

# MCNAMARA AND RUMSFELD: CONTROL AND IMBALANCE IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**MCNAMARA AND RUMSFELD: CONTROL AND IMBALANCE IN CIVIL-MILITARY  
RELATIONS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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As the nation moves beyond the planning failures of Operation Iraqi Freedom, both military and civilian leaders must act to restore balance to the strategic decision making process. Civilian control of the military is not in question, but senior military leaders must be given the professional respect and freedom to develop and provide both the President and Congress with candid advice and recommendations concerning national defense policy formulation and execution. Although expectations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff are well defined in US Code, reforms must address the requirements for the civilian strategic leader in relation to the uniformed military. Congress must also take action to reform the relationship between the Legislature, Executive and military elites to better enable the military to freely advise all participants in the strategic policy process. Operation Iraqi Freedom may well prove to be a watershed event for the culture of American civil-military relations. The intent of this paper is to examine how we have arrived at this point and to suggest reforms that will improve civil-military cooperation in national strategy and policy formulation.



## MCNAMARA AND RUMSFELD: CONTROL AND IMBALANCE IN CIVILIAN-MILITARY RELATIONS

Civil-military relations are the hidden dimension of strategy. In wartime it is in the interest of both statesman and soldier to minimize their conflict in public, no matter how fiercely they may abuse one another in private. In peacetime much of the normal friction between the two is confined to the attention of specialists or narrow circles of politicians and journalists. Yet it is in the often conflicted relations of citizen and soldier that the most consequential decisions of nations are forged.

—Eliot Cohen <sup>1</sup>

Arguably the relationship between the civilian and military elites in a democratic form of government is the most significant and far reaching in its effect on the larger society. The interrelation of the other various branches of government may determine domestic and foreign policy, economic and social priorities, and regulate societal norms, but the civil-military relationship decides, in large part, questions of when the military component of national power should be used and the form which that action will take. In essence, the equilibrium of power and influence within the civil-military relationship determines policy decisions affecting national survival and significantly affects the efficacy of the other elements of national power. Yet the defining parameters of a “balanced” civil-military relationship are open for debate.

I argue that effective civil-military relations must balance the military imperative for physical defense of the nation with the societal imperative to protect the democratically elected government from undue influence.<sup>2</sup> By extension, the indicators of a healthy civil-military relationship would include a professional officer corps, the ability of the military professional to render free and open advice to civilian authorities, civilian respect for the unique perspective of the military professional, the military



professional's refrain from active political participation and the willingness of the military to carry out the direction of the legitimate civilian authority.

Underpinnings of American Civil-Military Relations. Throughout much America's history, the health of American civil-military relations has been narrowly assessed in terms of positive civilian control over the professional military. As a result of few recognized threats to the nation, civil-military relations have exhibited a pattern of high military professionalism, low military political power and an antimilitary civilian ideology.<sup>3</sup> The active participation of uniformed officers in policy formulation during World War II and the Cold War requirement to maintain a large standing military altered that dynamic. Reflecting the concern of the founding fathers toward large standing armies and a politicized officer corps, much mental and political energy was focused on ensuring civilian control of the military through a series of processes and regulatory controls.

The Defense Reorganization Act of 1947 and the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 were publicized as much needed regulatory legislation to gain efficiency in the training, organization and equipping of the Armed Services, yet both also had significant effects on the relationship between the professional military elites and civilian policy makers. Both acts established processes that promoted stronger and more centralized civilian control while placing more rigorous structure and regulatory responsibilities on the highest military elites. Yet if the Congress was quick to reinforce the universally accepted concept that the American military is the servant of its civilian masters, they were much less clear on the responsibilities of the master to the servant.

The modern American military exists in a unique structural position in military and political history. At the highest levels, it operates as part of the Executive branch of

government under the President as Commander in Chief and the Secretary of Defense as his executive agent in managing the forces. Because of this structure, conflict between the civilian government and professional military is the norm.<sup>4</sup> From the Executive the military establishment draws direction and guidance along with decisions concerning funding levels and force structure that deeply affect the services. Concomitantly, the military must serve the Congress by providing its best advice and recommendations concerning a range of matters enabling the Congress to effectively decide matters of war and peace, to “raise and support armies,” and to “provide and maintain a navy”.<sup>5</sup> These two imperatives have often placed the military leadership squarely between the conflicted desires of the Executive and the Congress. In these situations, and in spite of legislative mandates (some would say because of them), civil control of the military has sometimes turned to civilian dominance of the military by the Executive, often with less than positive results.

Under the US Constitution, the President holds the position as Commander in Chief of the military forces. This is the only instance that the Constitution prescribes a position to an individual rather than a function. The subtlety is significant because it has allowed the President to expand his options to use the military while determining how he will interact with military leaders. Each President, since 1947, interacted differently with the Joint Chiefs based on his personal preferences and decision-making style.<sup>6</sup>

Section 201 of the National Security Act of 1947 codified the primacy of the Office of the Secretary of Defense over the JCS..<sup>7</sup> Since that time, the power and purview of the OSD has continued to expand, while that of the JCS has contracted into a focus largely restricted to budgetary issues associated with manning, training and

equipping the services. In parallel, the perceived value of military advice has slowly been displaced by civilian experts in business practice, systems analysis and organizational efficiency. The transition to civilian preeminence within the defense department has had considerable effect on both the manner and substance of American national security decision making.

