joining Kohn in his criticism of American civil-military relations, other American military observers charged that a high percentage of officer affiliation with the Republican Party is evidence of "partisanship" in the officer corps and expressed chagrin that well-known retired senior officers publicly support political candidates. For example, Thomas Ricks expressed his concern with the "creeping politicization of the officer corps," encouraging a 1998 Naval War College audience to stop an alleged "rightward political movement" by military officers.¹² The existence of a partisan political affiliation gap is indisputable. Whether this is the function of a conscious choice by military officers to "move rightward" is another issue. The balanced and scholarly Triangle Institute for Security Studies' "Project on the Gap between the Military and Civilian Society" (hereafter referred to as the "TISS Study") identified military officers as having a more distinctive partisan political party identity than in the past. Since 1976, those reporting themselves as Independents dropped from a majority (54 percent) to a minority (28 percent), Republicans nearly doubled from 33 percent to 64 percent, and officers now number eight Republicans to every one Democrat, while elite civilians are evenly divided. Despite noting that "anecdotal evidence" indicates old taboos on political activity may be weakening, the TISS Study states that "we have no systematic evidence one way or the other to know whether the high level of partisan association has been accompanied by a high intensity of partisan activity, but our expectation is that as professional officers they would not engage in any open partisan activity."¹³

Notwithstanding the TISS Study's evenhanded assessment, Andrew Bacevich draws distressing conclusions on the state of American civil-military relations. Bacevich paints a stark picture of crisis that lays the blame for civil-military discontinuities on the military for failing to adhere strictly to the principle of subordination to civilian control:

That contentious disharmony and pervasive mistrust characterize present-day American civil-military relations at the elite level is all too clear. ... [The evidence] points to a burgeoning crisis and an ominous erosion of military subordination to civil authority ... [and] the smudging of distinctions between military advice (once the business of soldiers) and policy advocacy (formerly the exclusive preserve of civilians)—all these testify to a civil-military relationship that is out of kilter.¹⁴

But even the alarmist Bacevich points out that the military is not exclusively to blame for the growing evidence of a gap with political leaders. Simultaneously as the military is allegedly politicizing civilian political leaders and national security elites increasingly reflect lower levels of military experience to inform their defense policy decisions and assist their national security

policy competency.¹⁵ Both Ole R. Holsti and the TISS Study highlight the loss of military experience across the federal government, and an increased blurring of civil-military roles in which "senior military ... become policy advocates and decision-makers, rather than solely advisors."¹⁶

Christopher Gibson and Don Snider provide more objective data to illuminate the reality behind these claims. They point out that, as of 1999, "military experience among members of Congress has declined nearly 30 percent since its high point in the early 1980s."¹⁷ In addition, Bill Clinton was the first president since FDR to not have military experience (although FDR served in the Navy Secretariat). Most importantly they carried out a detailed study of civilian and military defense expertise over a forty year period, using "coding rules" which assessed the level of national security expertise based on past experiences and assignments, to include higher education and service in senior staff positions in the defense bureaucracy. Their findings¹⁸ are first, that military competency to operate at the higher levels of government in policymaking and political issues has dramatically improved. Military officers routinely attend elite graduate schools to study national security and policy-related issues, and are now assigned to the upper echelons of the defense bureaucracy, dramatically improving their knowledge of and experience in dealing with national security policy-making. Second, the decline in overall civilian national security experience is noticeable, but not dramatic. However, contrasted with the military's increased expertise, the relative influence of civilian leaders on defense policy-making has declined. Finally, "a shift in the balance of potential influence within the political-military network over time ... [helps] to explain the increase in civil-military tension at the outset of the Clinton Administration."¹⁹ As a result of their empirical study and contrary to the alarmists, Gibson and Snider deduce that

U.S. civil-military relations are not in crisis. The tensions witnessed at the beginning of the Clinton Administration were actually quite predictable and understandable [given the congressional-presidential] split over post-Cold War strategic vision, new and relatively inexperienced political appointees working in the DOD, and a military adept at political-military affairs.²⁰

They conclude, "Military influence has increased noticeably in the post Cold War era, but certainly not to the point of domination."²¹

THE SOCIETY-MILITARY GAP.

The civil-military gap is not the exclusive domain of political and military elites, however. Problems are also identified in a society-military gap that reflects demographic trends and sociological conditions contributing to a gap between society and the military. Ole R. Holsti's

study of the alleged gap cites Ricks' thesis as giving prominence to "the military contempt for society that it views as materialistic, hedonistic, and decadent," in line with what one would expect of the disciplined "military mind" when it contrasts itself with a more self-oriented society at large.²² Upon carefully examining the evidence of elite attitudes between 1976-1996, Holsti finds relatively little divergence on international and defense policy issues, where civilian and military leaders differed by ten points or less on most issues. However, on many (but not all) domestic economic and social issues – what Holsti classifies as "partisan and ideological" issues (including abortion, education spending, the media, welfare and the like) – a more significant divergence of views was noted. This difference was widest with respect to social issues vs. economic concerns.²³ While Holsti refuses to conclude that the American military is "alienated," he does note a widening "civilian-military gap in partisan and ideological" social issues, but not in policy issues, where "gaps are neither uniformly large nor are they growing wider across the board; indeed, the post-Cold War period has witnessed a convergence of views on several issues."²⁴ Holsti further notes that it is impossible to tell if similar gaps existed in earlier historical periods, since no data exists to compare trends prior to the 1960s.

The TISS Study broadens the understanding of what this society-military gap entails by examining gaps between the military and the society at large with respect to the frequency and duration of social contacts such as family, work and other personal connections, and the institutional presence of the military in society which includes the military share of resources, and its physical presence in terms of numbers and distribution of military bases, as well as the degree of contacts military members enjoy with local community members. The general conclusion of these studies is that the reduced size of the military and reduced numbers of bases following the Base Realignment and Closure initiative in the late 1990s has increased the gap between American society and its military. Other authors have also indicated evidence of a military-society gap. For example, recent military difficulties in recruiting volunteers may be related to a reduced military presence in society, or other factors yet unknown.²⁵ Other society-military gaps focusing on values simply indicate that the beliefs, perspectives and opinions of people in uniform differ from those in the elite and general civilian public. For example, the TISS Study also documented the military's hostility and sense of superiority toward society based on the military's perception of society's "moral decay."²⁶ Unfortunately, in the absence of the long-term data available to Holsti, it is difficult to analyze the full range of society-military gaps, and their possible impacts on civil-military relations.

