

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL AFFILIATION ON STRATEGIC
MILITARY DECISIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper analyzes the impact of a culturally homogeneous group on strategic decision-making and policy recommendations. The United States military's organizational climate has shifted steadily to the right since the Viet Nam War. Today's Armed Forces are increasingly identified with conservative Christian and Republican values. This change in group dynamics can inhibit the decision making process by preventing a thorough review of relevant courses of action, in accordance with the Rational Decision Model. The nature of in-groups and their influence on the decision process can have a deleterious effect on sound decision making, even if only inadvertently.

Today's conservative voice has a strong influence on national policy decisions. This makes it imperative that strategic leaders understand the culture shift in today's military, as well as how group dynamics can limit creativity and proper analysis of alternatives. The failure to do so can cause a divergence of opinion between military and civilian leaders and thereby widen the gap in civil military relations.

THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL AFFILIATION ON STRATEGIC MILITARY DECISIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. Army War College's recurring theme of "VUCA", that is a "Volatile, Complex, Uncertain, and Ambiguous" world certainly rings true today. The wide variety of challenges facing the U.S. Military -- from reconstruction in Afghanistan to stable, democratic elections in Iraq, to homeland defense and transformation efforts, all in fierce competition for funds -- provide ample evidence that "VUCA" is alive and well. One should ask what makes the situations facing our military today different than at any other time in our history and why do we sense more applicability to the theme of "VUCA" now more than ever?

In the 21st century, slow adaptation to technological and social change can lead to obsolescent thinking and delayed responses to security threats. This statement is clearly not new, but what is different today is the pace of change -- not just technological change but social change as well. That pace has radically shortened the strategic thinker's processing time and forces quicker adaptation. In today's globally connected world, America's enemies are smarter. They learn faster, adjust more quickly to our methods, can easily hide among an innocent population, and with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, can hold more of our country at risk.

Threats to U.S. security are not all external however; they may also come from within. Sun Tzu said we not only must know our enemy, but ourselves as well.¹ Any discussion of our current security posture should include a thorough self examination of the U.S. military's culture and its impact to strategic leaders. If the Armed Forces' culture is allowed to stifle creativity and diversity of thought, then the strategic leader's difficult and often time-sensitive decision process may find itself with fewer courses of action from which to choose. Fewer choices are more easily influenced by a select group of individuals and can lead to disastrous consequences in the short term. Left unchecked, the credibility of the military's decision-making and policy advice to senior civilians could steadily erode over the long term.

In the decades following the Viet Nam war, the U.S. military officer corps has made a steady shift toward a conservative Protestant and Republican affiliation. The purpose of this paper is not to analyze the validity of any individual beliefs, but to show how the rise of conservative Christian and Republican values have affected the military's decision making, and policy recommendations. Whether right, wrong, or indifferent -- the conservative, Christian voice has impacted our military. America's strategic thinkers, both military and civilian must be aware of this trend and its potential implications to policy formulation.

Numerous cases throughout history reveal flawed policy decisions, frequently a result of a phenomenon known as *groupthink*. Irving Janis developed the *groupthink* theory, largely as a result of his historical analysis of events that led to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Korean War stalemate, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and escalation of the Viet Nam War.² This phenomenon occurs when participants in the decision making process filter or ignore relevant alternatives, despite any misgivings they may have. The majority of historical examples of *groupthink* reference failed decisions by civilian leaders, but cases of flawed military decisions and or policy recommendations also exist. Janis points to Admiral Kimmel's role in the attack on Pearl Harbor as one such example. The failed rescue attempt of the hostages in Iran, Operation Desert One, can also be used to illustrate the phenomenon. Some charge the Joint Chiefs instinctively knew the limitations of the operation but went along with it, even though they lacked confidence in its success.³

President Bush's controversial decision to invade Iraq in 2003 also casts a very recent light on this phenomenon. At some point, the possibility Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction clearly became an assumption and that assumption presumably rests, at least in part, on a military assessment. Some charge that military intelligence officers failed to highlight their concerns about the accuracy of Iraqi intelligence estimate, which subsequently facilitated the resultant policy recommendation promulgated by General Franks.⁴ The intent of this paper is to present how that military assessment can be affected by an increasingly conservative religious and political ideology. This shift in military culture has a substantial impact on strategic decision makers and their resultant policy recommendations.