Purpose and Method. The purpose of this paper is to comparatively analyze two periods in recent American history when the balance in civil-military relations was tipped in favor of the civilian elites through the introduction of control measures on the senior military leadership by the Secretary of Defense. The two periods (1963-68 and 2001-2006) were chosen as much for their differences as their similarities in order to establish the underlying cause(s) of the break down in civil-military relations and examine the underlying reasons that produced ill-conceived policies and ineffective military strategies. For the purpose of simplicity, each period will be referred to by the name of the Secretary of Defense who played such a central role in forming civil-military relations during the era.

The principal focus of any analysis of civil-military relations must be the senior officer corps and the national government; this is where the military's functional imperative to protect the state and the societal imperative to control the military meet. Within the American democracy, the senior officer corps is represented by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the senior service representatives to the civilian government and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the principal advisor to the Commander in Chief. Conversely, the government is represented by the Congress (Legislative Branch)

and the President (Executive Branch). Since 1947, the Secretary of Defense must also be included as a separate entity affecting civil-military relations.

For the purposes of comparison, I will focus on three key dynamics affecting the larger civil-military relationship at the strategic level: 1) the relationship between the JCS and the Secretary of Defense; 2) the relationship between the JCS and the President; and 3) the relationship between the JCS and Congress. The relationships between the JCS, SECDEF and the President will be addressed temporally by era, while the relationship between the JCS and Congress will be examined separately based on commonality of trends during the two periods.

### The McNamara Era

Robert S. McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: No action taken by President Kennedy had such an enduring effect on civil-military relations as his appointment of Robert Strange McNamara as Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). Kennedy's main reason for choosing McNamara, a former executive from Ford Motor Company, as SECDEF was to infuse modern business management techniques in the Pentagon.<sup>8</sup> Partly as a result of those efforts, several trends developed during the McNamara years that would diminish the power of the JCS to effectively operate as an independent body of professional military advisors.

Upon his arrival at the Pentagon in 1961, McNamara brought with him a team of young, highly educated, systems analysts who became known, somewhat derisively, as the "whiz kids". Many of these systems analysts were long standing friends of the new SECDEF who had worked with him during World War II assessing the strategic bombing campaign against Germany. This close-knit team of academics and

theoreticians became the driving force behind the Secretary's efforts to manage all aspects of DOD through logic, statistical analysis and quantification. In a short time, the whiz kids became a type of pseudo-military expert and displaced the military professionals as the primary decision makers at the Pentagon and providers of information to the Congress.<sup>9</sup>

The rise to eminence of the pseudo-military expert produced several noteworthy effects on the civil-military relationship during Secretary McNamara's tenure. The opinions of junior civilian academics became valued above those of professional military officers, who were seen to be too rooted in the past and lacking the proper education to be of value. McNamara's young civilian assistants rarely attempted to conceal their condescending attitude toward senior military officers. As a result, a new breed of military officer developed during the McNamara years: the military technocrat who could speak the new systems analysis jargon and more effectively maneuver the bureaucratic maze of the Pentagon but who had little practical experience in either strategic or operational art.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, the process became circular; the more professional military officers attempted to compete with the civilian analysts on their own terms, the more military professionalism's unique contribution to the decision making process became diluted and irrelevant.

McNamara's Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) was (and is) highly successful when used to correct imbalances between the military's mission and resources, preparing for war. But its rationalistic manner in addressing these issues becomes less useful, and possibly dangerous, when fighting actually begins. British defense analyst Gregory Palmer noted that: "The rationalistic approach is characterized

by a pretension to universality ...quantification, simplification, and lack of flexibility.” When used in the context of business or economics in support of defense program management, and where actors are assumed to react rationally, this approach was highly successful.<sup>11</sup> In warfare, however, actors seldom react rationally. This concept, encapsulated by the old military adage that “the enemy gets a vote” was recognized by Clausewitz when he too compared war to economics.<sup>12</sup> On McNamara and the whiz kids, however, the point was lost. Effectiveness equated to efficiency and all could be condensed to an equation in order to ascertain “How much is enough.”<sup>13</sup>

A third prevalent trend reflecting the rise of the civilian to a position of dominance in the McNamara’s DOD, was the Secretary’s largely successful efforts first to control and then marginalize the Joint Chiefs. McNamara effectively accomplished this by limiting both the Chiefs’ access to the President and, to a lesser degree, the advice they offered. Though McNamara began marginalizing the Chiefs under President Kennedy, it was under Lyndon Johnson that the effort reached fruition. During the pivotal years 1965-1968, as American involvement in South Vietnam reached a peak pursuing a strategy of gradual pressure, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the only member of the JCS to see the President regularly. The Chairman was almost always accompanied by either the SECDEF or his deputy. By all accounts, the civilian member of the briefing team rarely hesitated to propose counter arguments or dilute the Chairman’s thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

Early in the policy development process concerning Vietnam, the service chiefs voiced nearly unanimous opposition to the strategies of gradual response and quantification that Secretary McNamara and his civilian advisors favored. On January

22, 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a memorandum to the SECDEF advising him to either “get in or get out” of Vietnam. The chiefs’ advice concerning how to effectively proceed if the US went in, however, was fractured along service lines, with each chief advocating a lead role for his service. At the March 17, 1964 meeting of the National Security Council, the defense department’s policy memorandum concerning Vietnam was presented to the President. The memorandum reflected the McNamara strategy of gradualism. The only military officer present, JCS Chairman, General Maxwell Taylor, disingenuously assured the President that the memo had the full support of the Joint Chiefs. With McNamara controlling information passed to the President from the Pentagon, the dissenting voices of the Joint Chiefs were, for practical purposes, muted.

