Soldiers of the State

An Alternative View of Civil-Military Relations in America Today

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In America today the dominant view of civil-military relations holds that civilian control of the military is dangerously eroded.[1] Though tension clearly exists in the relationship, the current critique is largely inaccurate and badly overwrought. Far from overstepping its bounds, America's military operates comfortably within constitutional notions of separated powers, participating appropriately in defense and national security policymaking with due deference to the principle of civilian control. Indeed, an active and vigorous role by the military in the policy process is and always has been essential to the common defense. Today the subject of civil-military relations turns on two questions. The first is whether or not the American military has become dangerously estranged from American society at large. The second is whether or not it has become too deeply involved in American politics. Both are serious questions which deserve deeper examination than they generally receive.

Civil-military relations in America today are unquestionably marked by friction, not between society and the military, but between civilian and military elites. There are two principal factors that explain the divide. The first is that discord between civilian and military elites springs primarily from social and intellectual differences that profoundly condition and shape the relationship. The second is that our system of constitutionally distributed control over the military ensures that the tension inherent in separated powers extends to the military

[1]The foremost proponent of the dominant critique of civil-military relations in America today is historian Richard Kohn. He is joined by Peter Feaver, Andrew Bacevich, Russell Weigley, Michael Wesch, Eliot Cohen and others. See Richard H. Kohn, "Out of Control": The Crisis in Civil Military Relations", The National Interest, No. 35, Spring 1994; "The Forgotten Fundamentals of Civilian Control of the Military in Democratic Government", John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Project on U.S. Post Cold-War Civil-Military Relations, Working Paper No. 13, Harvard University, June 1997 and "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today", Naval War College Review, Summer 2002.

domain. The tension which marks the civil-military relationship today is not a function of an overweening military. Instead it is a product of a uniquely American process of constitutional governance which has succeeded well in reconciling the competing imperatives of an effective national defense and a properly subordinated system of separated powers.

Defining the Debate

A natural starting point for any inquiry into the state of civil-military relations in the U.S. today is to define what is meant by the terms "civil-military relations" and "civilian control." Broadly defined, "civil-military relations" refers to the relationship between the armed forces of the state and the larger society they serve – how they communicate, how they interact, and how the interface between them is ordered and regulated. Similarly, "civilian control" means simply the degree to which the military's civilian masters can enforce their authority on the military services.[2]

So much seems clear. Increasingly, however, these terms have been miscast. In general usage today, "civil-military relations" is more often meant to describe relations between civilian and military *elites*, not between the military as an institution and society at large. Similarly, "civilian control" is more often used today to describe, not the government's ability to exercise authority over the military, but in a narrower sense to mean executive branch policy dominance over the military on specific issues. In this sense, civilian superiors are interested

[2] In common practice "civilian control" is quite often used to mean much more, often implying unqualified deference to the executive branch.

in political freedom of maneuver, enabled and not obstructed by the public views from military leaders.

The debate is further obscured by imprecise use of the terms "military" and "officer corps", often employed when the author's real meaning is the senior military leadership who function at the policy interface – in a word, military "elites". Dangerous traits attributed to the military as an institution, with its millions of active, reserve and veteran members, are more alarming than the behaviors of a small number of senior military officers. Invariably, critics and scholars say "the military" when they mean "the officer corps", and they say "the officer corps" when they mean senior leaders at the very top of the military hierarchy.[3] Differentiation by service and by specialty is highly meaningful as well. The reduction of so many highly complex relationships and outlooks to simplistic labels misses much. This consistent lack of specificity plagues the field of civil-military relations.

Clarifying the vocabulary of civil-military relations sheds an interesting light on the current, highly charged debate. The dominant critique takes several forms, charging that the military has become increasingly estranged from the society it serves[4]; that it has abandoned political neutrality for partisan politics[5];

[3] Career military officers can be described in terms of professionalism, corporateness and unique and specialized expertise. The enlisted force and junior officers cannot. While profoundly important to the function of the military instrument, in outlook and scope of responsibility they do not meet the generally accepted criteria most often used to describe professional status.
[4] Kohn, ""The Erosion of Civilian Control", 10.
[5] See Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society? Some Evidence, 1976-1996", John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Project on U.S. Post Cold-War Civil-Military Relations, Working Paper No. 13, Harvard University, October 1997.

and that it plays an increasingly dominant and illegitimate role in policymaking.[6] This view contrasts the ideal of the non-partisan, apolitical soldier with a different reality. In this construct, the military operates freely in a charged political environment to "impose its own perspective" in defiance of the principle of civilian control.[7] The critique is frequently alarmist, employing terms like "ominous"[8] , "alienated"[9] and "out of control."[10] The debate is strikingly one-sided; few civilians or military leaders have publicly challenged the fundamental assumptions of the critics.[11] Yet as we shall see, the dominant view is badly flawed in its particulars, expressing a distorted view of the military at work in a complex political system that distributes power widely.

The Civil-Military Gap

The common assertion that a "gap" exists which divides the military and society in an unhealthy way is a central theme. Unquestionably, the military as an institution embraces and imposes a set of values that more narrowly restrict individual behavior. But the evidence is strong that the public understands the necessity for more circumscribed personal rights and liberties in the military, and accepts the rationale for an organizationally conservative outlook that

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[6] See Tom Ricks, "The Widening Gap Between Military and Society, The Atlantic Monthly, July 1997.
[7] Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today", 1.
[8] See Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 1.
[9] Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control", 1.
[10] Kohn, "Out of Control", 3.
[11] Author and scholar John Hillen is the most prominent critic of the prevailing academic view of civil-military relations, while Don M. Snyder charts a somewhat more moderate course; there are few others with dissenting views. See John Hillen, "The Military Ethos", The World and I, July 1997; "The Military Ethos: Keep It, Defend It, Manage It", Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute, October 1998; "The Military Culture Wars", The Weekly Standard, January 12, 1998; "Must U.S. Military Culture Reform?", Orbis, Winter 1999.

emphasizes the group over the individual and organizational success over personal validation.

The tension between the conservative requirements of military life and the more liberal outlook of civil society goes far back before the Revolution to the early days of colonial America's militia experience. Though it has waxed and waned it has remained central to the national conversation about military service.[12] The issue is an important one: the military holds an absolute monopoly on force in society, and how to keep it strong enough to defend the state and subservient enough not to threaten it is the central question in civil-military relations. Most commentators assume that this difference in outlook poses a significant problem – that at best it is a condition to be managed, and at worst a positive danger to the state. As a nation, however, America has historically accepted the necessity for a military more highly ordered and disciplined than civil society.