The Rational Decision Model and the Role of Intuition

Military leaders strive to make decisions and policy recommendations based on objective criteria whenever possible. This theme is illustrated in both the Joint Crisis Action Planning Model and the Military Decision Making Model where step three in the planning model calls for objective analysis, and Army Field Manual 101-5 outlines the need to "examine the application of (evaluation) criteria to ensure it is logical and objective."⁵ These are but two examples used to illustrate the military's belief in the need for decisions based on objective criteria. The search for objective criteria is strong in military culture and precisely why the rational decision process fits so well. It provides a useful framework to evaluate military culture's impact to decision-making at the strategic level.

The rational decision model is a four step process: define the goals, imagine alternatives, evaluate the consequences, and choose the best alternative to achieve the goal.⁶ The desired

end-state is a solution that provides the “maximum total welfare”. One of this paper’s key assumptions rests on the fact that step two, imagining the alternatives, is functioning. The military is a large and exceptionally diverse (regionally and ethnically) organization and cannot help but have a wide range of imagined possibilities. That makes step three of the model the crucial step, the step where the organizational culture can have disastrous effects if not properly managed. Theoretically speaking, an infinite number of consequences must be evaluated to guarantee a decision that delivers the maximum total welfare.⁷ An infinite number of possibilities implies an infinite amount of time to evaluate them all, therefore those involved in the process must filter the extraneous consequences and leave only the relevant ones for consideration. This filtering process is directly impacted by the phenomenon of *groupthink*.

In today’s uncertain and ambiguous world, a strategic thinker must not only assess relevant factors and alternatives when making decisions, but often must make certain assumptions about missing or incomplete information to arrive at a conclusion. The role of intuition on sub conscious biases and perceptions can dramatically impact the decision process. Miller and Ireland (2005) define one form of intuition as “automated expertise”.⁸ This concept is particularly relevant because it describes how as one’s experience level increases, the level of intuition also rises. However, as that level of intuition increases, the level of critical analysis actually falls.⁹ The intuitive process of “filling in the blanks” can thereby cause strategic decision makers to miss relevant possibilities, either by simply filtering them out or through incomplete analysis.

The interaction between the leader and subordinates of an organization also impacts the process. Depending on the level of complexity of the decision, the rational model may require an extensive review of the consequences and courses of action. The model assumes that the final decision rests with an individual, but can be applied to an organization so long as the final decision rests on the shoulders of one individual.¹⁰ This fits the military organizational model -- a hierarchical chain of command where the final decision rests with the leader. Complex issues will usually be vetted through the leader’s staff, which filters the consequences and presents courses of action.

This paper assumes complex decisions have more varied the consequences and possibilities and therefore require a greater diversity of thought, whether by an individual or by the organization, to ensure all relevant possibilities are considered. Swann et al’s (2004) “self-verification” theory implies that people tend to gravitate toward organizations that recognize their unique contributions.¹¹ The alternative to the “self verification” theory is that people sacrifice part of their identity in pursuit of a common goal through a process known as “self-

categorization".¹² On the surface, the "self-verification" theory implies the opposite of this paper theme – that is individuals gravitate toward diverse groups that emphasize individuality. However, their conclusions rely on the need for a "psychologically safe climate that encourages group members to express their viewpoints openly".¹³

The "self-categorization" theory fits well with the concepts of *group-think* and the impact of climate on decision making, but the "self-verification" theory also supports the premise of this paper. Swann et al's conclusions distinguish the difference between self-verification of *personal* views, which encourages diverse thinking, and self-verification of *social* views (such as politics and religion) which do not necessarily imply diverse thinking.¹⁴ Regardless of whether the source of personal identity is derived from within the individual (self-verification) or from the group (self-categorization), the constant theme is that people tend to choose their group associations based on compatible values. Diverse personal views ensure step two of the rational decision model remains functional, but compatible social views provide the mechanism for *groupthink* to take hold in step three, and increase the likelihood that relevant possibilities will be missed.