The acquiescent Joint Chiefs aided and abetted McNamara. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy moved to replace the holdover Chiefs from the Eisenhower administration with his own men. Key among these appointments was General Maxwell Taylor as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Taylor was Kennedy’s man and fully committed to promoting the position of the administration over that of the military. Following Taylor as Chairman was General Earl Wheeler, a former math instructor at the U.S. Military Academy. By all accounts, Wheeler was a skilled staff officer, good briefer and master administrator. He had never served a day in combat, but McNamara and Taylor both found him to be a “team player”.<sup>15</sup> By minimizing the role of the service chiefs and leveraging a Chairman that he could at least overshadow and at best manipulate, Secretary McNamara effectively spoke for the military during policy and strategy making sessions, giving the impression of complete unanimity between him and the Joint Chiefs. In part he succeeded in controlling the chiefs

because the chiefs themselves were divided along service lines to such a degree that they lost credibility with both the President and Congress. Their failure to speak with a single voice is quite possibly the single most important underlying factor explaining why the Joint Chiefs could not “prevent the deepening morass in Vietnam.”<sup>16</sup>

During critical decision making periods both before and during the long U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs provided few useful recommendations to the National Command Authority, partly because their views were largely service centric and partly because the ever present McNamara would not allow open discussion concerning the linkage of political and military objectives or even how various military options might contribute to achieving policy goals. What advice was proffered was uniformly ignored by a SECDEF and his civilian assistants who considered it irrelevant. Unable to proffer advice and not allowed to execute strategy because of interference by the civilian administration, the chiefs soldiered on silently. Only once, during the micromanagement of the bombing campaign, did the chiefs come close to resigning *en masse* in protest. Their failure to do so set a standard for the military, loyalty to civilian control and silence in the face of incompetence.<sup>17</sup>

Speaking after his retirement, Admiral David McDonald, Chief of Naval Operations under McNamara, confessed: “Maybe we military men were all weak, maybe we should have stood up and pounded the table... I was part of it and I’m sort of ashamed of myself too. At times I wonder why did I go along with this kind of stuff.”<sup>18</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling is more scathing in his assessment: “Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson estimated in 1965 that victory would require as many as 700,000 troops for up to five years. Commandant of the Marine Corps Wallace Greene



made a similar estimate on troop levels. As President Johnson incrementally escalated the war, neither man made his views known to the President or Congress. President Johnson made a concerted effort to conceal the costs and consequences of Vietnam from the public, but such duplicity required the passive consent of America's generals."<sup>19</sup>

The President and the JCS: The term of Secretary McNamara spanned two Presidents (Kennedy and Johnson), each with a unique decision making style, both of which ultimately muted the Joint Chiefs. John Kennedy came to office as a decorated war hero. The Chiefs initially warmed to him, but were never able to adjust to his collegial style of decision making. Kennedy made decisions using an almost seminar like style that often left the Chiefs wondering if a decision had actually been arrived at or not. To make matters worse, Kennedy failed to effectively use the one organization structured to accommodate a decision making process the Chiefs would recognize by relegating the National Security Council (NSC) to a forum for advocacy of various programs rather than brokers of national security policy.<sup>20</sup>

The invasion of Cuba was a turning point in relations between the civilian and military segments of the Kennedy administration. During planning for the operation, the Joint Chiefs were relegated to a strictly advisory role to the CIA. When the Bay of Pigs invasion foundered in April 1961, the chiefs unanimously recommended using American military power to assist, but Kennedy instead listened to his most trusted advisor, Secretary McNamara, and withheld support to prevent an escalation. Similar recommendations by the Joint Chiefs during the Cuban Missile Crisis the following year cemented Kennedy's perception of the service chiefs as too quick to draw the sword

and bolstered his confidence in McNamara. After the missile crisis, the recommendations of the chiefs were regularly relegated to those of McNamara and his “Whiz Kids.”<sup>21</sup> Kennedy confided to his brother Bobby, then the Secretary of State: “An invasion would have been a mistake – a wrong use of our power. But the military are mad. They wanted to do this. It’s lucky we have McNamara over there (at DOD).”<sup>22</sup>

Upon the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson became Commander in Chief. As Vice President, Johnson had been party to the decision making process during both the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis. These experiences reinforced his contempt of the Joint Chiefs and most other senior military officers who Johnson alternatively ignored, cajoled, lied to and insulted during his administration.<sup>23</sup>

Like Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson preferred the advice of an inner circle of trusted advisors. Unlike Kennedy, whose inner circle was provided the latitude to think freely and explore policy options, Johnson’s personality required constant confirmation. The President’s inner circle was expected to agree with him on most issues. Even more than Kennedy, Johnson gave Secretary McNamara free reign at the Pentagon and with defense policy. Following his political instincts, the President focused his attentions on his “Great Society” programs and left the SECDEF to handle the annoyance of Vietnam. At a practical level, this insulated Johnson from the decision making cycle except when he wanted to be seen in command. The best examples of his penchant to be in charge were the Tuesday morning luncheons where he personally vetted the target lists for U.S. bombers. The fact that regularly there were not even any members of the Joint Chiefs at these meetings reflect both what low regard Johnson had for the uniformed

military, and the reliance the President placed on the SECDEF to represent the military opinion.