DEFINING "CRISIS"

The usually unstated but strongly implied concern of the alarmists is that evidence of a growing gap in American civil-military relations poses threats to democratic order and our constitutional heritage. What the alarmists all share, in various degrees, is an assumption that the American military tradition of subordination to civilian control translates into a norm of unquestioning acceptance of civilian policy supremacy, a military that eschews any participation in or debate over policy-making, and a clearly discernible division between the military and civilian spheres in government. A critical issue in defining the extent of the problem cited by the alarmists is that they fail to define what they mean by "crisis," instead assuming that the anecdotal indicators they cite are sufficient justification to identify a crisis. Yet despite their efforts to incite fear over the state of current civil-military relations, the alarmists admit that "a coup has never really been a serious threat, and the chances today, even of an attempt, are virtually nil."²⁷ Certainly a crisis in civil-military relations could exist in the absence of the possibility of a coup, but if a coup is neither imminent nor even possible, the precise character and potential extent of the alleged crisis remains a mystery. By failing to distinguish the precise character of the "crisis" in civil-military relations or define what it consists of, the alarmists' only confuse the debate they have created. What is needed is a definition that establishes objective conditions for determining whether a crisis exists.

From the alarmist camp, Cori Dauber defines a crisis in civil-military relations as a breakdown in the ability to interact and argue by the players involved with the civil-military dialogue, claiming that, "the creation and preservation of national security proceeds only as the institutional and civil elements of a democratic society negotiate and reconcile norms of collective interest formation."²⁸ Dauber claims U.S. civil-military relations are currently in crisis because the military has "trumped" the civilians by insisting on the "standard" of the Weinberger Doctrine as the test for the use of force, thus defining for civilian leaders severe constraints on the employment of force, and effectively suspending constructive civil-military interaction. Dauber errs not only in her description of the Weinberger doctrine, which she believes means that the use of force cannot provoke public criticism, but in insisting that the Weinberger doctrine is the standard currently followed to employ force. To the contrary, the Clinton threshold for employing military force – from Haiti to Kosovo – has been far lower than the Weinberger bar, disproving Dauber's specific thesis.²⁹

In critiquing various theoretical models of effective civil-military relations, James Burk follows three lines of thought to determine tests of when a crisis exists: when either party to the civil-military relationship abandons its duties and competence level by attempting to influence or

decide policy; when the military is isolated from (and presumably alienated toward) and no longer representative of society; and finally, when a breakdown in the shared civil-military commitment to democratic values occurs.³⁰ But the real issue is neither civilian control nor military obedience and subordination – civilian control and military obedience are merely vehicles to ensure the functional military imperative does not disrupt the societal imperative of individual liberty:

[It] is effective civil-military relations that we want. Effective civil-military relations enable democratic societies adequately to balance the ongoing requirements to sustain an efficient military able to fight and a free society able to regulate its own affairs. Achieving that may or may not require civilians to win particular policy debates. At the moment, we cannot conclude with any confidence that the current fractiousness in civil-military relations is a cause for concern, much less evidence of a crisis. Fractiousness, after all, is only disagreement over policy: it is the expected state of affairs in an open society, and its lack may be a surer symptom than its presence that a democracy has fallen³¹

Thus, alarmists and other observers of civil-military relations seem to have augmented their concerns by focusing on the *means* of effective civil-military relations – civilian control of the military – rather than the *ends* of effective relations reinforcing the military and societal imperatives. Thus a crisis is not necessarily indicated by disagreement between civilian and military leaders, which is more accurately a positive sign of normal, healthy debate when two institutions and perspectives collide on an issue. Rather a “crisis” in civil-military relations will be distinguished in this working definition:

1. A breakdown in *effective* communications and interaction among civilian and military policy elites so that these elites refuse to address issues of disagreement with mutual respect and deference, instead choosing to attempt to “veto” one another on a continual basis over time.
2. An effort by one of the parties to the civil-military dialogue to dispense with some aspect of the military or the societal imperative without consulting or considering the claims of the other parties as part of the normal civil-military debate and dialogue

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF CIVIL-MILITARY GAPS

Many experts find that both a gap and increased military involvement in policy-making are inevitable trends due to a variety of factors. Some trace underlying causes for a civil-military gap to a structural cause in the international milieu. The most noted advocate of this argument, Michael Desch claims that the high threat periods of American history, such as World Wars I and II, as well as the Cold War, corresponded with effective civilian control over the military, as defined by “the prevalence of civilian preferences over those for the military.”³² Desch believes that effective civilian control tends to occur when the military is externally focused, which

normally corresponds to periods of high external threats. He cites some anecdotal evidence to support his assertion, but as with the alarmists, his evidence is only anecdotal, and not supported by strong empirical evidence correlating a rise and fall in civil-military tensions with a focus by the military on external threats.³³ Furthermore, the structuralist approach eliminates from consideration the wide variety of other possibly explanatory variables for schisms in the civil-military relationship.

Others find the causes for the alleged gap in post-World War II history. The Cold War pre-eminence of national security, and hence military concerns with policy pulled the military much more intimately into the policy-making process. United States global interests during the Cold War resulted in American military global reach and a peacetime role expansion for U.S. armed forces. To deal with a vastly expanded and permanent international commitment, the 1947 National Security Act created the architecture for the modern national security structure in the American Executive. As the bureaucracy expanded, so did the need for military officers to fill the bureaucracy's offices and adequately dialogue with civilian experts on national security issues. Partly in response to this, the military pursued expanded graduate education for officers in a wide variety of disciplines useful for defense management and national security policy-making. Simultaneously, civilian governmental officials with military experience (or interest) have declined concurrently with decreased military service opportunities following the post-Vietnam and post-Cold War defense reductions.³⁴ Increasing military involvement in defense policy issues was accelerated by Goldwater-Nichols legislation that expanded the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their subordinate Joint Staff, as well as the geographic combatant commanders to more directly insert them into policy-making. The result of these factors has been an increase in military self-perception as "at least as competent and capable as its civilian overseers in contributing to the policy-making process."³⁵ Thus, it should not be surprising that in an era of change and uncertainty in the international security environment when previous agreement on Cold War security issues are suspended, that we would have some conflict and disagreement among civilian and defense leaders over defense issues.

Following the Vietnam debacle with its traumatic anti-military backlash, U.S. military leaders initiated a searing self-examination that resulted in critiques leveled at the quiescence of the Joint Chief of Staff over the inadequate defense policies and tactical micromanagement of the war by President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara.³⁶ Several authors point to the Weinberger-Powell doctrine of only applying overwhelming military force to achieve narrowly defined policy goals that address only vital U.S. interests, as the policy prescription solution formulated by the Vietnam generation. Since the end of the Cold War, the relevance of

internationalism and globalization has only expanded in the post-Cold War era, in which "America has redefined security to include illegal drugs, illegal immigrants, terrorists, rogue states, international natural disasters, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and homeland defense."³⁷ As a result, the Clinton administration's impulse to expand the use of military power to help solve a wide variety of international problems, while simultaneously decreasing the size and budget of the military, created a force structure-commitment gap. The Defense Department has had to cut back modernization and training programs in order to meet operational deployments. Concurrent declines in military readiness have sharpened military concerns with defense policy decisions, leading to accusations of a coming defense train wreck.³⁸ The upshot of these trends has been that "the world leadership position of the United States has so expanded the scope of military affairs that there is no longer a clear-cut cleavage between military and civilians spheres of activity,"³⁹ if indeed there ever was any such clear distinction.