The Rise of Conservative Christian Values

The influence on military culture by Protestant religions has grown markedly over the past forty years. Since Protestants are such a large and diverse group, it is important to understand some general classifications, as they do not all have the same impact to the strategic leader. Protestants generally fall into two groups. The first and most traditional group includes those in the mainstream, such as the United Methodist Church. The second group, one of the focus areas of this paper, is represented by more evangelical and conservative Christians. Theological differences among this second group of more conservative Christians, sometimes referred to as the Christian Right, are slight but sufficient to divide them into four basic categories: Fundamentalists, Pentacostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Evangelicals.¹⁵ Fundamentalists often have their name used interchangeably with the terms *conservative* or *evangelical*, despite the fact that they are distinct subset of conservative Christians. The term *evangelical* refers to those who spread their beliefs and encourage others to share that belief.¹⁶ For the purposes of this paper, the term *evangelical* is implied wherever references to conservative Christians exist.

The rise of evangelicalism in today's the Armed Forces can trace its roots to the Viet Nam War. Public support for the war declined steadily as the years wore on, but evangelical Christians remained generally supportive of the war throughout. Over the course of the war,

they found themselves progressively more aligned with the military -- a military which increasingly found itself isolated from the general population.¹⁷ Conservative Christian themes resonated well throughout the Armed Forces, from the private in the foxhole all the way to the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson, who assumed his post in 1964.

General Johnson had always believed spirituality was a cornerstone of good leadership. The year before he became Chief of Staff he wrote piece called "Ministering to the Military" in which he espoused that spiritual wellness provided soldiers the strength to ensure success in combat.¹⁸ Shortly after assuming his duties as Chief of Staff, he accepted an invitation to speak at the International Christian Leadership prayer breakfast in Washington, D.C. in 1965. Subsequent invitations included Presidential Prayer Breakfasts and the National Prayer Breakfasts. His major themes varied slightly depending on the audience, but generally adhered to the messages that soldiers needed religious faith and that all Americans should seek God.¹⁹ When speaking to more diverse audiences, he encouraged personal choice and his language was generally more neutral, however his choice of which prayer breakfasts to attend hinted his true beliefs lay much closer to those of conservative Christians.²⁰

By the early 1970's, prayer groups, breakfasts, and luncheons became commonplace in the Pentagon. Some activities were sponsored by International Christian Leadership and others by the Christian Men of the Pentagon. An informal outreach group called Teams of Two began to increase its evangelical efforts.²¹ Many General Officers actively supported the groups and even held leadership positions as these conservative Christian groups continued to grow in size. By the 1980's, nearly 20 evangelical groups held regular meetings.²²

Under this supportive leadership umbrella, participation in conservative Christian groups also increased at the service academies. Due to it's proximity to Washington, D.C. (the headquarters of many evangelical groups of the time) membership at Annapolis increased first, especially among the Officer's Christian Fellowship and the Navigators. One of Navy's football coaches conducted the team's bible studies, and the midshipmen even held post game evangelistic rallies.²³ Similar gains followed at West Point and the Air Force Academy so that by middle of the decade, prayer groups had become well-established at all of the academies.

Another result of the Viet Nam war, evident in all services but particularly acute in the Army, was the need to find a moral compass. According to Anne Loveland, atrocities such as the My Lai massacre led to numerous articles on professional ethics and core values. Most articles in military professional journals throughout the late 1970's and 1980's carried a generally secular tone to them, one that many evangelicals found lacking. In 1986 when the Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh declared the annual theme of the Army was values,

Colonel Don Martin Jr. published an article in the military journal *Command*. In it, he espoused ethics and values as inextricably linked to a belief in God.²⁴