The Congress and the JCS: Throughout America's long slide into the Vietnam Conflict, none of the Joint Chiefs of Staff effectively filled their constitutional mandate to freely and openly advise Congress. Several factors contributed to this failure. The professional code of the U.S. officer corps prevents officers from engaging in partisan political activity. Coupled with the military's traditional loyalty to their superior (in this case the Commander in Chief), evidence indicates that most of the chiefs believed that when dealing with Congress it was their duty to support the policies of the President regardless of their personal views. The chief's concept of loyalty is understandable if misplaced. In 1965, memory of the Truman-MacArthur was fresh and argued heavily against any venture into the political realm.<sup>24</sup>

The traditional support of the senior military for Executive policy before Congress further reinforced the chief's inaction. This tradition of suppressing an officer's own beliefs to those of civilian authority goes back at least to the pre World War II period and is deeply ingrained in the American military psyche. As early as 1924, in testimony before Congress, General Walker (Chief of Army Finance) stated: I think when the budget has once been approved by the President...no officer or official of the War Department would have any right to come up here and attempt to get a single dollar more..."<sup>25</sup> His feelings were echoed a year later by the Army deputy chief of staff, General Nolan who inaccurately proclaimed: "...we are prohibited by law from asking Congress for anything except the amount that is allowed in the (President's) budget."<sup>26</sup> Together, the imperative to remain apolitical and the chief's loyalty to the President

provided ample cover for the JCS to remain disengaged with Congress. A less idealistic rationale may also have been at play, service interest.

In the pre Goldwater-Nichols era, service interests often trumped national interests. McMasters suggests that at least three of the chiefs remained silent concerning the President's policy to garner resource benefits for their individual services. Army chief Harold Johnson later noted that he opted against resignation in the face of McNamara's deceit to protect the Army as best he could. Admiral McDonald and Marine Commandant Greene similarly repressed their professional assessment of the President's Vietnam strategy and in return garnered increased resources for the Navy and Marine Corps.<sup>27</sup> McMaster notes: "Because the Constitution locates civilian control of the military in Congress as well as in the executive branch, the chiefs could not have been justified in deceiving the people's representatives about Vietnam."<sup>28</sup>

### The Rumsfeld Era

Donald Rumsfeld and the JCS: Like Robert McNamara, Donald Rumsfeld arrived at the Pentagon with a mandate for change. During the 2000 Presidential campaign, George Bush had expressed his idea that the American military needed to change its cold war focus and transform itself into a lighter, more agile force prepared to cope with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> As a former SECDEF under Gerald Ford and with a strong business background, "Rummy" was just the man to "shake things up" at the Pentagon.

From the beginning, evidence suggests that Donald Rumsfeld had no intention to work with senior military officers. He projected an image of himself as someone who knew all there was to know about military problems and certainly more than the chiefs

who he distrusted. Rumsfeld believed that the military had gained too much political clout under Bill Clinton and in order to effect real change at the Pentagon, he had to get the JCS under control.<sup>30</sup> He began his campaign by arbitrarily cutting the senior service staffs by 15% while bolstering his Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) staff.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, Rumsfeld made it clear that any senior officer who dared to question his vision for military transformation would find his career cut short. According to a report leaked to the press, a top Bush advisor (probably Rumsfeld) stated that the only way to restore civilian control to the Pentagon was to “fire a few generals.”<sup>32</sup>

When General Hugh Shelton retired as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October 2001, Rumsfeld replaced him with General Richard Myers. Shelton, an Army officer, frequently challenged Rumsfeld’s views and jealously protected his prerogative under Goldwater-Nichols to see the President in person. Alternatively, Myers, an Air Force general and former fighter pilot, was known for his malleability preference to “get along” with his superiors.<sup>33</sup>

General Myers’ selection as Chairman was the first of several public demonstrations illustrating to the uniformed military that, within the Rumsfeld Pentagon, loyalty and teamwork were the gold standard of conduct and that disagreement with the Secretary would not be tolerated. Throughout Rumsfeld’s time as SECDEF, high visibility selections and non-selections reinforced this message. The Secretary’s veto of Air Force General Ron Keys as J-3 for the Joint Staff came after an interview in which Keys reportedly gave the wrong answer to the question of whether he would give unconditional support to Rumsfeld’s policies.<sup>34</sup> An even more controversial appointment was Rumsfeld’s choice of retired Army General Peter Schoomaker to replace General

Eric Shinseki as Army Chief of Staff after the later privately disagreed with the Secretary concerning the direction of Army transformation and publicly disagreed with him concerning the number of troops needed to occupy Iraq during Congressional testimony. The Washington Post quoted an unidentified Army officer as stating that: “Rumsfeld is essentially rejecting all three and four star generals in the Army... undermining them by saying, in effect, they aren’t good enough to lead the service.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, Secretary Rumsfeld’s personnel decisions may be his most enduring legacy within the American military. As SECDEF, his personal involvement in the selection of two and three star generals and determining their assignments was unprecedented. The effect of promoting the careers of senior officers who’s vision of the future mirrored his own, or who were willing to subjugate their professional candor for advancement, will continue to affect the American military for years to come.<sup>36</sup>