While important cultural differences exist between services and even communities within services,[13] the military in general remains focused on a functional imperative that prizes success in war above all else. Though sometimes degraded during times of lessened threat, this imperative has remained constant at least since the end of the Civil War and the rise of modern military professionalism. It implies a set of behaviors and values markedly

[12] The most famous and influential exponent of the military conservative vs. social liberal dichotomy remains Samuel Huntington. See The Soldier and the State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1957.
[13] Don M. Snider, "The Future of American Military Culture: An Uninformed Debate on Military Culture", Orbis, Winter, 1999, 19.

different from civil society, particularly in an all-volunteer force less influenced by large numbers of temporary conscripts.

Though the primary function of the military is often described as "the application of organized violence", the military's conservative and group-centered bias is based on something even more fundamental. In the combat forces which dominate the services, in ethos if not in numbers, the first-order challenge is not to achieve victory on the battlefield. Rather it is to make the combat soldier face his own mortality. Under combat conditions the existence of risk cannot be separated from the execution of task. The military culture, while broadly conforming to constitutional notions of individual rights and liberties, therefore derives from the functional imperative and by definition values collective over individual good.

The American public intuitively understands this, as evidenced by polling data which demonstrates conclusively that a conservative military ethic has not alienated the military from society.[14] On the contrary, public confidence in the military remains consistently high, more than a quarter century after the end of the draft and the drawdown of the 1990's, both of which lessened the incidence and frequency of civilian participation in military affairs. There is even reason to believe that the principal factors cited most often to explain the existence of the "gap" – namely the supposed isolation of military from civilian communities and the gulf between civilian and military values – have been greatly exaggerated.

[14] See Paul Gronke and Peter D. Feaver, "Uncertain Confidence: Civilian and Military Attitudes About Civil-Military Relations", Paper Prepared for the Triangle Institute for Security Studies "Project on the Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society", 1.

The military "presence" in civil society is not confined to serving members of the active duty military. Rather it encompasses all who serve or have served, active and reserve. For example, millions of veterans with first-hand knowledge of the military and its value system exist within the population at large. The high incidence of married service members and an increasing trend towards off-base housing means that hundreds of thousands of military people and their dependents live in the civilian community. Reserve component installations and facilities and the reserve soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines that man them bring the military face to face with society every day in thousands of local communities across the country. Military officers, and increasingly NCO's, regularly participate in civilian educational programs, and officer training programs staffed by active, reserve and retired military personnel are found on thousands of college and high school campuses. Military recruiting offices are found in every sizable city and town. Many military members even hold second jobs in the private sector. At least among middle class and working class Americans, the military is widely represented and a part of everyday life.[15]

Just as the military's isolation from society is often overstated, differences in social attitudes, while clearly present, do not place the military outside the mainstream of American life. The dangers posed by a "values gap" are highly questionable given the wide disparity in political perspectives found between the east and west coasts and the American "heartland"; between urban, suburban

[15] "Overall, the military remains a formidable material presence in American society … there is no reason based on this analysis to say the military is a peripheral or alienated institution." James Burke, "The Military Presence in American Society, 1950-2000", in Feaver and Kohn, Soldiers and Civilians, 261.

and rural populations; between north and south; between different religious and ethnic communities; and between social and economic classes. It may well be true that civil society is more forgiving than the military for personal failings like personal dishonesty, adultery, indebtedness, assault or substance abuse. But society as a whole does not condone these behaviors or adopt a neutral view.

To the extent that there are differences, they are differences of degree. On fundamental questions about the rule of law, on the equality of persons, on individual rights and liberties, and on civilian control of the military in our constitutional system there are no sharp disagreements with the larger society. Indeed there is general agreement about what constitutes right and wrong behavior.[16] The difference lies chiefly in how these ideals of "right behavior" are enforced. Driven by the functional imperative of battlefield success, the military as an institution views violations of publicly accepted standards of behavior more seriously because they threaten the unity, cohesion or survival of the group.[17] Seen in this light, the values "gap" assumes a very different character.

To be sure, epochal events have altered the civil-military compact. The advent of the all-volunteer force, the defeat in Vietnam, the end of the Cold War, the drawdown of the 1990's, the impact of gender and sexual orientation policies and a host of other factors have influenced civil-military relations in important ways. The polity no longer sees military service as a requirement of citizenship

[16] See Captain Peter Kilner, USA, "The Alleged Civil-Military Values Gap: Ideals vs. Standards", Paper Presented to the Joint Service Conference on Professional Ethics", Washington, D.C., January 25-26, 2001.,

[17] The consequences of adultery, substance abuse, failure to pay just debts, assault, lying and so on are readily apparent when seen from the perspective of small combat units, composed principally of well-armed, aggressive young men placed in situations of extreme stress.

during periods of national crisis, or a large standing military as a wartime anomaly. Despite such fundamental changes, over time public support for the military and its values has remained surprisingly enduring, even as the level of public participation in military affairs has declined.

The "Politicization" of the Military

Of equal or perhaps greater import is the charge that the military has abandoned its tradition of nonpartisan service to the state in favor of partisan politics. Based on apparently credible evidence that the military has embraced conservatism as a political philosophy and affiliated with the Republican Party, this view implies a renunciation of the classical, archetypal soldier who neither voted nor cared about partisan politics. Nevertheless, as with the "values gap", the charge that the U.S. military has become dangerously politicized does not stand up to closer scrutiny. The tradition of non-partisanship is alive and well in America's military.

One can plausibly speculate on trends which suggest greater Republican affiliation over the past generation or so. Seven of the last ten presidential administrations have been Republican. For those with a propensity to enter the military and even more for those who choose to stay, the Republican Party is generally seen as more supportive of military pay, quality of life, and a strong defense. Since the late 1970's, the percentage of young Americans identifying themselves as Republicans rose significantly across the board

Still, from 1976-1999, the number of high school seniors expecting to enter the military and self-identifying as Republicans never exceeded 40% and

actually declined significantly from 1991 to 1999. Despite the end of the draft and the more-market-inspired and occupational flavor of military service under the All Volunteer concept, new recruits "are predominantly not Republican and are less Republican than their peers who go to college."[18] Increasingly it seems clear that the young enlisted service members who make up a large proportion of the force cannot be characterized as predominantly conservative or Republican.