James Burk approaches the gap from an institutional perspective, concluding that the U.S. military remains salient and has centrality to the American society at large, although both its salience and its centrality appear to be diminishing. The current downward military trend of relevancy is in line with both the reduced external threat since the end of the Cold War, as well as the traditional "boom-bust" preparedness cycle the U.S. military has experienced throughout its history. This cycle only dampened significantly with the advent of the Cold War, but even during this long period, was in evidence: viz., the spike in defense manpower and expenditures during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, as well as the increase in the late 70s and early 80s in response to a perceived growing Soviet military threat. Contrary to what one would expect based on alarmist claims, Burk points out that the military has readily adapted to the societal imperative since the end of World War II, accepting a judicial system imposed by congressional reforms, has integrated racially and by gender, and has acceded to a policy accepting homosexual service conditional on military service during which homosexuals will not publicly reveal their homosexuality.⁴⁰

FALSE ASSUMPTIONS AND CIVIL-MILITARY NORMS

Alarmist arguments suffer from multiple problems, including inappropriate leaps of logic, false assumptions, and inaccurate portrayals of the true sociological and historical nature of American civil-military relations. As previously indicated, the alarmists cite mostly anecdotal indicators (e.g., the instances of military insubordination and disrespect cited by Kohn), which are inappropriate for serious consideration unless related to a more deliberate and scholarly examination of the underlying trends. More systematic examinations of a wider body of data

going beyond anecdotes, as was conducted by Holsti or the TISS Study, uncovered evidence of some civil-military "gaps," but reached conclusions that these gaps, while possible cause for some concern, in no way constituted a crisis, completely contrary to the alarmists.

In cases where alarmists cite indicators that are based on underlying studies revealing trends in civil-military relations, and not just anecdotes from which to generalize, the alarmists tend to make logical leaps of faith that do not justify the conclusions drawn. For example, Thomas Ricks' accusation that the military is increasingly practicing partisan politicization is based on the underlying reality of a trend toward partisan affiliation by military officers since 1976. But identifying oneself with a political party is not the same as partisan activity. Thus Ricks makes a leap of faith from the political and cultural affinities that military officers hold in the context of their role as private (and voting) citizens, to the generalized assumption that these privately held affinities would necessarily result in public behavior that violates the civil-military norm. The TISS Study charging politicization is based on a survey of officers' *political affiliation* – which one would expect to encompass officers' voting behavior as private citizens who retain that elementary right even while serving in uniform. It is a large leap of faith to charge "politicization," which implies active politicking or endorsement on behalf of a particular party or candidate, purely based on a survey of officers' private political beliefs. In any case, the Holsti study showed that the major diversion in beliefs between civilian and military elites occurred over domestic issues, especially social issues. An entirely plausible (though as yet unproven) explanation is that officers are attracted to the Republican Party based on its generally conservative stands on social issues as the primary factor

The alarmists who charge the military with increased politicization also assume the only explanation for this shift in political orientation is increasing sympathy by the officer corps with conservative politics. None of the alarmists consider other possible explanations or changes in variables other than officers' attitudes. For example, a shift in policy attitudes and orientations by the major political parties could be the causal explanation for the rightward trend in officers' political affinity. In other words, if officers' attitudes stayed relatively constant but the political parties' platforms and policies changed, one would expect that officers' political orientations would reveal a shift corresponding to the change in political winds. In this regard, a worthy line of research would be to examine how the major political parties' general orientations have changed in the last thirty years or so, both with respect to general political issues, as well as toward defense and military issues. Such research might shed light on the validity of the charges that the military officer corps is becoming politicized.

The alarmists' underlying assumptions also misconstrue the true nature of the civil-military tradition, resulting in conclusions that the only proper military behavior is extremely constrictive, even ascetic. Thus, to military officers who indicate they would resign if civilians did not accede to their policy concerns on issues of "purely military domain," Kohn argues that resignation is improper behavior that "goes too far."⁴¹ Kohn's reasoning for why resignation "goes too far" is not clear, but to suggest that resignation can never be an option ignores the societal imperative and flies in the face of American ideals of individual liberty, implying that military officers are vassals who have forever forfeited their freedom to the pleasure of civilian masters. Instances of military resignation over principle are rare, but have occurred throughout the American historical experience. The most recent notable example is that of Air Force Chief of Staff General Fogleman, who resigned rather than accept Secretary of Defense Cohen's decision to censure selected officers after the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing. In no way did General Fogleman overtly or even subtly attempt to change the Secretary's decision. Having fought against the decision while in his military capacity, he merely resigned without comment.

Other experts apply a more precise "veto power" test to determine the permissibility of cases in which officers might resign. Kemp and Hudlin assert that "protest within the chain of command is permissible, and resignation is permissible, but public political opposition to the policy established by the civilian leadership is not ... even the right to resign can be abused in a way that threatens the principle of civilian control of the military."⁴² Military examples of threatening resignation or using other techniques to "veto" policy abound. When Kaiser Wilhelm asked Moltke the Younger to stop the German mobilization in the hopes that a diplomatic solution might be concluded, Moltke protested that demobilization was virtually impossible, when in fact German planners had never considered it, nor did Moltke want to, for fear that a demobilization would leave the German military at a disadvantage with respect to its enemies. More prolonged military vetoes over policy occurred when German Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff continually "threatened to resign, allowing them effective control over the German government between 1916 and 1918,"⁴³ as well as the spectacular British "Curragh" incident in 1914. Officers of the 3d Cavalry Regiment under Brig Gen. Hubert Gough declared they would resign rather than execute an order to fight Ulster Unionists, following which General Gough negotiated terms of a governmental assurance that no such order would be issued.⁴⁴ Applying this standard, General Fogleman's resignation can hardly be criticized as contrary to appropriate military behavior.