Secretary Rumsfeld’s vision for the transformed U.S. military was one of high technology, small size, precision and computer networking. The vision instantly placed him at odds with the service chiefs and particularly the Army, which the SECDEF wanted to cut by half. Following the 9/11 attacks, the method of attack in Afghanistan seemingly validated Secretary Rumsfeld’s concept. Using Special Forces and precision air strikes to support an indigenous ground force, the coalition achieved an apparent decisive victory. This success was cited as justification for the SECDEF’s proposals to trim and reorganize military forces making them both lighter and more lethal by emphasizing technology and special operations forces.<sup>37</sup>

It was no coincidence that the Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO) matured within the Rumsfeld DOD. Dating from the early 1990s, the concept of EBAO

was rapidly adopted by the technologically guided services (Air Force and Navy). Though not totally successful during the Kosovo Campaign in 1999, the concept was pressed into Joint doctrine as a politically and economically viable alternative to the “Powell Doctrine” of overwhelming (and expensive) force. With its focus on operational net analysis (ONA) to identify critical nodes that could then be economically attacked with precision weapons, then quantify the results of those attacks on the relationships between nodes (effects). EBAO may accurately be seen as the bastard offspring of traditional airpower zealots and the systems analysts of the McNamara years.

For Secretary Rumsfeld, EBAO offered the perfect doctrine to support his vision of transformation and around which to build a lighter, leaner, more precise U.S. military that could fight wars quickly, cleanly and cheaply. The initial phase of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) tested, and seemingly validated, many of Rumsfeld’s concepts concerning EBAO and transformation while repudiating conventional military thinking. In execution, the SECDEF’s technology assisted micromanagement of the Afghanistan war was comparable to anything under McNamara, but the rapid end to major combat operations and extremely light casualties precluded any large scale military backlash.<sup>38</sup> Operation Enduring Freedom served to reinforce Rumsfeld’s belief that he and his civilian advisors understood military strategy, doctrine, structure, and weapons systems better than the professional military.<sup>39</sup>

In 2002, after President Bush asked for planning to begin in support of regime change in Iraq, Secretary Rumsfeld was intent that the military would “get it right” this time and break the outdated concepts of the Powell Doctrine. Armed with the power of his belief in transformation, Secretary Rumsfeld largely ignored the advice and

recommendations of the Joint Chiefs in planning for a large invasion force to execute Operation Iraqi Freedom. By-passing the JCS, the bulk of the planning effort took place directly between Rumsfeld's OSD and General Tommy Franks' U. S. Central Command staff. Introducing a compressed planning cycle known as adaptive planning, the SECDEF effectively halved then reduced again the overall numbers of the invasion force. Through iterative briefings, he demonstrated a level of micromanagement concerning operational and even tactical matters not seen since the "Tuesday morning meetings" conducted under Johnson-McNamara. Retired General Barry McCaffery surmised that the only possible explanation for the SECDEFs demonstrated desire for personal control and micromanagement to the smallest detail was "a complete lack of trust that these Army generals knew what they were doing."<sup>40</sup>

Privately, many senior officers expressed serious misgivings about the small size of the Iraq invasion force. These leaders would later express their concerns in tell-all books such as "Fiasco" and "Cobra II," however, when the U.S. went to war in Iraq with less than half the strength required to win, these leaders did not make their objections public.<sup>41</sup> Like their predecessors under McNamara and Johnson, they remained silent to both the President and the Congress. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior Army officer offered another rationale. The current plan, he said, is not about winning, but winning a certain way to prove [Rumsfeld's] transformation plans.<sup>42</sup>

As the Iraq War slipped into insurgency, many serving and retired officers blamed the SECDEF and his inner circle of civilian advisors for the problems coalition forces face in the country. One unidentified general officer was quoted as saying: "I do not believe we had a clearly defined war strategy, end state and exit strategy before we



commenced our mission. The current (Rumsfeld) OSD refused to listen or adhere to military advice.”<sup>43</sup> Significantly, actively serving officers remained silent concerning any reservations they may have held. Only those admirals and generals who had retired from active service spoke out against what they perceived as the arrogance and ineptitude of the senior civilian leadership in the OSD. <sup>44</sup>

The President and the JCS: When George W. Bush took office in 2000, most in the military looked forward to the change after eight years of reduced defense budgets and drifting policy. Certainly, the new President’s campaign rhetoric led both the professional military and civilians in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill to so believe. In practice, however, Bush’s preference for delegating responsibilities to his cabinet effectively resulted in the same civil-military friction seen during the Kennedy-Johnson era. Whereas Johnson actively aided McNamara in micromanaging and abusing the Joint Chiefs, Bush remained above the fray, effectively enabling Donald Rumsfeld to operate like his predecessor four decades before.<sup>45</sup> As during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the President’s preference to take advice from close trusted aids led him to value the ideas and policy recommendations of his inner circle above experienced, professional outsiders. As a result, most military advice rendered to President Bush was filtered through a SECDEF who was allowed to ignore the senior military’s advice unless it confirmed his own beliefs.<sup>46</sup>