The figures for senior military officers are quite different; about two thirds self-identify as "Republican". To some extent this reflects the attitudes of the socio-economic cohort they are drawn from, generally defined as non-minority, college educated, belonging to mainstream Christian denominations, and above average in income. On the other hand, military elites overwhelmingly shun the "far-right" or "extremely conservative" labels, are far less supportive of fundamentalist religious views and are significantly more liberal than mainstream society as a whole on social issues.[19] It is far more accurate to say that senior military leaders occupy the political center than to portray them as creatures of the right.

If the conservative orientation of the military is less clear-cut than commonly supposed, its actual impact on American electoral politics is highly doubtful. As we have seen, the attitudes and orientation of the enlisted force vary considerably. The commissioned officer corps, compromising perhaps 10% of the force (roughly 120,000 active duty members) and only a tiny fraction of the

[18] David R. Segal, Peter Freedman-Doan, Jerald G. Bachman, and Patrick M. O'Malley, "Attitudes of Entry-Level Enlisted Personnel: Pro-Military and Politically Mainstreamed", in Feaver and Kohn,Soldiers and Civilians, 175-194.
[19] James A. Davis, "Attitudes and Opinions Among Senior Military Officers", in Feaver and Kohn, Soldiers and Civilians, 109.

electorate, is not in any sense politically active. It does not proselytize among its subordinates, organize politically, contribute financially to campaigns to any significant degree or, apparently, vote in large numbers. There is no real evidence that the military has become increasingly partisan in an electoral sense, or that it plays an important role in election outcomes. As Lance Betros has argued

> The fundamental weakness of this argument is that it ascribes to military voters a level of partisanship that is uncharacteristic of the voting public. The vast majority of people who cast votes for Democrats or Republicans are not partisans, in the sense of actively advancing the party's interests. Instead, they comprise the "party in the electorate", a much looser affiliation than the party organization … these voters do not have more than a casual involvement in the party's organizational affairs and rarely interact with political leaders and activist. They are, in effect, the consumers, not the purveyors, of the party's partisan appeals and policies.[20]

A common criticism is that a growing tendency by retired military elites to publicly campaign for specific candidates signals an alarming move away from the tradition of non-partisanship. But aside from the fact that this "trend" can be observed in favor of both parties[21], not just the Republicans, evidence that documents the practical effect of these endorsements is lacking. Except in wartime, most voters cannot even identify the nation's past or present military leaders. They are unlikely to be swayed by their endorsements. Nor is there any evidence that the political actions of retired generals and admirals unduly influence the electoral or policy preferences of the active duty military. We are in

[20] Colonel Lance Betros, USA, "Political Partisanship and the Professional Military Ethic", Paper Submitted to the National War College, May 4, 2000, 23.
[21] Former CJCS ADM William Crowe led 22 other retired general and flag officers in endorsing Governor Clinton during the 1992 presidential election and was rewarded with appointment to the Court of St. Kames as U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain.

fact a far cry from the days when senior military leaders actually contended for the presidency while on active duty – a far mores serious breach of civilian control.

The Military Role in the Policy Process

More current is the suggestion that party affiliation lends itself to military resistance to civilian control in policy matters, especially during periods of Democratic control. The strongest criticism in this vein is directed at General Colin Powell as a personality and gays in the military as a policy issue, with any number of prominent scholars drawing overarching inferences about civil-military relations from this specific event.[22] This tendency to draw broad conclusions from a specific case is prevalent in the field but highly questionable as a matter of scholarship. The record of military deference to civilian control, particularly in the recent past, in fact supports a quite different conclusion.

Time and again in the past decade, military policy preferences on troop deployments, the proliferation of non-traditional missions, the drawdown, gender issues, budgeting for modernization, base closure and realignment, and a host of other important issues were overruled or watered down. Some critics, most notably Andrew Bacevich, argue that President Clinton did not control the military so much as he placated it.

> "The dirty little secret of American civil-military relations, by no means unique to this administration, is that the commander-in-chief does not command the military establishment; he cajoles it, negotiates with it, and, as necessary, appeases it."[23]

[22] See Anrdew Bacevich, "Tradition Abandoned: America's Military in a New Era", The National Interest, Summer 1997, 16-25.
[23] Bacevich, "Discord Still: Clinton and the Military", The Washington Post, January 3, 1999, C1.

This conclusion fails to square with the facts. Under President Clinton, military force structure was cut well below the levels recommended in General Powell's Base Force recommendations. U.S. troops remained in Bosnia far beyond the limits initially set by the president. Funding for modernization was consistently deferred to pay for contingency operations, many of which were opposed by the Joint Chiefs. In these and many other instances the civilian leadership enforced its decisions firmly on its military subordinates. In virtually every issue, the military chiefs made their case with conviction, but acquiesced loyally and worked hard to implement the decisions of the political leadership.

As many scholars point out, the election of William Jefferson Clinton in 1992 posed perhaps the most severe test of civil-military relations since the Johnson-McNamara era. Avowedly anti-military in his youth, Clinton came to office with a background and political makeup that invited confrontation with the military. His determination to open the military to gays, announced during the campaign and reiterated during the transition, provoked widespread concerns among senior military leaders. Eminent historians Russell Weigley and Richard Kohn have severely criticized the military's role in this controversy, and in particular General Powell's actions. Weigley cites the episode as "a serious breach of the constitutional principle of civilian control" justifying a "grave accusation of improper conduct". Kohn characterizes it hyperbolically as "the most open manifestation of defiance and resistance by the American military

since the publication of the Newburgh address … nothing like this had ever occurred in American history.[24]

All this is poor history and even poorer political science. The presidential candidacies of Taylor, Scott, McClellan, Grant, Hancock, Wood and MacArthur while on active duty suggest far more serious challenges to civilian control. The B36 controversy (the "Revolt of the Admirals") in 1948 and the overt insubordination leading to the relief of MacArthur in 1952 represented direct challenges to the political survival of Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson in the first case and President Truman himself in the second. The "gays in the military" dispute was very different and much less significant in overarching national security import. A more balanced critique suggests that the controversy hardly deserves the claims made in its behalf.