Throughout the 1990's, a conservative Protestant shift in the chaplain corps mirrored the regular force. Since 1994, the number of Roman Catholic priests in the Air Force alone has dropped 44 percent and similar decreases exist in mainstream Protestant chaplains as well.²⁵ Even if barred directly from evangelizing, just through daily interaction with the troops chaplains probably have the indirect effect of increasing the numbers of conservative Christians. Military chaplains today find themselves in the middle of a dilemma -- how to remain tolerant of others' beliefs while adhering to their own, which often include evangelizing. A code for Chaplains written in 1990 by the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces, a private group closely linked to military chaplains, discourages converting members of one faith or another, but recommends proselytizing those who have no religious affiliation.²⁶ This evangelicalism has raised criticism from those who want to retain the beliefs of Agnostics or Atheists without subjecting them to attempted conversion. In the end, the Air Force published policy guidelines to avoid the implication that the Air Force "supports any one religion over other religions, or the idea of religion over the choice of no religious affiliation."²⁷

This past year, a lawsuit and a scathing report by the Americans United for Separation of Church and State forced Air Force leadership to review its religious policies. A Department of Defense Task Force focused on the Air Force Academy found no overt religious favoritism, but noted the Academy suffered from "insensitivity", and that pastors blurred the lines between good "pastoral care" and "evangelical care".²⁸ Critics believe this understates the severity of the problem and point to the case of Captain Melinda Morton. Captain Morton was a Lutheran chaplain at the Academy who claimed she was forced to leave because she spoke out against the prejudicial climate toward other faiths.²⁹ The Department of Defense task force revealed a fine line between pastoral care and bible-centered, evangelical care -- which is characterized by the notion of turning one's life over to Christ to provide the answers.³⁰

To a lesser degree, the Army has also found itself at the center of evangelical controversy. In Iraq, during the heat of the summer in 2003, the Miami Herald reported an Army chaplain used his swimming pool as a "baptismal font" and required soldiers to become baptized before allowing them access to the water. Chaplain Llano, a self-proclaimed "Southern Baptist Evangelist" reportedly insisted that soldiers attend a 90 minute sermon before allowing them access for a swim.³¹ Also in 2003, General Boykin, then Deputy Undersecretary for Intelligence, came under criticism for multiple addresses to evangelical groups describing

America's enemy as a spiritual enemy, and proclaiming it is a battle we will only win "if we come against them in the name of Jesus".³²

Critics of conservative, Evangelical Christian movements point to some general themes. They are invariably led by authoritarian males who see a clear dividing line between (themselves) the "true believers" and those who are not. They selectively retain certain aspects of the past and the present to buttress their ideals, and view cooperation or negotiation as weaknesses to be avoided.³³ Throughout the 1990's conservative Christians, particularly Southern Baptists, moved steadily further to the right. During the annual Southern Baptist Convention of 2000, the members agreed to further centralize control of church issues, including reducing the autonomy of local churches, firmly established the dominant position of all-male pastors over lay ministers, and limited the role of women. The proclamation was enough of a departure from the past, more inclusive practices, that at least one life-long Baptist born and raised in the south (as well as a former president) severed his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention.³⁴

Increasingly Open Conflict with Elected Political Officials

The shift to the right of the political spectrum has been no less dramatic than the move to evangelical conservatism. Sixty-four percent of the officers responding to a 1999 study identified themselves as Republicans while only eight percent affiliated with the Democratic Party, and Independents, traditionally the largest military voting block at nearly seventy percent, dropped to only seventeen percent.³⁵ The number of Democratic affiliations, steady at about eight percent, has changed little from previous studies but the ratio of Republicans to Independents has reversed.³⁶ This represents a major shift in military culture; the increase in conservative political views matches the increase in the conservative Christian views.