One unique aspect of civil-military relations during the George W. Bush administration has been a growing trend to politicize the Joint Chiefs and operational commanders. The 2007 testimony before Congress by General David Petraeus, in effect defending the administration’s Iraq Policy was the latest in a series of episodes

during which both the administration and Congress selected to publicize the views of senior officers supporting their own political position.<sup>47</sup>

Congress and the JCS: Like their predecessors four decades earlier, the Joint Chiefs under Secretary Rumsfeld largely withheld their council from Congress and limited dissention to close hold forums in “the tank”. Herspring cites the traditional reasons of loyalty to the President and a desire to remain above politics as rationale for the chief’s disengagement. He also notes the tight reign the SECDEF kept on the chiefs and the desire by the services to leverage a greater percentage of a shrinking defense budget as contributory factors.<sup>48</sup> As valid as these assertions may be, an even greater effect on the military Congressional relationship was exerted by the changed composition of Congress itself. Continuing a three decade decline, only about one in three members of Congress had *any* type of military experience in 2003.<sup>49</sup> Even more significant, the total number of Congressmen who had served in the volunteer force was less than 25.<sup>50</sup> These figures indicate the challenge that the professional military faces when dealing with Congress and the challenge Congress faces in trying to exercise their Constitutional responsibilities pertaining to the armed forces. In a form of political Kabuki, the military professional testifying before Congress will answer any question put to him, but will not volunteer information that counters the policies of the Executive. For its part, Congress no longer possess the experience to ask the right questions. Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than during Army Chief of Staff, General Eric Shinseki’s testimony before Congress in the days before the Iraq War. Though he adamantly disagreed with the number of troops allocated to the Iraq mission, he did not volunteer that information until directly asked. Significantly, there were no follow up

questions by the members of the committee.<sup>51</sup> When a few days later, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz derided Shinseki's estimate as "wildly off the mark," his advice carried the day.<sup>52</sup> A more experienced Congressional leadership might have known to be more skeptical.

Comparative Analysis. Even cursory reviews of the McNamara and Rumsfeld years at the head of the Defense Department are striking in their similarity. In both cases, factors of environment, personality and process intersected to form a perfect storm of civilian domination over the military that effectively muted the voices of military experience and dissent in policy and strategy formulation while allowing civilian appointees to intervene into activities previously the purview of the uniformed military. The imbalance in civil-military relations deprived the nation of effective policy formulation at a critical juncture in history. At the highest levels of the National Security establishment, decision makers only heard recommendations that reinforced their already formulated concepts.

Close similarities exist in the environmental contexts in which both Secretaries McNamara and Rumsfeld operated. Both served during periods when the United States was confronted by an ideologically motivated enemy seeking asymmetrical methods of expanding their influence. Both administrations inherited simmering conflicts from their predecessors and both suffered defense policy failures early in their tenures. Together, these events convinced both administrations that American power needed to be demonstrated as credible and both sought to demonstrate this "over there" rather than at home. Finally, both administrations operated within constrained resources with a preference (at least initially) toward domestic programs. This focus on domestic social

and economic progress pressed both SECDEFs to policies of gradualism and minimal force that brought them into early conflict with the more traditional military doctrine of the periods.

Secretaries McNamara and Rumsfeld each came to office with a mandate from the President to reform and/or transform what was perceived at the time as a stodgy and cumbersome defense establishment. However true the assessment, the manner in which both pursued this goal alienated most senior military officers. In the drive to reform the Department of Defense, both men expanded scope and influence of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) at the expense of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Relations between the most senior civilian and military elites were further by what individuals close to both SECDEFs have described as a common disdain for the value of military experience and a preference to rely on civilian intellectuals to formulate policy and develop military strategy.

Presidential leadership styles further empowered both SECDEFs to tightly control the recommendations emanating from the DOD. Rather than relying on organizations and structure to assist in policy formulation, Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and George W. Bush all preferred to rely on personal relationships and the advice of an inner circle of confidants as the cornerstones of their decision making process. In such an environment, loyalty was valued above candor and corporate “groupthink” above dissenting opinion. Henry Kissinger noted: “Presidents listen to advisors whose views they think they need, not to those who insist on a hearing because of some organizational chart.”<sup>53</sup> The indicators suggest that under all three Presidents, the civilian leadership in the White House, the Congress, and the Office of the Secretary of

Defense thought that there was little value added in including the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the decision making process.<sup>54</sup>

Early in both administrations steps were taken to replace sitting service chiefs and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs with officers whose beliefs conformed more closely to the SECDEF or who were more malleable in their beliefs. All three Presidents also marginalized the National Security Council (NSC), using it only to gain pro-forma approval of predetermined decisions as required by the National Security Act of 1947. This approach effectively empowered Secretaries McNamara and Rumsfeld to control the information provided to senior decision makers and squash dissenting opinions.

The eroding will of the Congress to fully engage with the military and Executive in matters of national security further contributed to imbalance in civil-military relations during both eras. The framers of the Constitution envisioned the Congress (Legislature) as the dominant player in Civilian-Military affairs. In the *Federalist Papers*, James Hamilton noted: "...The power of the President would be inferior to that of the Monarch....That of the British King extends to the declaring of war and to the Raising and Regulating of fleets and armies; all which by the Constitution...would appertain to the Legislature."<sup>55</sup> During the last two hundred years however, the relationship between the professional military and the Congress has evolved away from Congressional control toward ever growing control by the Executive. This trend accelerated after 1947 and is a key enabler of Executive dominance in civil-military relations.