None of this is to indicate that the current civil-military relationship is as healthy as it could or should be – it is not. The signs pointed out by the "alarmists" are indeed worthy of careful

consideration and examination for possible changes in national security structure, military professional development, and military roles and mission. However, there is another side to this debate that deserves consideration. As the TISS Study indicated, "These are real problems that must be addressed. However, some of the concerns expressed in the policy community about the gap are not sustained by careful analysis."⁴⁵

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

The turmoil and transformation alleged in current American civil-military relations, far from being a recent phenomenon, is a constant of United States history. Military leaders such as Ulysses Grant and George Marshall are cited by noted American military historians Russell Weigley and Forrest Pogue to provide the historical model of correct behavior that military officers should emulate.⁴⁶ However, an idyllic civil-military paradise has never existed in American history, despite long periods of relative military neglect, such as between the War of 1812 and the Mexican American War, from the Civil War to the Spanish-American War, and during the inter-war years of 1919-1940, nor can it reasonably be expected to. During periods when important threats to national security arose and required the use of military power, civil-military differences underlying the apparently placid surface often emerged. These differences often simmered over relatively long periods (such as the problems Lincoln experienced with his various generals before Grant assumed command of the army, or Sherman's dissatisfaction with Indian policy during his long tenure as General of the Army). Others were resolved quickly to the mutual acceptance of both parties such as when Woodrow Wilson gave General Pershing an astonishingly free hand to make policy in Europe during World War I.⁴⁷

Alarmists, who have attempted to examine the nature of current civil-military relations and the basis for military subordination to civilian control have generally started with the development of the national security state after World War II (Kohn), followed by the traumatic social upheavals of the Vietnam War (Feaver). Some even go back to the Civil War (Weigley). However, examples of significant civil-military turmoil are not limited to the dramatic and oft-cited Truman-MacArthur example, but permeate the entire American history. Cases include Andrew Jackson's martial law over New Orleans in the War of 1812, the popular protests against the Mexican American War, draft riots and other Civil War protests, Lincoln's suspension of civil liberties, including habeas corpus, military control of the South during Reconstruction, Sherman's disagreements on Indian policy after the Civil War, and significant involvement by military professionals in running governments in various countries in the twentieth century, including Cuba, the Philippines, Nicaragua, Haiti, Panama, and the

Dominican Republic. Twentieth century examples include the remarkable presidential bid on the Republican ticket by active duty General Leonard Wood in 1920, Billy Mitchell's overt challenge to civilian authority, the crushing of the bonus marchers in 1932, the Admiral's revolt of the late 1940s, Army resistance to Eisenhower's Doctrine of Massive Retaliation, and periodic instances of general officers being fired for repudiating presidential authority, such as General Singlaub's removal over President Carter's proposed Korea withdrawal in the late 1970s. Thus, despite some considerable efforts at broader consideration of the historical record,⁴⁸ few studies consider the broad pantheon of civil-military discourse and disruption common to the American experience. Placing the ideal of military subordination to civilian control in a more retrospective context will help correct the alarmists' inaccurate assumptions of what constitutes appropriate military behavior, and aid us in better understanding the limits of the alarmists' arguments.

GEORGE WASHINGTON AND THE ROOTS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY TRADITION

American civil-military relations has its roots in the militias of the colonial period, but developed its traditions distinct from Britain during the American Revolutionary period with the development of the Continental Army. Parameters for the tradition were first codified with the Constitutional convention and debates; hence legalists emphasize the importance of the Constitutional Convention. Russell Weigley makes a good argument that the U.S. military professionalism finds its roots in the Civil War because that is when the Army first assumed a truly professional form.⁴⁹ However, any examination of the American civil-military tradition can only be partial if it neglects the development of the first truly American Army. Noted revolutionary historian Don Higginbotham makes a compelling case for the formative influence of George Washington on the origins of this tradition.

Washington's earliest military experiences were as a young officer in the French and Indian War. Frustrated with slow decisions, politicians unschooled in military matters, and inadequate provisions, he made "indefensible behind the back barbs at both executive and legislative branches [of the Virginia Colony]," played officials off against each other, and made excuses for his extra-legal actions in the name of military expediency.⁵⁰ Washington transformed this incipient political civil-military conduct into civil-military virtue by simple maturation and long experience in the Virginia legislature, where he gained considerable understanding of the political prerogative and a deep appreciation for the need to maintain popular and political support an army. Thus, when he arrived in Boston as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army in the summer of 1775, Washington enjoined his officers to pay strict

“attention to the civil constitution of this colony” and swore he would give due “regard to every Provincial institution ... [as] a principle of duty and policy.”⁵¹

Although Washington’s example of calm leadership and sacrifice allowed him to personally maintain the confidence of the bulk of the army throughout the war, as well as the respect of Congress, he struggled to assure harmonious relations between these two institutions, because “civil-military relations were probably more strained at certain periods during the Revolution than at any other time in our history.”⁵² Rampant material shortages, late and inadequate pay, irresponsible and resource-intensive militias, and an unreliable population, all combined to produce soldiers who greatly resented their incredible sacrifice while many civilians, including some in Congress, grew wealthy on the war. The level of sacrifice, internal political bickering in Congress and among the states, in the context of a prolonged military campaign, has never been equaled in our history. Consequently, Washington’s responsibilities were enormous:

To sustain an army; to drum up new recruits every spring while enticing the much-abused militia to hold the lines in the interim months; to procure sufficient provisions, uniforms, tents, guns, and ammunition. All these tasks entailed endless appeals to civilian leaders not only in Congress but at the state and local level as well. ... Washington faced the additional challenge of wiring together his heterogeneous throng, making it fight and occasionally win – all without unduly antagonizing civilian and public officials.⁵³

In addition to these daunting challenges, there was no adequate vehicle to present military views or “exchange opinions on subjects that legitimately concerned the armed forces.”⁵⁴ As a result of his unique position with obligations to both the Army and the Congress, “Washington was literally the man in the middle.”⁵⁵ He became the principle vehicle to communicate with his civilian superiors in Congress. Most notably, Washington did not shrink from advocating policy. With his breadth of knowledge, experience, and relationships he actively and often bridged the gap between the Army and Congress, explaining, cajoling, and complaining over innumerable military issues. He frequently wrote the president of Congress, but also wrote directly to individual members, often using blunt language to attain the degree of influence he felt critical to sustain the war effort. His actions provide a guiding principle for appropriate participation in civil-military relations:

Being faithful to his superiors and dedicated to the concept of civil supremacy did not mean that Washington failed to express his views on issues of great importance or dissent strongly when he disagreed with a congressional decision. Generals in free societies need not be “yes” men; nonetheless, if their thinking is rejected, they must carry out disagreeable orders and policies or else resign their commission.⁵⁶

Some might dismiss Washington's policy advocacy and insistent entreaties by arguing that Revolutionary circumstances, with an inherently weak Congress and incipient union of new states, were a uniquely exigent situation. But this misses the larger point. Appropriate civil-military relations are just that – *relations* requiring mutual respect and deference to achieve a balanced interchange of opinions. It is only through such intercourse of ideas that the full panoply of potential policies can be vetted to realize desired political goals, while preserving military functional capabilities - all without harming society's values.