Clinton's proposal was simple and direct: to eliminate all barriers and restrictions to gays serving openly in the military. If implemented, this policy would have moved far ahead of public opinion at the time and would have engendered widespread consternation in the armed forces, already embarked on the massive force reductions which followed the Gulf War. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Powell accurately gauged the likely reactions of the Congress and the Chiefs to the proposal. Prior to President Clinton taking office, and with the approval of the Bush administration, Powell expressed his

[24] See Russell Weigley, "The American Civil-Military Cultural Gap: A Historical Perspective, Colonial Times to the Present" in Feaver and Kohn, Soldiers and Civilians, 243; and Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control", 2.

opposition to the proposed policy in a number of venues.[25] During the transition, he frankly expressed his opinion and that of the Chiefs to the President-elect and the Secretary of Defense-designate, Les Aspin, offering to step down early due to his strong ties to previous Republican administrations.[26]

Though a career soldier, Powell was uniquely qualified to assess and comprehend the intertwined political and military dimensions that so largely define the Chairman's environment. As a former National Security Adviser with many years in high level politico-military assignments, Powell saw clearly that issuing an Executive Order mandating an immediate end to the ban was an approaching train wreck, for the military, for the administration and for Clinton personally. Even before the inauguration, he proposed a compromise that offered political cover and breathing space to the new administration, reassurance to the Chiefs, and maneuver room to a Congress ill-disposed to accept an outright lifting of the ban. This compromise evolved into the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy which remains in effect today.

Powell's actions, though originating in a serious analysis of the probable impact of lifting the ban on military readiness, nevertheless solved a major political problem for the new administration. Powell did not "force" the new administration to accept the military's view of the issue; left to themselves, the Chiefs would have much preferred the status quo. Instead, Powell suggested a middle course that solved many of the Chief's readiness concerns, deflected

[25] Don M. Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew, "The Current State of Civil-Military Relations: An Introduction" in U.S. Civil-Military Relations : In Crisis or Transition? (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies), 1.
[26] Colin Powell, My American Journey (New York: Random House, 1995), 563-564.

congressional opposition and allowed the incoming administration to substantially implement a major campaign pledge. The alternative was an almost certain political defeat at the hands of Congress that would have seriously undermined an inexperienced and untested national security team.

The Apolitical Soldier Revisited

The characterization of Powell as a "politician in uniform" is often contrasted with the ideal of the non-partisan soldier modeled by Huntington. This rigidly apolitical model, typified by figures like Grant, Sherman, Pershing and Marshall, colors much of the current debate. The history of civil-military relations in America, however, paints a different picture. Since the Revolution, military figures have played prominent political roles right up to the present day. The ban on partisanship in electoral politics, while real, is a relatively modern phenomenon. But the absence of the military from the politics of policy is, and always has been, largely a myth.

The roster of former general officers who later became president shows a strong intersection between politics and military affairs. The list includes Washington (probably as professional a soldier as it was possible to be in colonial America), Jackson, Harrison, Taylor, Grant, Hays, Garfield, and Eisenhower. (Many others had varying degrees of military service, some highly significant). [27] The list of prominent but unsuccessful presidential aspirants who

[27] Harrison commanded an infantry regiment in the Civil War while McKinley served as a major; Arthur served briefly as a state quartermaster general during the Civil War, Theodore Roosevelt won fame with the Rough Riders in Cuba; Truman commanded an artillery battery in the First World War; JFK won the Navy Cross as a PT boat skipper in WWII; Johnson, Nixon and Ford served as naval officers in WWII; Carter was a submarine officer for 8 years; Reagan served as a public relations captain in WWII; George H.W. Bush was the youngest pilot in the Navy when he was shot down in the Pacific in WWII; and George W. Bush was an Air Guard fighter pilot.

were also military leaders includes Scott, Fremont, McClellan, Hancock, Leonard Wood, Dewey and MacArthur. Even in the modern era, many senior military leaders have served in high political office, while many others tried unsuccessfully to enter the political arena.[28]

Upon closer examination, even some of the paladins of the apolitical ideal benefited greatly from political patronage at the highest levels. Future two-term President Ulysses S. Grant resigned his commission in disgrace before the Civil War and owed his general's commission entirely to Congressman Elihu Washburne of Illinois.[29] William T. Sherman was relieved of command early in the war and sent home; the remonstrations of his brother, Senator John Sherman, both then and later were crucial to his subsequent success. John J. Pershing's marriage in 1905 to the daughter of Senator Francis E. Warren of Wyoming, the Chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, and the personal sponsorship of President Theodore Roosevelt was followed by his promotion from Captain to Brigadier General, ahead of more than 800 officers on the Army List.

In attempting to reconcile an obvious history of military involvement in American political life to the apolitical ideal, historians have often differentiated

[28] A partial list of senior officers who unsuccessfully sought high political office includes GEN Curtis LeMay and VADM James Stockdale, failed VP candidates; GEN William Westmoreland and BG Pete Dawkins lost Senate bids. Others were more successful: former Army Chief of Staff George Marshall served as both Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense; LTG Bedell Smith was the first Director of Central Intelligence; former CJCS GEN Maxwell Taylor became Ambassador to South Vietnam; ADM Stansfield Turner served as DCI under President Carter; former CJCS ADM William Crowe was appointed Ambassador to Great Britain; former CINCPAC ADM Thomas Prueher became Ambassador to China; former CNO ADM James Watkins became Secretary of Energy; and former CJCS GEN Colin Powell is the current Secretary of State.

[29] There were at this time only 30 brigadiers in the entire federal service. Bruce Catton, Grant Moves South (Boston: Little Brown, 1960, 16-17).

between “professional” and “non-professional” soldiers. The non-professionals, so the argument runs, can be excused for their political activity on the grounds that they were at best part-timers whose partisan political behavior did not threaten the professional ethic. Yet many commanded large bodies of troops and simultaneously embodied real political strength and power.[30] This line of reasoning is suspect for a number of reasons, not least because, for much of American history, the military was not recognizably professional.

Prior to the Civil War American military professionalism as we understand it today did not even exist.[31] The regular officer corps was so small, so poorly educated and so rife with partisan politics that in time of war it was often led, not by long service professionals, but by essentially political figures like Andrew Jackson. Even those few career soldiers who rose to the top in wartime, such as Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, not infrequently became politicians who contended for the presidency itself – Taylor successfully, and Scott notably not.