The culture of the American military has, from its inception, placed loyalty to superiors and submission to civilian authority uppermost among its values. Only once (MacArthur) has a senior officer openly defied civilian authority, and in that case the

body of the professional officer corps supported his ouster.<sup>56</sup> But this same loyalty and submission to civilian control has also led to the professional military's shirking of its Constitutional responsibilities to freely advise Congress.

Since the creation of the Department of Defense under the Executive in 1947, the inclination by senior military leaders to replace their best advice with loyalty to the Executive has only increased. Under the PPBS system, established by Secretary McNamara, the OSD traditionally controls inputs from the defense department for the President's budget request to Congress. This fact cannot help but affect the officers providing budgetary advice and recommendations to the Congress. Though the services may privately disagree with the President's budget, when testifying before Congress military culture and loyalty to the commander-in-chief serve as a strong deterrent to speaking out. Regardless of their professional beliefs, based on experience and their own judgment, many are hesitant to openly challenge the assertions of their civilian bosses before Congress.

Objective Control Theory: In his seminal work *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel Huntington identified objective civilian control of the military as the most stable and productive type of Civil-Military relationship in a democracy. Objective control embraces a distinct military expertise: the management of violence. Under objective control, issues of personnel, training, and military doctrine are the prerogative of the military professional. While Huntington assumed that the military and civilians might continue to disagree on matters of doctrine and policy, he argued that the increased professionalism fostered by objective control leads to a more, not less, politically neutral military elite. Political scientist Peter Feaver, a student of Huntington's, notes that:

“Autonomy leads to professionalism, which leads to political neutrality and voluntary subordination, which leads to secure civilian control.”<sup>57</sup> Though not universally embraced, objective control of the military has fundamentally shaped civil-military relations over the last 50 years. “When followed, it has generally been conducive to good civil-military relations as well as to sound policy decisions.”<sup>58</sup>

Analysis indicates that during the tenures of Defense Secretaries McNamara and Rumsfeld, each secretary was able to undermine objective control of the military to such a degree as to either circumvent or mute the senior military’s advisory responsibility. Each SECDEF maximized civilian power within the Defense Department through a series of techniques that favored the military bureaucrat over the military professional. An important result of this bureaucratization was the marked decrease in the perceived value and uniqueness of professional military advice to the civilian elites. As Huntington predicted, civilian attempts to reduce friction between the civilian and military components of the relationship actually resulted in increased animosity and distrust between the two national security partners. The swing toward subjective civilian control was only possible because the relative power of the Executive over the Legislative had enabled the President to supplant the Constitutional powers of the Congress.<sup>59</sup> Instead of achieving a higher level of harmony and national security, attempts to marginalize the professional military has actually achieved the reverse, placing the nation at greater peril without the unique expertise of the professional military and in a political loggerhead between the Executive and Legislative concerning who is best positioned, and willing, to fix the problem (Iraq). To move back along the civil-military continuum

toward a more objective civilian control of the armed forces requires addressing a number of contentious issues.

The Way Ahead: Analysis suggests three broad issues that should be addressed by the next administration to counter the enablers listed above and to promote a balanced civil-military relationship and objective civilian control: 1) fostering military professionalism; 2) unfettered access to the President and Congress by senior military leaders; and 3) reassertion of Congressional prerogative in civ-mil relations. Each of these issues requires serious debate and resolution of very basic issues concerning the desired role of the military in the formulation of national defense policy and strategy.

Many political scientists predict a looming crisis in civil-military relations regardless of which political party occupies the White House after the 2008 elections.<sup>60</sup> This need not be the case, but for any substantive progress to be made, the Executive, the Congress and the uniformed military must put aside partisanship and narrowly focused service and party interests. Significantly, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen, reinforced the requirement for military officers to provide their best advice and recommendations to the civilian leadership in his initial letter to military service members. Mullen reaffirmed: "The law says my main job is to advise the President, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council on issues of military readiness and capabilities. I will do that."<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Secretary Gates has very publicly announced his intention to consult with both the combatant commanders and the Joint Chiefs before making policy recommendations to the President. Attitudes concerning the management of civil-military relations have clearly changed at the most senior levels of the defense department. However, without concrete action to improve



the statutory underpinnings of American civil-military relationships opportunity exists for the nation's civilian elites to again mute the voice of the professional military.

To facilitate consideration of the widest spectrum of strategic options, the full Joint Chiefs of Staff, not only the Chairman, must be reinstated as statutory members of the National Security Council. Since the formulation of the National Security Council, the manner and extent to which it has been used as intended by the 1947 Defense Reorganization Act and subsequent legislation has varied widely with the personal leadership style of the President. The clear parallel between the effectiveness of the organization and formulation of viable national policy and strategy argues for using the council to its full capacity as an arena where the proposals and concerns of the interagency can be freely surfaced to the President and other senior decision makers. Though forcing any President to use the NSC in a manner that conflicts with his preferred decision making style is problematic, the return of the full Joint Chiefs of Staff as statutory members of the NCS would, at the least, provide a vehicle for the President to access a wider range of strategic options than is currently the case. Concomitantly, inclusion of the Chiefs will also make it much more difficult for any future Secretary of Defense to intercede between the most senior military professionals and the Commander in Chief.