The clearest example of Washington's policy advocacy during the tensest moment in America's civil-military history occurred during the Newburgh conspiracy of 1783. The conspirators' real purpose is still unknown and debated, but important to this discussion because they intended to attain political results via overt military action. This incident was the single most egregious act of improper conduct in the Army's history, contrary to Kohn's assertion in 1994 that, "the U.S. military is now more alienated from its civilian leadership than at any time in American history," cited earlier (page 3). Learning of the plot, Washington immediately went to Newburgh to appeal to the officers to refrain from improper conduct. Promising to "help place their legitimate grievances before the Continental Congress in a respectful manner," he foiled the plotter and successfully gained concessions on some of their key concerns – pay issues.⁵⁷ The key point is that Washington consistently represented and advocated essential military institutional concerns, even when that institution was on the brink of overt interference into domestic political issues

The fear of standing armies is often cited as the driving force behind the American principle of military subordination to civilian control. While fear of large standing armies was certainly a major consideration for the Founders, the subordination principle owes far more to the example of Washington and the constitutional codification of the President as Commander in Chief. The historical record of the Constitutional Convention reveals no public debate over the principle of military subordination to civilian control – a standard assumed by the Founders. Discussions of the military focused almost exclusively on two brief debates over the wisdom of authorizing or restricting standing armies, as well as discussions over which governmental body would have the authority to command the military.⁵⁸ In reality, discussions of a standing army were rapidly muted by a unanimous vote both times that the gadfly Elbridge Gerry proposed limiting the size or capabilities of a standing army.⁵⁹ The over-riding concern of the Founders with respect to military power was not with military obedience, subordination, or coups, but with the aggregation of any kind of excessive power – to include military capability – in the hands of a particular person or governmental body.⁶⁰ This is not to say some of the populace was not

prejudiced against, and some even fearful of, a large standing army. The majority who embraced the Radical Whig view “that regular standing armies were tyrannical institutions that posed a constant threat to liberty.”⁶¹ But the Founders, having only recently won a long and difficult war with Britain, facing numerous threats from multiple sources and along extensive frontiers, including the possibility of future European invasion, fully accepted the need for a standing army, however small it dwindled to in the country’s formative years when the nature of threats were still not clear. Regardless, the Founders firmly rejected any constitutional limitation on the size of a standing army, granting to Congress the power to “raise and support” an army, assuming that Congress would best be able to reconcile the military imperative of security with the societal imperative as the people’s representatives in their deliberations over the size army to raise and support.

Following Washington’s example, General George Marshall is often held up as a modern paragon of civil-military virtue. His close experience with civilian officials and the National Guard during the Depression years, similar to Washington’s long hiatus between the French and Indian War and the Revolution, gave Marshall a much broader perspective on civil-military relations than most officers. As a result, Marshall developed an unrivaled reputation for rectitude. But Marshall’s behavior, always formal and proper, was far from pliant. His legendary candor with Congress included advocating for an extension of the draft in autumn 1941, and solidified a personal relationship with then-Senator Truman. He also did not hesitate to forcefully disagree with President Roosevelt, not only advocating policy, but on rare occasions outwitting him. He and Secretary of War Stimson

... believed that they had the right and duty to make the needs and problems of the army known to the President ... [and] they should warn the chief executive of actions they judged mistaken ... On a few occasions, acting in concert, they simply outmaneuvered [President Roosevelt].⁶²

In fact, Higginbotham finds in Marshall a disciple so devout to the Washington tradition, Higginbotham extends it to include an updated “Washington-Marshall” tradition, postulating that, “occasional dissent from governmental decisions [is] a part of the American military tradition worth preserving. To be loyal is not always to be silent. The crucial question is how to go about it.”⁶³

CIVIL-MILITARY TENSIONS: THE DUALITY OF THE FUNCTIONAL-SOCIETAL IMPERATIVES

As Higginbotham relates, “throughout the war, [Washington] labored to point out that there should be no gulf between the citizen and the soldier,”⁶⁴ then quotes Washington:

When we assumed the Soldier we did not lay aside the Citizen; and we shall most sincerely rejoice ... when the establishment of American Liberty, upon the most firm and solid foundations, shall enable us to return to our Private Stations in the bosom of a free, peaceful and happy Country.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, most citations neglect the second segment that underscores the higher purpose to which American soldiers are committed – the ideal of liberty. This soldier is first an American citizen with all of the attendant rights and privileges (constrained by the exigencies of military service), and simultaneously, not distinctly, a professional soldier. Thus, the American genus of professional soldier is committed to executing his duties in the service of higher ideals that correspond with his responsibility as a citizen – a duality fully captured in the Army Oath of the Officer:

Having been appointed in the Army of the United States, I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter; So Help Me God.

The oath focuses first on the duty to the Constitution, and therefore the values it embodies, and only secondarily on the military functional imperative. Some alarmists' suggestions that behavior by American military officers that even hints at disagreement with civilian authority is improper (e.g., Kohn's assertion that officer resignations is "going too far"), denies this dual reality of the American soldier.

In a democratic polity, civil-military schisms occur largely because of the tension created by this dual nature. Virtually all civil-military scholars accept Huntington's seminal study on civil-military relations as a start point, which established the theoretical basis for a potentially conflicting duality inherent in military organizations, as the basis for analyzing this tension. Huntington characterizes the military profession as having expertise in the management of violence against a thinking enemy, a sense of responsibility to the client (state) that transcends the self, and a distinct corporateness that is highly valued.⁶⁶ The military mindset is distinct as "pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power-oriented, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist, and instrumentalist in its view of the military profession. It is, in brief, realistic and conservative."⁶⁷ The military in any society, but particularly a democratic society which values individual liberty, also has a "societal" imperative to incorporate fundamental values of the society it swears to protect and defend – society's broadly accepted values tend to predominate, except in rare circumstances of dire security exigencies. The soldier shares those ideals to maintain internal moral consistency while defending them.⁶⁸

The military's functional imperative is inherent in its mission to fight and win wars; any military which cannot competently execute successful combat operations fails to perform the function society expects and resources it for. The functional imperative values mission accomplishment above all else and demands unique ideals, such as needs of the mission and unit over the individual and a conservative orientation designed to ensure adequate resources are always available to defend the state, if it is to win in the demanding sphere of military combat. As Washington suggests by his actions and his warning, the functional-societal duality is not unique to either civil or military institutions, but adheres to the individual soldier too. He is both soldier and citizen, having duties and rights in each sphere that overlap, but are necessarily somewhat constrained in order for him to be faithful to both.

To criticize military players for their actions with regard to current civil-military relations without accepting this duality as not just inherent to the military and political institutions, but to the people who serve in these institutions, is to misunderstand the depth of the societal imperative innate in every American. Thus, when American officers identify themselves from a societal perspective as belonging to a particular political party, it should not surprise us that they tend to align with the party more in tune with their generally conservative social values, as indicated by Holsti. But since Holsti revealed a high degree of concurrence between military and civilian leaders on international, defense, and security issues, fears that political affiliation might spillover from the citizen into the sphere of the soldier are likely overwrought. In any case, the long tradition and culture of military subordination is so strong, that it is unlikely to occur, except in rare instances which become the exception that prove the rule. However, prudent military leaders would be wise to remember that their political masters retain the same citizen component in their own duality as political leaders, and that political judgment can and should always prevail over military considerations. This is not to indicate military leaders should forswear conflict with political leaders, only that they should strive to refrain from challenging such leaders. Thus, the American military tradition consists of citizens who voluntarily embrace certain principles to become soldiers, yet who never lay aside their rights, duties and obligations as citizens.