America fought the War of 1812, the Mexican War and the Civil War using the traditional model of a small professional army and a large volunteer force, mostly officered by militia officers or social and political elites with little or no military training – including many politicians (War Department policy kept Regular officers in junior grades with Regular units; few escaped to rise to high

[30] In 1864 Generals Fremont, Butler and McClellan all posed active political threats to Lincoln’s reelection. George McClellan still commanded enormous popularity in the Army of the Potomac and was favored to win the presidential election; had Sherman not taken Atlanta, even Lincoln believed that McClellan would likely win and would take the North out of the war. McClellan owed his political position entirely to his status as a senior military officer. See Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln: The War Years, Vol. III (New York: Harcourt, Brace and world, 1939), 219, 222.

[31] Russell Weigley “American Military and The Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell”, The Journal of Military History, Volume 57, Number 5, October 1993, 37.

command).[32] By war's end, politicians in uniform like Butler, McClernand and Sickles and politically ambitious generals like McClellan and Fremont had given way to more professionally oriented commanders. In the post-war period the notion of the talented amateur on the battlefield faded while the memory of the "political" generals, often acting in league with the congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War to further their own personal interests, continued to rankle. Until the turn of the century the army would be run by professional veterans of the Civil War, particularly General Sheridan as Commanding General, and they would attempt to impose a stern ethic of political neutrality.[33]

That this ethic heavily influenced the professional officer corps cannot be doubted – and yet the tradition of career military figures seeking political office continued. Nor did the ethic renounce active participation in the politics of military policy. Even at a time when the military-industrial complex was far less important than today, when the military share of the budget was tiny and the political spoils emanating from the military inconsequential, the military services struggled mightily with and against both the executive and legislative branches in pursuit of their policy goals.

A vivid example is the bitter struggle between Army Chief of Staff Leonard Wood and Secretary of War Henry Stimson against the Army Adjutant General, Fred C. Ainsworth, prior to the First World War. For generations the Army had

[32] Because the northern armies consisted largely of federalized state volunteer units whose state governors were vital to the war effort, and because of the need to dispense patronage to ensure his continued political viability, Lincoln freely, and perhaps unavoidably for the time, commissioned political figures as general officers. A few, notably John Logan, became successful battlefield commanders. Most, however, proved notably unsuccessful and were removed or reassigned to other duties.
[33] Huntington, 281.

been organized into line and staff, with no professional head empowered to coordinate both. Building upon the reforms of Elihu Root, Stimson and Wood sought to extend the powers of the Chief of Staff and the Secretary over the administrative bureaus. Though subordinate to Wood by law, Ainsworth operated largely autonomously, championing the staff bureaus' independence and direct links with congressional oversight bodies.

The conflict was fought out on an explicitly political battlefield. Wood served somewhat precariously as the Army's professional head, having begun as a medical corps officer and catapulting to the top through the direct influence of Republican politicians and especially Theodore Roosevelt.[34] If Wood was clearly a political soldier with overt party affiliations and aspirations, Ainsworth enjoyed very strong congressional support from congressional Democrats, particularly Congressman James Hay, the Chairman of the House Military Committee, and he used them fully. The partisan political dimensions of the struggle therefore dominated its purely policy aspects to a striking degree.[35]

Ainsworth resisted stoutly for three years, even suggesting legislation (which Hays subsequently introduced) to make him Wood's military senior. The issue ultimately went to President Taft, who approved Ainsworth's relief for insubordination. Even in retirement, Ainsworth continued to work as a consultant for Hays to restore the traditional autonomy of his former office. Wood, for his

[34] Wood first rose to prominence as military surgeon to President Cleveland, who promoted him from Captain in the Medical Corps to Brigadier General in the Regular Army and command of the 1st Volunteer Cavalry (the Rough Riders) in the Spanish American War. Through the influence of President Roosevelt, who had served as his second-in-command in Cuba, Wood rose rapidly to become Army Chief of Staff. His obviously political rise hampered his ability to lead the Army and the officer corps. Huntington, 279.

[35] Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967), 350.

part, ended his tour as Chief of Staff in 1914 but remained on active duty while publicly criticizing Wilson's administration in concert with leading Republicans of the day.[36]

Naval mavericks led by Admiral Bradley Fiske played a similar game in 1915 by going around the Secretary of the Navy to Congress in hopes of installing a Chief of Naval Operations able to function as a professional fighting head of the Navy. Though opposed by the President and Secretary, legislation was duly introduced that created the Office of the CNO, draining much of the power over the Navy from the Secretary. History subsequently passed a favorable judgment on the reorganization of the Department of the Navy. The tactics employed by Fiske and his supporters, however, fell well short of the apolitical ideal.

As Huntington points out, Fiske's openly political behavior was matched by Alfred Thayer Mahan, a serving naval officer and theorist who wielded enormous influence at home and abroad in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Going far beyond the narrow bounds of conventional professionalism, Mahan outspokenly called for imperial expansion through naval power for explicitly non-military reasons.[37] The greatest naval thinker of his day, Mahan expressly called for political consciousness within the officer corps, a view that contrasted sharply with a hardening professional tone that condemned political behavior in a military man.

[36] Weigley, History of the United States Army, 342.
[37] Cited in Huntington, 274.

The inter-war period saw no great civil-military struggles; peace and retrenchment were the order of the day and the Great Depression stifled any arguments the military might make about the rising threat from Germany or Japan. After Pearl Harbor, political and military leaders were united in the desire to crush the Axis powers. Admiral King, General Arnold and General Marshall were granted wide latitude in running the war and almost unlimited budgets. But the end of the war and the onset of the Cold War brought a return to civil-military conflict.[38]

When Huntington wrote in the 1950's, the political landscape was still littered with WWIII military figures of towering, even excessive prestige. Eisenhower was president, George Marshall had recently served as both Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, and Bedell Smith had headed the new CIA. Besides an influx of military leaders into the upper reaches of government,[39] the post-war period also saw a series of perhaps the most intense political battles ever to involve the U.S. military. The 1947 National Security Act, the Key West accords which codified service roles and missions, and turf battles over employment of nuclear weapons were followed by the Truman-MacArthur imbroglio and intense confrontation between President Eisenhower and Army Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgway (and later Maxwell Taylor) over the doctrine of

[38] Many scholars cite WWII as the point at which the tradition of the soldier divorced from the political process changed for good. See John H. Garrison, "Military Officers and Politics", in American Defense Policy (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 5th Edition, 1982), 761.