Senior civilian elites in both the Executive and Congress must recognize the importance and value of the expert knowledge offered by a professional military. Both branches must actively work to foster professionalism within both the services and the joint community. Two key elements defining any profession are the organization's ability to self police its members and the responsibility to promote its members within the

organization.<sup>62</sup> For the military services to exercise these professional prerogatives, a quantum shift must occur in how America's most senior military positions are selected. Senior civilians in the Executive must refrain (or be restrained) from interfering in the promotion and selection of officers both within the Services and for positions on the Joint Staff or as combatant commanders.

Obviously, the mechanics of how this is achieved will raise heated debate concerning the President's constitutional role as the Commander in Chief, but an equally compelling counter-argument cites the constitutionally mandated responsibility of Congress to raise and maintain armies. Whatever compromise is reached, the Congress must pull itself back into a more active, some would argue proper, role in national defense issues. Only then will the military be in a position to realize its mandated loyalty not only to the Executive, but rather to the entire government under the Constitution. Culturally, the American military must resolve the question of its principal loyalty in a way that honors its oath to support and defend the Constitution. The military exists within the Executive branch, but does not serve it solely. To twist a phrase often used by British politicians to describe the United Kingdom's relation with continental Europe, the American military must be in the Executive Branch, but not of the Executive branch.

Finally, the civilian authorities must review the current structure and processes that limit the senior military leadership's access to the President and Congress as well as the influences that inhibit them from proffering frank advice and recommendations. The first two proposals above do, in some measure, address this concern. Yet it is arguable that the necessary links between the Joint Chiefs and the OSD pursuant to

execution of their Title X responsibilities to man, equip and train their services could render the Chiefs vulnerable to influence or coercion concerning national policy and strategy recommendations.

Maxwell Taylor proposed a possible solution in 1961. In response to what he viewed as the JCS's narrow focus on service issues, Taylor recommended forming a council of senior military officers from each of the services of either newly retired or officers on their last active tour to advise the President, Congress and SECDEF directly on national security matters.<sup>63</sup> Such a plan is attractive because it frees the Joint Chiefs to maintain focus on Title X and service matters and remain advocates for service related resource issues while removing the likelihood of budgetary battles overflowing into matters of policy and strategy. At the same time, the President, SECDEF and Congress would have access to a body of expert military experience unfettered by temporary political influence or a combatant commander's narrow regional focus. Interestingly enough, Robert McNamara, in the closing pages of his 1995 *mia culpa* titled "In Retrospect" made a similar suggestion, though he expectedly argued for a wider body similar to the NSC and including the Chiefs.<sup>64</sup>

Testifying before Congress on 1 May 1946, then Secretary of the Navy, James V. Forrestal unsuccessfully argued against the consolidation of the power of the Joint Chiefs under a single secretary and the implications for subjective civilian control of the armed forces. Speaking out against the post that he would eventually hold, Forrestal noted that relying on "a single military genius" would risk "mistakes of judgment."<sup>65</sup> Ignoring Forrestal's caveat, successive defense reorganization acts have consolidated more and more power into the hands of fewer and fewer civilian officials.<sup>66</sup> Twice during

the past sixty years, the existing structure and processes at the Department of Defense have allowed a single “genius” to so dominate civil-military relations as to mute dialog concerning critical national defense strategy and successfully argue for ill conceived strategy in the pursuit of national policy. With growing impetus to review the Goldwater-Nichols Act and a strong political current clamoring for change, the next administration and the Congress should act to promote a balanced civil-military relationship and a more objective civilian control within the Department of Defense. It’s past time to ensure that all voices at the table are considered before again ordering the men and women of our nation into harms’ way.

### Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>4</sup> Huntington, vii-viii

<sup>5</sup> United States Constitution.

<sup>6</sup> Herspring, 13-15

<sup>7</sup> National Security Act, (1947).

<sup>8</sup> Herspring, 121.

<sup>9</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: Harper-Collins,1997), 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Little, Brown & Co , 1979), 34-35.

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- <sup>16</sup> Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 410-411.
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- <sup>19</sup> Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," available from <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/05/2635198>; Internet; accessed 16 January 2008.
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- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
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<sup>35</sup> “Retired General Picked to Head Army; Rumsfeld’s Choice of Schoomaker Expected to Rankle Many in Uniform,” *Washington Post*, 11 June 2003, 4.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *Federalist* (no. 24), 465.

<sup>56</sup> Herspring, 83-84.

<sup>57</sup> Herspring, 7.

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<sup>59</sup> Huntington, 80-97.

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<sup>63</sup> McMaster, 15.

<sup>64</sup> McNamara, 332.

<sup>65</sup> McMaster, 13.

<sup>66</sup> James R. Locher, III, *Victory on the Potomac* (College Station, TX.: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 4-5. During a closed door meeting with Senators Goldwater and Nunn in February 1986, Army Chief of Staff John Wickham predicted that by: "making each chief's performance as a Joint Chief subject to the direction and control of his service secretary, the chiefs would no longer be able to provide independent military advice."