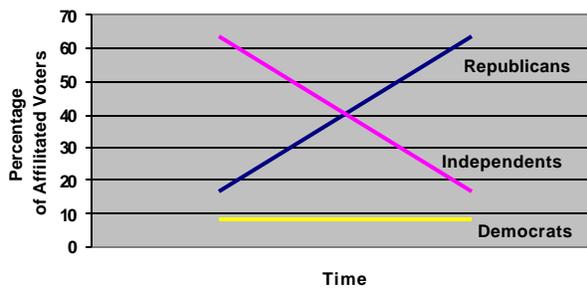


FIGURE 1 THE CHANGE IN MILITARY POLITICAL AFFILIATION³⁷

This steady shift occurred for two main reasons. First, traditional, conservative Republican values on a wide range of platforms, from social programs to a strong defense, seem to resonate well with the military.³⁸ Second, the Republican Party has actively courted military voters, especially since the Reagan administration. The large build-up that eventually ended the cold war resonated with officers, even if the President's attempt to shift society as a whole toward more traditional, conservative Christian values proved less successful.³⁹

When the Democrats took office, President Clinton's administration did not enjoy the same harmonious relationship with the Department of Defense. Clinton's anti-military stance in his youth, his political beliefs, and his determination to allow homosexuals to serve in the armed forces bred mistrust and, on occasion, even public dissent among military officers.⁴⁰ In 1999, the Kosovo air campaign represented a low point for civil-military relations. Dissention between the administration and the military led to a badly coordinated campaign whose impact rippled through the entire NATO alliance.⁴¹ This schism graphically represents how the incongruence between military recommendations and trust by civilian officials can affect policy formulation.

Additionally, among many in today's officer corps, the belief is that liberal, and generally more Democratic leaders, promote values contrary to military culture, interests, and proud tradition of service. Conservative Republicans can point to three representative examples just in the last two presidential elections. The first was during the 2000 campaign, when Al Gore proposed one factor to determine a candidate's suitability for the Joint Chiefs be his or her position on allowing homosexuals to serve openly in the military.⁴² Secondly, the 2000 election's fierce battle over Florida's absentee ballots opened the Democrats up to charges of hypocrisy. Republicans contested their claim that "every vote counted", and charged the Democrats wrongfully attempted to exclude more than 1,500 military absentee ballots.⁴³ Finally, during the 2004 election, attacks on Senator John Kerry's Viet Nam service record and anti-war stance, particularly from the "Swift Boat" veterans, highlights the strong hold conservatism has not only on active duty personnel, but retirees as well.

The Dangers of an Increasingly Homogeneous Group

The officer corps' changing culture toward increasingly conservative religious and political ideology and can lead to unimaginative, or potentially incorrect, solutions. This can undermine the effectiveness of our decision-making framework in three ways: magnitude, time, and concealment. The magnitude of an institution's cultural impact to the decision model is profound and direct. Organizational leaders tend to surround themselves with people who hold similar values and beliefs, which can lead to the creation of *in-groups*, groups that may miss

relevant alternatives (step three of the decision model). Second, the reinforcing nature of the culture shift ensures a religious and politically homogeneous group will remain an important factor for years to come. The third and final concern is that the concept of *groupthink* can easily conceal underlying flaws in the decision making process, potentially creating a divergence between military policy recommendations and solutions favored by civilian leaders.

The term culture, and its differentiation from the idea of climate, merits a brief explanation to better understand how culture directly impacts the strategic decision maker's policy recommendations. The most commonly accepted contrast of culture and climate refers to their enduring qualities.⁴⁴ Culture is rooted in the deep values, beliefs, and assumptions of its members and is more resistant to change. Climate, on the other hand, is commonly portrayed as more temporary in nature and can be more directly influenced. Over the last decade, the line between culture and climate has somewhat blurred. For example, Denison (1996) states that the "differences may be more closely linked to differences of perspective rather than differences of substance."⁴⁵ Though the methodologies may in fact have some convergence, the classical view (deep beliefs held over time) still prevails as the most commonly accepted view and more accurately describes today's military's officer corps.

Culture is a critical, but often unrealized stimulus on the decision model, but not the way many believe. Snider's anthology (2005)⁴⁶ is representative of considerable academic research postulates a potential crisis in civil-military relations if military culture gets too divergent with America's societal make up. The rationale is that if left unchecked, the loss of trust will degrade America's faith in her military's ability to accomplish its mission. One recent study indicates that the military's conservative ideological values actually more closely mirror the character of the general public than elected public officials'.⁴⁷ That loss of common ground represents the real concern, as civilian officials may lose confidence in their military advisors if they believe the policy recommendations are based on an unsound process.