[39] In the Truman administration, "ten military officers served as principal departmental officers and ambassadors." Morris Janowitz, The Professional; Soldier (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 379.

massive retaliation.[40] In each case, the military services reached out to congressional allies as well as influential personalities in the executive branch in pursuit of service goals. Policy battles were accompanied by intense political maneuvering and in-fighting, including leaks to the media. in WWII, perhaps best typified by Air Force General Curtis LeMay and Army generals Matthew Ridgway and Maxwell Taylor. But under Johnson and his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, these leaders were replaced with largely unknown figures who lacked public reputations and who were thought to be more amenable to civilian control.[41] In later years, officers with distinguished combat records from WWII, Korea or Vietnam were at times named to high military posts, but none enjoyed the publicity and name recognition of their predecessors of the 1940's and 1950's.[42] Few were noted for their willingness to publicly engage their civilian masters in policy disputes.

Yet even with the passing of the 'heroic" generation of WWII combat leaders, the military services and service leaders continued to participate

[40] Ridgway retired after two years instead of the customary four after publicly criticizing the "New Look" doctrine of massive retaliation and working strenuously against it both privately and publicly. See Andrew J. Bacevich and Lawrence F. Kaplan, "Generals vs the President: Eisenhower and the Army, 1953-1955", case study prepared for the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 1997, 10.

[41] Army Generals George Decker, Army Chief of Staff, and Earle Wheeler, CJCS, modeled this trend. Both had undistinguished records as staff officers in WWII but rose to high rank in the 1960s on the strength of their bureaucratic skills.

[42] Interestingly, no Army or Navy officer selected as Chief of Staff or CJCS since the mid-80's was highly decorated for valor in combat, though all had served in Vietnam and some had been wounded. The pool of senior general and flag officers awarded the Silver Star, Distinguished Service Cross and even the Medal of Honor and eligible for consideration for these posts was significant; numbers remain on active duty even today. It is no reflection on outstanding and honorable officers to speculate that exceptional combat credentials did not figure highly in the selection process for the most senior posts, presumably because such credentials would enhance the standing and professional independence of the officers bearing them. In the post-Vietnam era this has apparently not been viewed as an asset by civilian defense elites.

aggressively in the give and take of the policy process. The efforts of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General David Jones to bring about meaningful reform of the JCS is only one outstanding example. Determined to change the system by which the JCS could offer only watered down, lowest common denominator advice, but lacking the support of President Reagan and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Jones went directly to the Congress in search of allies to advance his goal. His efforts were spectacularly rewarded with the eventual passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1987, which fundamentally altered the role of the Chairman and the Joint Chiefs.[43]

These and many other examples illuminate the true nature of civil-military relations in America today, demonstrating clearly that the separation of the military from the political process is, and always has been, highly problematic. As we have seen, the evolution of the professional ideal, while substantially accurate as a description of officer attitudes following the Civil War, was not accompanied by military isolation from political activity or from society itself.[44] Even as serving officers modeled a pure form of apolitical disinterestedness in partisan politics, senior officers often nursed political ambitions. In cases too numerous to count, the military services used the linkages of congressional oversight to advance their interests and preserve their equities against perceived executive encroachment. Over time, a strong prohibition on military involvement in electoral politics evolved which remains powerfully in effect today. But the

[43] James R. Locher III, Victory on the Potomac (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 2002), 57.
[44] Edward M. Coffman, "The Long Shadow of the Soldier and the State", The Journal of Military History, Vol 55, No. 1, January 1991, 81.

realities of separated powers, as well as the powerful linkages between defense industries, congressional members and staff, and the military services do not – and never have -- allowed the military to stand aloof from the bureaucratic and organizational pulling and hauling that define the political process.

If the American political system invites, if not compels, uniformed participation in the policy process, how to account for the very strained relations which characterize civilian and military defense elites today? The differences between the two groups are striking, even profound. The roots of elite friction and tension in civil-military relations exist fundamentally in the social and economic circumstances which define these two groups

Profiling Defense Elites

Senior military leaders – the top generals and admirals of the armed forces --are a homogeneous group. Each service possesses senior leaders from a multitude of support specialties, but the key leaders who direct large combat formations and occupy critical operational billets come from service warfighting specialties.[45] Service chiefs, their vice-chiefs and operations deputies, combatant commanders, and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs are drawn from their ranks.

The typical military officer at this level is in his early or mid-fifties and averaged more than three decades of military service. Virtually all are graduates of service staff colleges and war colleges (each an academic year in length) and possess one or more civilian graduate degrees (though only rarely from top-

[45] In the Army and Marine Corps, these are the infantry, armor, artillery and aviation communities; in the Navy, the submarine, surface warfare and aviation specialties; in the Air Force, those officers who pilot fighter and bomber aircraft.

ranked civilian academic institutions). Many are not service academy graduates, especially in the Army, and racial and ethnic minorities are represented at the highest levels. Springing exclusively from middle class or working class origins, few if any senior military leaders earned undergraduate or graduate degrees from Ivy League or comparable schools.

As a consequence of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation, military elites attain significant experience in joint assignments both as mid-grade officers and after promotion to flag rank. In addition to successful command and staff experiences in many operational assignments, these officers overwhelmingly possess combat experience and a strong "inside the beltway" background. All are practiced in managing and leading large organizations.

With thirty or more years of service, including wide exposure to overseas environments and combined operations, today's senior military officers are broadly experienced. As a group they have been deeply influenced by the Vietnam and Gulf War experiences, either as direct participants or through prolonged and close association with peers and superiors who were. Broadly speaking, these strategic inflection points serve as examples of "how to lose" – the traumatic Vietnam experience, long, drawn-out, indecisive, marked by half-measures and vague objectives – and "how to win" – the victory in Desert Storm, quick, decisive, fought with clear political guidance using overwhelming force. In this sense, the Gulf War did not dispel the "ghost of Vietnam." Rather it provided a sharp and defining contrast between military success and military failure. In the case of Vietnam, involvement by civilians in the details of military operations

and unwillingness to accept military advice from military leaders contributed to defeat – at least in the opinion of many military leaders.[46] In contrast, the Gulf War is seen as an example of the "right" way to manage civil-military relations in wartime; civilian leaders are perceived as having been receptive to military advice and trusting of field commanders to execute broad guidance.