The reality of the American civil-military relationship has been a dynamic interchange and interaction between and among the two spheres, that as frequently illustrates tension and discord as it does military acceptance of policies or orders with which it disagrees. Huntington highlights the dilemma of civilian constitutional authority in contrast to the professional expertise of the military, recognizing that war fighting is an extremely complex and dangerous activity, requiring a professional class. Policy makers who employ military forces, yet fail to adequately

consider the expert capabilities of military professionals in the application of force, do so at the peril of policy objectives and may endanger the military members who will be sent in harm's way. Huntington develops two "ideal types" of civilian control for nations to solve the dilemma. "Subjective control" comes from outside the military via a variety of means and is imposed by civilian politicians. "Objective control" in which the "essence of objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism,"⁶⁹ is essentially self-control of the military in executing prerogatives only within defined limits, and may assume a "pact" in which civilians grant the military a high degree of professional autonomy and some policy input in exchange for military subordination.

PLIANT SUBORDINATION OR UNEQUAL DIALOGUE?

Regardless of how superior the military view of a situation may be, the civilian view trumps it. Civilians should get what they ask for, even if it is not what they really want ... civilians have a right to be wrong. ... [and the military should be] pliant enough to do what civilians order them to do.⁷⁰

Whether American society really wants a "pliant" military that quietly accedes to civilian orders in all cases is extremely problematic. Not only does civilian competence vary widely on defense policies, it is abjectly absent from most detailed technical considerations of military execution, and carelessly disregards the moral dilemma of following unethical orders. Strictly following this prescription would justify the horrors committed by the German military at Hitler's behest in World War II.

Two scholars offer different views of how this "problematique" plays out in practice. From the military perspective, Colonel Lloyd J. Matthews examines several cases of interference by civilian political leaders in the tactical execution of military operations to show the importance of allowing military experts to execute the operations without overt interference in tactical details. Matthews cites a series of incidents in which civilian officials interfered with on-going tactical military operations, to the detriment of the intended political policy and to the hazard of the military force engaged. These include Kennedy's last minute denial of air cover to the Bay of Pigs invasion, whose plan for success hinged on air cover; Operation Paul Bunyon in Korea in 1976 to extract personnel from the demilitarized zone; President Johnson's legendary personal control over tactical operations in Vietnam; a Presidential directive that limited Saigon's 1975 evacuation to use only 19 helicopters, thus stranding "420 friends and allies" who were subsequently brutalized; and Defense Secretary Aspin's denial of armored forces to leaders in Somalia, hindering the Ranger rescue effort.⁷¹ Matthews asserts that "rigid micromanagement from afar, leaving no room for the exercise of tactical discretion by on-scene military

professionals ... leads to bad decisions.”⁷² His point is valid, but his narrow focus on military objections to interference in tactical details is insufficiently broad to arrive at conclusions about the panorama of civil-military relations.

Professor Eliot Cohen examines the issue from a broader strategic perspective, arguing that “it is precisely those cases in which the military has had the freest hand – Germany in World War I and Japan in World War II – that have produced the greatest ruin to a state.”⁷³ Cohen highlights numerous incidents where civilian interference in military affairs corrected grievous problems and ensured connection between policy and military execution. In particular, he cites Lincoln’s firm control over strategic direction by constantly questioning, prodding, and suggesting, often concerning details of war prosecution. Churchill relentlessly queried his military chiefs to expose fallacious underlying assumptions about German capabilities, which might have shaped the war’s strategic direction in ways detrimental to victory. David Ben Gurion of Israel focused on organizational issues, restructuring the Israeli *Hagannah* to permit operations at a level far exceeding its Arab enemies. Cohen concludes:

The tasks of civilian supreme command – selecting and monitoring generals, adjudicating their differences, managing risk, assessing organizational health and intervening to restore it – go far beyond what [Huntington’s] normal theory of civil-military relations would seem to require.⁷⁴

Contrary to Matthews, Cohen highlights a key concern for the military profession – the tendency to assume away problems due to a lack of combat experience, and hence a lack of practical knowledge. The great irony of the military profession is that much more time is spent practicing and preparing than conducting combat operations. Thus, close air support at the National Training Center is routinely assessed as a weakness by units. This very problem plagued the Allies in the North African campaign in 1942-43, but became a strength by the time of the Normandy invasion, mostly due to practice. Military professionals are unaware of critical factors in the actual conduct of war until such time as they are called on to fight because, “every war is rich in unique episodes. Each is an uncharted sea, full of reefs.”⁷⁵ While this Clausewitzian certainty is timeless, here Cohen misses Matthews’ key point that military expertise has more cogency closer to the tactical end of the spectrum than the strategic. Still, Cohen’s larger point is essential to understanding what constitutes appropriate military behavior with respect to policy issues:

... the heart of sound civil-military relations is an unequal dialogue on the use of force. Invariably, the imperatives of politics and of military professionalism tug in the opposite directions; invariably too, professional judgments require scrutiny rather than unthinking acceptance.⁷⁶

THE WASHINGTON-MARSHALL EXAMPLE: RESTORING A BALANCED DIALOGUE

Washington and Marshall both fully respected the prerogatives and pressures on civilian politicians. They remained scrupulously subordinate to political leaders, but could be scathingly candid and forthright in representing military views when military functionality demanded, often to the point of shaping and directing policy. Their example illustrates that occasional, sometimes forceful, policy activism, often on contentious issues, is appropriate and necessary to maintain the civil-military balance. But they also clearly recognized their effectiveness as military leaders vying to uphold the military and societal imperatives depended on prudent restraint and setting significant limits to their own autonomy.

The debate over perceived divisions in American civil-military relations, to be relevant, must be informed by the realities of historical precedent provided most importantly by the examples of Washington and Marshall. It is important to remember, however, that these paragons of civil-military virtue were imitated frequently by other senior military leaders striving to achieve the example these model leaders set. Portraying the figment of an imagined ideal past where military subordination to civilian authority proceeded submissively, thanks to perfectly competent civilian policy-makers and thoroughly trustworthy military officials, distorts reality and harms the debate. This world has never existed, and never can, given the numerous variables affecting the relationship, as the rich literature on civil-military relations illustrates.