The relationship between a superior and subordinates has been studied for thirty years under the umbrella of the Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.⁴⁸ Researchers uncovered two types of relationships that evolve between leaders and subordinates. Those subordinates with expanded roles and responsibilities are commonly known as the *in-group*, while those who adhered to more limited and strictly defined roles became known as the *out-group*.⁴⁹ The *in-group* generally enjoys a closer and more mutually supportive relationship with the leader and therefore has a more direct impact on the filtering phase of the decision model.

As LMX theory evolved, the question of how the *in-group* originates came under study. Some have proposed three stages of development in leader-member exchanges in which the

middle phase marks the transition between traditional roles and relationships to one of increasingly greater trust and respect for each other. It is generally initiated by the leader and involves opportunities for social interaction beyond the traditional work environment.⁵⁰ If one assumes leaders are apt to foster relationships with subordinates they can more easily relate to -- those who share similar beliefs and values -- the *in-group* can easily become a large portion of the strategic leader's staff.

As the size of the military draws down, a larger portion of officers now have a service academy background, up to nineteen percent in 2000 from only fifteen percent in 1985.⁵¹ This leads to the second major concern; the military culture's shift to the conservative right is guaranteed to remain in place for years to come. Many administrators and instructors in America's service academies are filled from the ranks of active duty and even retired officers. When viewed through the lens of LMX, this means military *in-group* relationships, now more than ever, are formed at the earliest levels of military service. This cements the foundation of the increasingly religiously conservative and Republican character of cadets, and ensures it will remain a concern for strategic decision makers as the cadets rise through the officer ranks.

This reinforcing nature is best illustrated by the Air Force Academy, a microcosm of the entire military culture shift. The Air Force has a higher percentage of Protestants than the other services, nearly one of every two members identify themselves as Protestant. The difference among service academies is even greater, six of every ten cadets at the Air Force Academy is Protestant compared to only about thirty-five percent of the student body at Annapolis and West Point.⁵²

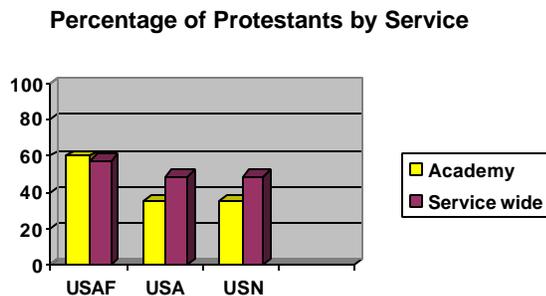


FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF PROTESTANTS BY SERVICE⁵³

This high percentage coincides with the rise of conservative Christian organizations found in Colorado Springs.⁵⁴ Since the 1980's, dozens of evangelical institutions, most notable

among them Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, have established headquarters there. The tight link between its service academy and the Air Force population as a whole ensures this conservative culture will remain an issue for the strategic decision-maker for the foreseeable future.

Janis' discussion of *groupthink* best illustrates the insidious problem of culture and its impact to strategic leaders. He believes that as group cohesion increases, adherence to group norms decreases and the potential for inadvertent suppression of creativity increases.⁵⁵ When integrated with LMX theory, this suppression leads to a number of consequences on the *in-group's* role in the rational decision process. First, the discussion is often limited to only a few courses of action. Second, when a decision is made, the *in-group* fails to reexamine the choice when objections are raised. Third, the *in-group* fails to fully evaluate the consequences of what few competing alternatives exist. Fourth, little effort is made to gain insight from the *out-group*. Fifth, the *in-group* tends to ignore facts that don't support their conclusion, and finally, they don't fully account for how political or bureaucratic realities may impact the decision.⁵⁶