Except for the fact that both serve in the national security arena, the contrast between civilian and military defense elites is striking. Most civilian defense elites come from legal, business or academic backgrounds. They may serve in elected or appointed positions in the defense establishment, as senior staff on Capitol Hill, or as influential opinion leaders working in think tanks, writing for major news organizations or teaching in prestigious universities. A very strong common factor is a pattern of attendance at a handful of the best graduate schools.[47] Much more commonly than with the military, civilian elites are drawn from the upper socio-economic classes, either from birth or through subsequent attendance at elite civilian institutions. Unlike their uniformed counterparts, and in keeping with the modern traditions of the upper classes in America, they do not as a rule send their sons and daughters into the military.[48] In many cases their service in significant defense positions is episodic and transient, a function of political cycles, bureaucratic frustration and unattractive compensation.[49]

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[46] See H.R. McMaster, Dereliction of Duty (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), 385.
[47] Graduate level programs in political science, foreign affairs, history, national security studies and law from a small number of prestigious universities are overly represented in the ranks of modern U.S. defense elites. Leading schools include Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Georgetown, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts and Johns Hopkins.
[48] David M. Halbfinger and Steven A. Holmes, "Military Mirrors Working-Class America", New York Times, March 30, 2003.
[49] See Eliot A. Cohen, "A Tale of Two Secretaries", Foreign Affairs, Volume 81, Issue 3, May/June 2002, 33-46.

Few civilian elites working in the defense arena possess experience in uniform. By definition, most are politically and intensely partisan. Many are significantly younger than their military counterparts. Academics, with few exceptions[50], are armed with history or political science degrees and are generally observers lacking significant direct expertise in national security matters.[51] Very senior defense elites often come from business backgrounds [52] or from the Congress.[53]

Military elites are thus strategically and operationally practiced; organizationally grounded; combat experienced; politically non-partisan; broadly exposed to joint and combined environments; and long tenured. Civilian defense elites possess more prestigious academic credentials; more often derive from upper middle class and upper class backgrounds; have higher incomes; have limited military experience; have stronger budget, policy and partisan backgrounds; and possess more limited tenure in positions with direct influence on defense or national security issues.

Elite Perceptions

Coming from such diverse backgrounds, both groups see the world of national security through very different filters. Military elites view respectful dissent, prior to final decision, as normal, healthy and even essential to effective policy. Civilian elites often see dissent as disloyalty. Military elites assert unique

[50] The most notable being Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who has served extensively in Republican administrations.
[51] Professor Eliot Cohen may be taken as representative of this type.
[52] Secretaries of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Frank Carlucci, William Perry and Donald Rumsfeld model this type.
[53] Secretaries of Defense Les Aspin and William Cohen are recent examples.

expertise in the fields of military strategy (as distinct from national strategy) and military operations. Their civilian counterparts, independent of party affiliation, often disagree, viewing senior officers as risk-averse, anti-intellectual, resistant to change and lacking in innovation and imagination. These, and a host of other cultural, corporate and normative pre-dispositions complicate a relationship that is, and always has been, delicate at best and dysfunctional at worst.

For much of American history the divide between senior civilian and military officials was less wide. Prior to the Civil War, the United States hardly possessed a regular military establishment at all, and senior officers often stepped directly from political, business or part-time militia backgrounds straight onto the battlefield.[54] In an age of crude military technology, simple line and column tactics and small armies, the gifted amateur could still compete with his regular counterparts.

By the end of the Civil War, all that had changed.[55] Increasingly, the professional officer monopolized senior leadership positions in time of war as the size of armies and navies expanded along with their technological sophistication. By the end of WWII the transformation was complete. The end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War mark the beginning of our modern conception of civil-military relations and of an increasingly fractious debate about civilian control.

[54] The Navy was an important exception. Small and highly specialized, the naval service required real sailors and mariners and part-time officers were not generally thought suitable.
[55] Allen R. Millet, "Military Professionalism and Officership in America", (Columbus, Ohio: The Mershon Center of the Ohio State University, 1977), 17.

The transition to an All Volunteer force in the early 70's, the dramatic decline in the quality of the Armed Forces throughout that decade, the opening of the service academies to women in 1977, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, the American intervention in Lebanon in 1984, the hasty decision to go to war with Iraq in 1991, the painful drawdown in the 1990's, the opening of combat vessels and cockpits to women in the mid-90's, the explosive proliferation of non-traditional missions after the Cold War around the globe – these and many other political decisions were implemented against the recommendations of prominent military figures, and often against the collective views of the service chiefs. Far from proving that military elites are "out of control", the record suggests that senior military officers, as often as not, usually play a conservative and often limited role in important political decisions affecting the armed forces. [56]

A closer examination of the demographic and professional traits which characterize military and civilian defense elites suggests a wide divergence in perspectives that can powerfully inhibit effective civil-military cooperation. That as a group civilian elites feel themselves intellectually superior may be unarguable; that military elites feel themselves possessed of specialized and unique expertise in their sphere is as well. A shared experience of the battlefield bonds military chiefs powerfully but distances them from their civilian masters. An unfamiliarity and discomfort with the bureaucratically sharp-elbowed, morally ambiguous infighting of an intensely partisan political process can jar the general or admiral who finds himself suddenly propelled into its daily orbit. Class

[56] Allen Guttmann, The Conservative Tradition in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 116.

differences, on both sides, subtly but powerfully pervade the relationship.[57] Just as importantly, the clash of very different organizational perspectives rooted in different incentives, goals and professional value systems markedly affects civil-military interaction.

The implications of continuing elite conflict in the defense arena are troubling and apparently transcend party lines.[58] Some proposed solutions clearly border on the impractical. Richard Kohn argues in favor of a sort of political "reeducation" program applied to all officers to "rebuild the diversity of the officer corps, particularly with respect to prevailing attitudes and perspectives … with a new sensitivity and a sophistication of understanding so that present trends can be reversed."[59] Eliot Cohen proposes lateral entry of civilians into the military at the field grade and even general officer level "as a way of bringing special talents and fresh perspectives to bear on enduring problems."[60] These and similar suggestions reflect the deep distrust felt by many civilian defense elites towards uniformed leaders.