Current tensions are not unique, but a normal part of the civil-military dynamic. This dynamic changes with a wide variety of influences and variables, including the external international environment, internal societal changes and pressures, defense organizational structure (both civilian and military), the experience level of civilian and military decision-makers in both the political and the military realms, and a host of military sociological trends. The challenge is to achieve a mutually respectful consultation and balance between and among civilian and military authorities. When military officials represent their opinions candidly, and forcefully when more strictly military competencies are at stake (e.g., judgments on the risks to soldiers, the tactical conduct of on-going operations), the military view should be shown wide deference. But the military is not infallible, especially since theirs is a profession that is perennially obsolete as new and untested equipment, doctrine, and tactics are developed, yet not vetted in the only adequate test of real combat operations. This in no way should be interpreted to exclude continual and close questioning by political leaders, who must not only continually strive to improve their own understanding of military operations, but who must also attempt to discern political implications in on-going military operations. Thus civilian prodding, probing and questioning should be not only tolerated, but also actively encouraged. We must

avoid a recurrence of, "the ready uncarping acceptance of civilian supremacy that characterized military professionalism...[eighty years after] the Civil War,"⁷⁷ which refused military preparations for war and led to the disastrous fall of the Philippines. "The issue [of the Philippines defense policy] was not one of questioning the President's policy but of making him unquestionably aware of an important result of his policy, so that he could proceed with full knowledge of the implications."⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

While the alarmists are incorrect in important aspects regarding the tradition of civil-military relations, their concerns have had the positive benefit of starting a serious debate and deeper examination over the nature and current condition of American civil-military relations. Fortunately, this debate has sparked a deeper examination of American civil-military history and tradition that illuminates a more balanced judgment of their current status, and helps guide us in outlining some considerations for what characterizes truly appropriate civil-military relations. Even some of the alarmists have suggested the need for "restoring the tradition of loyal dissent,"⁷⁹ yet the general tone the alarmists sounded is inaccurate, as the TISS Study indicates: "Beyond [normal] tensions and conflicts, we see no real signs of crisis, no indicators of loss of effective civilian control nor of undue influence by military leaders in decisions properly the domain of elected or appointed political leaders."⁸⁰ Indeed, Don Snider makes a key point that signs of discord indicate

there is a stark, but potentially healthy tension between the two imperatives and the character and ethos of their respective cultures ... between freedom and individualism ... and the corporate nature of the military that demand sacrifice ... to the higher good of the mission. ...Not all observed gaps are dangerous; at the same time, not all convergences between the two cultures are functional and thus desirable.⁸¹

Whatever the origins of and solutions to the current schisms, it is important to understand that they represent the necessary and inevitable tension in the fundamentally contradictory nature of civil-military relations in a democratic society. Furthermore, these problems are neither unique to the dawning twenty-first century, nor do they portend gloomy civil-military relations in the future, as some of the alarmists depict. Reduced civilian defense expertise and the increased insertion of military officers into the national security bureaucracy to deal with policy issues has expanded the limits of military participation in policy-making far beyond the mythical notion of the alarmists.

Two potential dangers for the future development of civil-military relations exist. The first is civilian withdrawal and assumption of superiority, and thus the lack of any need to engage with or understand the military profession:

Increasingly uninformed about, and out of contact with, the military profession, civilian leaders may become so 'willfully ignorant' that they fail to understand the need for limited autonomy for the military so that professionalism can be restored ... thus, it is imperative for civilians—intellectual, business, media and political leaders—to reconnect with our military institutions and their leaders, to understand what they need and why, and to provide determined political leadership so as to arrive—despite the military's own reluctance—at a new balance between the social and functional imperatives.⁸²

The second danger is that of military submissiveness and quiet acquiescence to any and all civilian orders, especially as civilian expertise continues its current trend of decline. The military should play a strictly professional role, but "this in no way means that the military mind is to be turned off and its voice silenced. The military view has relevance to almost every conceivable national policy."⁸³ Military disagreement with civilian policies or decisions is a normal and constant component in the historical tradition of US civil-military relations. This is not simply due to historical fact, but because of the dual nature of the relationship, which is further affected by numerous other variables. The key is to strike a balance that maintains:

The unequal dialogue rests on the willingness senior officers to court dismissal by obdurately making their case to their civilian superiors. The lessons of serious conflict are, above all, that political leaders must immerse themselves in the conduct of war ... that they must master their military briefs ... that they must demand and expect from their military subordinates a candour [sic] as bruising as it is necessary ... that both groups must expect a running conversation in which, although civilian opinion will not dictate, it must dominate.⁸⁴

In order not to dictate, civilian leaders must educate themselves, and concede adequate space to the military professionals to engage them in an open, continuing dialogue. For the future health of American civil-military relations, military professionals should closely examine the charges and indicators offered by the alarmists for deeper trends of concern, and pledge to reinvigorate the Washington-Marshall traditional model of conspicuous acceptance of the principle of military subordination to civilian control, while courageously but respectfully advocating military concerns and points of view in all policy matters affecting national security and the health of future civil-military relations.

ENDNOTES

¹ Richard H. Kohn "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," in The National Interest 35 (Spring 1994): 3-17.

² In particular, see the Triangle Institute for Security Studies Project on the Gap between the Military and Civilian Society: Digest of Findings and Studies, www.poli.duke.edu/civmil; also, Don M. Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew, eds., U.S. Civil-Military Relations: In Crisis or Transition? (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1995).

³ The term "alarmist" is my own designation to classify the group of writers who have criticized the U.S. military in line with Kohn's general tenor. This term is not meant to be pejorative, but rather a descriptive way to classify those who are sounding an alarm that something is seriously wrong with American civil-military relations. This term is also meant to characterize this group's jump to ominous conclusions without a more detailed understanding or examination of other periods in U.S. history when civil-military relations suffered significant gaps and policy differences similar to the indicators pointed out by the alarmists today.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 2. Huntington and Finer (see footnote 6) define the seminal works on civil-military relations theory, and serve as a point of departure for most debates over civil-military relations.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶ S.E. Finer, The Man on Horseback: Military Intervention into Politics (Hammondspont, UK: Penguin, 1975).

⁷ Kenneth W. Kemp and Charles Hudlin. "Civil Supremacy over the Military: Its Nature and Limits" in Armed Forces and Society, (Fall 1992): 7-9.

⁸ Deborah Avant, "Conflicting Indicators of 'Crisis' in American Civil-Military Relations," Armed Forces and Society (Spring 1998), 375.

⁹ Rebecca L. Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance," in Armed Forces and Society (Fall 1995), 10-11.

¹⁰ Kohn, 3.

¹¹ Kohn, 9-13.

¹² Thomas E. Ricks, "Is American Military Professionalism Declining?" in Proceedings (July 1998), 26.

¹³ Triangle Institute for Security Studies, Project on the Gap between the Military and Civilian Society: Digest of Findings and Studies, found at www.poli.duke.edu/civmil, 3-4. Hereafter referred to as the TISS Study.