This third danger is the one most easily masked to decision makers. Officers believe their decisions are rational, impartial, and that they offer unbiased advice to civilian authorities. That belief is deeply rooted in military culture, even if senior officers occasionally need to remind their subordinates of that requirement.⁵⁷ The root cause for concern is although officers clearly understand their obligation to provide impartial advice; they are increasingly, and perhaps unknowingly, unable to do so. The conservative ideological impact to the strategic leader is the resulting *groupthink* which limits creative thinking and divergent points of view. It also reduces the decision maker's (or the organization's) ability to analyze the relevant consequences of a decision. Left unchecked, *groupthink* can cause the real crisis in civil-military relations by exposing a seam between a conservative, military policy recommendations and alternatives favored by more liberal civilian officials.

The Conservative Impact on National Policy and Military Decisions

There is a steadily increasing trend of growing influence by conservatives on a number of national security topics and policies that directly affect the Armed Forces. Three such examples are the Reagan military build-up, the issue of homosexuals serving in the military, and the abandonment of the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty. Military officers generally consider themselves to be a strongly neutral party in such policy discussions and recommendations, but the Armed Forces ever-closer affiliation to conservative Christian and political values and ideals requires us to pay careful attention to its possible impact.

Although President Reagan's attempt to move society as a whole closer toward the Christian Right proved less successful than he had hoped, the Conservative voice and its impact on national security policy rose rapidly in the 1980's. Echoing the administration's call for "peace through strength", they became increasingly vocal in their support for such programs as the B-1 bomber and the Strategic Defense Initiative. They believed it was the way to show moral leadership and get America back on track to a more secure future. Many of these leaders were retired or active duty generals. Retired Brigadier General Albion Knight, Jr., USA, Major General George J. Keegan Jr., USAF, and retired Lieutenant General Daniel O. Graham (who founded the group *High Frontier*) all publicly spoke on various issues in favor of a strong defense.⁵⁸ These policies found more lukewarm support among more mainstream religions and Democrats who considered them, particularly the Strategic Defense Initiative, as wasteful and destabilizing.

Nothing affected the Armed Forces more emotionally than the issue of permitting homosexuals to serve in the military, and no issue better illustrates the impact conservative Christians can have on National policy matters. Allowing gays to serve openly was a matter of intense debate in the early 1990's, shortly after President Clinton took office. Conservatives were already worried about the Clinton administration, and took strong exception to his intention to lift the ban on gays in the military. Evangelicals argued that homosexuality was a sin and absolutely immoral, and to commit such an act is directly contrary to God's word.⁵⁹ The military and general public also opposed, although with varying degrees, as numerous opinion polls revealed condemnation of the proposed policy.⁶⁰ In the end, President Clinton managed to persuade a narrow public majority to support the compromise policy of "don't ask, don't tell," one which remains steadfastly opposed by conservative Christians.⁶¹ Were it not for such intense conservative pressure, it seems likely the final policy would have more closely mirrored the president's original goal.

In 2002, the United States Government abandoned the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty and potentially opened up the potential weaponization of space. New Department of Defense doctrine defines the need for freedom to attack from as well as defend against attacks from space.⁶² Many consider the new administration's policy destabilizing and will likely begin a new arms race, this time in space. Additionally, the United States possesses 12,000 nuclear weapons, and focuses more on upgrading and maintaining that force than on non-proliferation -- one of our key national security priorities.⁶³ Despite the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's eastward expansion, now numbering twenty-six countries, no change has been forthcoming in nuclear weapons stockpiles or policies.⁶⁴

Analysis Reveals the Conservative Impact is an Indirect One

The most recent example notwithstanding, available historical examples generally do not appear to indicate the rational decision model or policy formulation process is any more flawed now than before. This occurs for three reasons. First, the grass-roots movement toward conservative ideology began in earnest with President Reagan is only just now beginning to find its way into the General Officer Ranks, as his administration's tenure approximates the dates of when most of our senior Colonels entered service. One recent study of U.S. Army General Officers confirms the trend, as only two of fifty-two respondents claimed a liberal ideology.⁶⁵ Secondly, many policy decisions do not result in military action and therefore make case studies difficult to find. For example, how can one measure the impact of pulling out of the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty vis-à-vis NATO? The level of degradation to the trans-Atlantic alliance is difficult to quantify. Thirdly, the interplay between civilian policy decisions and military recommendations is difficult to capture. Presumably, such policy decisions received some military advice, but the precise weighting remains elusive.

Yet the move to the right remains anecdotally strong and shows no signs of slowing down. When the Administration issued its policy of pre-emptive war in the National Security Strategy, many "mainstream" religions and nearly all Democrats rejected it, insisting pre-emptive war rejects the United Nations charter of war as a last resort and takes a unilateralist, militant approach to national security.⁶⁶ Many conservative Christians however, applauded the declaration. In a letter to President Bush, several prominent conservatives strongly endorsed the policy of pre-emptive war against Iraq as "prudent and fall(s) well within the time honored criteria of just war theory."⁶⁷

The link between conservative political and Christian beliefs and their impact to military policy and decision makers is an indirect one. To date, no evidence suggests that military strategic thinkers have allowed conservative political or Christian values to override their policy decisions and recommendations, at least not intentionally. However, when a dearth of objective criteria exists and one must rely on intuition or supposition, conservative values may have considerable impact, even if inadvertent or unintentional. Our firmly ingrained belief in civilian control of the military has minimized any open conflict and at least outwardly, maintains the impartiality the uniformed services so zealously guard.

The emphasis the Christian Right places on a strong military and "peace through strength" themes resonate loud and clear with the Armed Forces. Civilians and retired military officers (especially General Officers) alike are increasingly vocal in their beliefs, and through organizations such as the *High Frontier*, have attempted to influence the debate on national

policy decisions. In the case of retired officers, it appears unlikely they developed these beliefs immediately upon retirement. More likely those conservative Christian values were already present or formed over a period of many years, such as through their associations with Chaplains. Many of today's active duty officers share those same values.

The impact of a conservative Christian and largely Republican ideology among military officers has serious implications for today's strategic decision maker. When viewed through the construct of the rational decision model -- step three, the evaluation of consequences -- is the pivotal point. The organizational culture's conservatism dominates *in-group* members' values and tends to stifle creative thinking during the filtering process. This can lead to an incomplete analysis, and possibly even invalidate the correctness of the decision. The military's loss of identity with society is less of a concern than the potential gap with civilian officials. If civilian leadership believes the military's strategic thinkers and decision-makers lack the capacity for independent thought and competent recommendations, it will degrade the effectiveness of national policy formulation.

Direct historical examples are infrequent due to the fact that decisions do not always lead to military action, and their analyses often rely on subjective interpretation to determine their correctness. That subjective analysis highlights the insidious nature of the decline; groupthink dynamics may even suppress the possibility of a problem due to rationalization.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Conservative voices have made their opinions known on a wide range of issues such as the B-1 bomber procurement, Strategic Defense Initiative, Gays in the military, the abandonment of the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, and the doctrine of pre-emptive war. These issues all directly involved the military, and since the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff sits on the National Security Council, the military certainly had representation during these discussions.

For many evangelical Christians, regardless of their profession, their religious beliefs are so strongly embedded that it is difficult to separate their personal views from their professional opinions. Without a firm understanding of this potential pitfall, it could threaten our military's religious pluralism and tolerance at a time when America's population and Armed Forces are more diverse, ethnically and religiously, than ever before. Fortunately, the military's unshakable faith in Constitution makes the possibility of sustained, open conflict between military and civilian authorities implausible, at least for the foreseeable future. The real danger to strategic decision-making is the gradual decline in effectiveness that leaders may not notice until it is too late.

America's military leaders must ensure preconceived notions based on religious or political ideology do not adversely shape the decision making process, nor can it allow intuition

based on “automated expertise” to override an objective evaluation of relevant possibilities. Failure to do so can result in lead to an erosion of trust with civilian leadership and degrade national policy decisions. The impact to strategic thinkers is clear, and Sun Tsu’s warning to know one’s self has never been more applicable than it is today.

Endnotes

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