¹⁴ A.J. Bacevich, "Tradition Abandoned: America's Military in a New Era," in National Interest 48 (Summer 1997), 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁶ TISS Study, 9. Major aspects of the civil-military gap are addressed by numerous others, most notably Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society?: Some Evidence, 1976-96," in International Security 23/3 (Winter 1998/99): 5-43.

¹⁷ Gibson and Snider, 199.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the details of their findings, see Gibson and Snider, 209-213.

¹⁹ Ibid., 213.

²⁰ Ibid., 214.

²¹ Ibid., 215.

²² See Huntington's discussion of "The Military Mind," 59-79.

²³ Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society?: Some Evidence, 1976-96," in International Security 23/3 (Winter 1998/99): 16-36. Holsti draws heavily from Thomas Ricks' 1997 Atlantic Monthly article titled, "The Widening Gap between the Military and Society;" see Holsti, 8, fn 9.

²⁴ Ibid., 8, 35-36.

²⁵ Don M. Snider, "America's Postmodern Military" in World Policy Journal 17/1 (Spring 2000), 47.

²⁶ TISS Study, p.9. Major aspects of the civil-military gap are addressed by numerous other authors, most notably Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society?: Some Evidence, 1976-96," in International Security 23/3 (Winter 1998/99): 5-43.

²⁷ Kohn, 15

²⁸ Cori Dauber, "The Practice of Argument: Reading the Condition of Civil-Military Relations," in Armed Forces and Society 24/3 (Spring 1998), 445.

²⁹ For a detailed critique of Dauber, see Andrew J. Bacevich, "Absent History: A Comment on Dauber, Desch, and Feaver," in Armed Forces and Society 24/3 (Spring 1998): 447-453.

³⁰ James Burk, "The Logic of Crisis and Civil-Military Relations Theory: A Comment on Desch, Feaver, and Dauber" in Armed Forces and Society 24/3 (Spring 1998): 456-459.

³¹ Ibid., 461.

³² Michael C. Desch, "U.S. Civil-Military Relations in a Changing International Order," in Don M. Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew, eds., U.S. Civil-Military Relations: In Crisis or Transition? (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1995), 178

³³ See *Ibid.*, and Michael C. Desch "Soldiers, States and Structures: The End of the Cold War and Weakening U.S. Civilian Control," in Armed Forces and Society 24/3 (Spring 1998): 389-405.

³⁴ Christopher P. Gibson, and Don M. Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence: A Look at the National Security Decision-Making Process," in Armed Forces and Society 25/2 (Winter 1999), 5. The expansion of military professionals into the policy-making process was identified as early as 1974 by Rocco M. Paone, who discussed the "militarization" of the political sphere and the "politicization" of the military sphere caused by the imperatives of American global power. See his chapter "Civil-Military Relations and the Formulation of Foreign Policy in Cochran, ed, Civil-Military Relations (New York: The Free Press, 1974).

³⁵ Don M. Snider and Miranda Carlton-Carew, "The Current State of U.S. Civil-Military Relations, in their edited book, U.S. Civil-military relations: In Crisis or Transition? (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1995), 7.

³⁶ See H.R. McMaster, Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1997).

³⁷ Don M. Snider and Gayle L. Watkins, "The Future of Army Professionalism: A Need for Renewal and Redefinition," in Parameters XXX/3 (Autumn 2000), 17.

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of these concerns, see Daniel Goure and Jeffrey M. Ranney, Averting the Defense Train Wreck in the New Millennium, (Washington: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1999)

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁰ James Burk, The Military's Presence in American Society, 1950-2000, prepared for the TISS Project on the Gap between the Military and Civilian Society, 26.

⁴¹ Elaine M. Grossman, "Are U.S. Military Leaders Overstepping Their Bounds? Experts Differ," in Inside the Pentagon (January 27, 2000), 1.

⁴² Kemp and Hudlin, 20

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 20

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21

⁴⁵ TISS Study, 2.

⁴⁶ In particular, see Russell F. Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," in Journal of Military History Special Issue No. 57 (October, 1993): 27-58; Also see Forrest C. Pogue, "George C. Marshall on Civil-Military Relationships in the United States," in Kohn, Richard J. ed. The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789-1989. (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

⁴⁷ Russell F. Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," in Journal of Military History Special Issue No.57 (October, 1993), 27-58.

⁴⁸ Notable among these efforts is Russell Weigley's "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," in Journal of Military History Special Issue No. 57 (October, 1993): 27-58; Alan R. Millett's The American Political System and Civilian Control of the Military: A Historical Perspective, (Mershon Center Position Papers in the Policy Sciences Number Four, Columbus: The Mershon Center of the Ohio State University, 1979); and Richard J. Kohn's Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802 (New York: The Free Press, 1975).

⁴⁹ Weigley, 37-39.

⁵⁰ Don Higginbotham, George Washington and the American Military Tradition, (Mercer University Lamar Memorial Lectures No. 27. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 33-38.

⁵¹ Ibid., 67.

⁵² Ibid., 80.

⁵³ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 98-99.

⁵⁸ See Christopher Collier, and James Lincoln Collier. Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787 (New York: Random House, 1985).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 234-248.

⁶⁰ Higginbotham, 113.

⁶¹ Peter Maslowski, "To the Edge of Greatness: The United States, 1783-1865," in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States and War, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 212.

⁶² Forrest C. Pogue, "George C. Marshall on Civil-Military Relationships in the United States," in Richard H. Kohn, ed., The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789-1989 (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 209.

⁶³ Higginbotham, 130.

⁶⁴ Higginbotham, 47.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁶ Huntington, 8-11.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁸ Don M. Snider, "America's Postmodern Military," 48.

⁶⁹ Huntington., 80-85.

⁷⁰ Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," in Armed Forces and Society 23/2 (Winter 1996), 154-155.

⁷¹ Colonel Lloyd J. Matthews, USA Retired. The Political Military Rivalry for Operational Control in U.S. Military Actions: A Soldier's Perspective, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, June 22, 1998).

⁷² Ibid., 9.

⁷³ Eliot A. Cohen, The Unequal Dialogue: The Civil-Military Gap and the Use of Force, paper presented at the conference on "The Military and Civilian Society," 13 October 1999, 12-13.

⁷⁴ Cohen, 34

⁷⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, p. 170, cited in Cohen, 42.

⁷⁶ Cohen, 48.

⁷⁷ Weigley, 49.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁹ Ricks, 28.

⁸⁰ Snider and Carlton-Carew, 15.

⁸¹ Snider, "America's Postmodern Military," 48-49.

⁸² Ibid., 54.

⁸³ Elmer J. Mahoney, "The Constitutional Framework of Civil-Military Relations" in Charles L. Cochran, ed., Civil-military Relations, (New York: The Free Press, 1974), 53.

⁸⁴ Cohen, 48-49.

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