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[57] Aside from official functions, America's military elites are generally excluded from the private social circle of civilian elites in the nation's capitol – a telling commentary on the class distinctions which divide the two groups. Writing of the military mind, Samuel Huntington concluded "the intelligence, scope and imagination of the professional soldier have been compared unfavorably to the intelligence, scope and imagination of the lawyer, businessman, and politician … military and civilian writers generally agree that the military mind is disciplined, rigid, logical, scientific; it is not flexible, tolerant, intuitive, emotional … emphasis has generally been focused on two sets of attitudes assumed to be characteristically military: bellicosity and authoritarianism". Huntington, 59-60.

[58] Some observers contend that civil-military relations in the current administration are as troubled as they were in the McNamara era. See Vernon Loeb and Thomas E. Ricks "Rumsfeld's Style, Goals Strain Ties in Pentagon Transformation Effort, Spawns Issues of Control", The Washington Post, Wednesday, October 16, 2002, Page A01.

[59] Kohn, "Out of Control", 17.

[60] To a significant degree this already happens with reserve component officers, who bring important civilian perspectives and experiences to bear on the active force (particularly in the post - Cold War era). Eliot Cohen, "Making Do With Less, or Coping With Upton's Ghost", paper presented at the U.S. Army War College Annual Strategy Conference, April 1995, 15.

The Separatist vs. Fusionist Debate

There are essentially two competing views on the subject of the military's proper role. The first holds that the military officer is not equipped by background, training and inclination, to fully participate in defense policymaking. In this view, mastering the profession of arms is so demanding and time consuming, and the military education system so limiting, that an understanding of the policy process is beyond the abilities of the military professional.[61]

> 9… [M]ilitary officers are ill prepared to contribute to high policy. Normal career patterns do not look towards such a role; rather they are – and should be – designed to prepare officers for the competent command of forces in combat or at least for the performance of the highly complex subsidiary tasks such command requires … military officers should not delude themselves about their capacity to master dissimilar and independently difficult disciplines.[62]
>
> Politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional competence, dividing the profession against itself, and substituting extraneous values for professional values.[63]

Aside from the question of competence, this "separatist" critique warns of the tendency towards the militarization of foreign and defense policy should military officers be allowed to fully participate. Critics assert that, given the predisposition towards bellicosity and authoritarianism cited by Huntington and others, too much influence by the military might tend to skew the policy process to favor use of force when other, less direct approaches are called for.[64]

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[61] See Eliot A. Cohen, Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 13.
[62] John F. Reichart and Steven R. Sturm, "The Importance of the Professional and Ethical Issues Facing the Military" in American Defense Policy, 724.
[63] Huntington, 71.
[64] Reichert and Sturm, 723.

An alternative view, the “fusionist” or “soldier-statesman” view, holds that direct participation by military leaders in defense policy is both necessary and inevitable. If the assumption of unique expertise is viable, only the military professional can provide the technical knowledge, informed by insight and experience, needed to support high quality national security decisionmaking. Given the certainty that military input is both needed and demanded by Congress as well as the Executive Branch, military advocacy cannot be avoided in recommending and supporting some policy choices over others. This school holds that long service in this environment, supplemented by professional schooling in the tools and processes of national security, equips senior military leaders to fulfill what is after all an inescapable function.

These two competing perspectives mirror the “realist” and “idealist” theories of politics and reflect the age old division in political science between those who see reality as it “ought” to be and those who see it as it “is”. As we have seen, the historical record is unequivocal. Military participation in partisan politics has been inversely proportional to the growth of military professionalism, declining as the professional ethic has matured. But the role of the military in the politics of policy has endured from the beginning, increasing as the resources, complexity and gravity which attend the field of national security have grown. The fusionist soldier in America has not come into his own. He has always been.

The Nature of Military Involvement in Defense Policymaking

If this is true, to what extent is such participation dangerous? Does active military involvement in defense policymaking actually threaten civilian control?

Clearly there have been instances where the military crossed the line and behaved both unprofessionally and illegitimately with respect to proper subordination to civilian authority; the Revolt of the Admirals and the MacArthur-Truman controversy have already been cited. The increasingly common tactic whereby anonymous senior military officials criticize their civilian counterparts and superiors, even to the point of revealing privileged and even classified information, cannot be justified. And the apparent cultivation of congressional and senior executive branch sponsors and mentors by some serving officers, even if supported by historical precedent, suggests direct political influence in promotions and assignments which is at best unseemly and at worst unethical.

Yet civilian control remains very much alive and well. The many direct and indirect instruments of objective and subjective civilian control of the military suggest that the true issue is not control –defined as the government's ability to enforce its authority over the military --but rather political freedom of action. In virtually every sphere, civilian control over the military apparatus is decisive All senior military officers serve at the pleasure of the president and can be removed, and indeed retired, without cause. Congress must approve all officer promotions and guards this prerogative jealously; even lateral appointments at the three and four star levels must be approved by the president and confirmed by Congress, and no officer at this level may retire in grade without separate approval by both branches of government. Operating budgets, the structure of military organizations, benefits, pay and allowances, and even the minutia of official travel and office furniture are determined by civilians. The reality of

civilian control is confirmed not only by the many instances cited earlier where military recommendations were overruled. Not infrequently, military chiefs have been removed or induced to leave early by direct and indirect exercise of civilian authority.[65]

To be sure, the military as an institution enjoys certain advantages. Large, well trained staffs, extended tenure, bureaucratic expertise, cross-cutting relationships with industry, overt and covert relationships with congressional supporters and stability during lengthy transitions between administrations give it a strong voice. But on the big issues of budget and force structure, social policy, and war and peace, the military's voice is one among many.

If this thesis is correct, the instrumentalities and the efficacy of civilian control are not really at issue. As I have suggested, political freedom of action is the nub of the problem. Conditioned by sharp socio-economic differences, and hampered by constitutionally separated powers which put the military in both the executive and legislative spheres, civilian elites face a dilemma. They can force the military to do their bidding – but they cannot always do so without paying a political price. Because society values the importance of independent, non-politicized military counsel, a civilian who publicly discounts that advice in an area presumed to require military expertise runs significant political risks. The opposition party will surely exploit any daylight between civilian and military leaders, particularly in wartime – hence the discernable trend in the modern era

[65] In the decade of the 1990's one Chief of Naval Operations was retired early following the Tailhook scandal. His successor committed suicide, troubled in part by persistent friction between senior naval officers and civilian defense officials he could not assuage. One Chief of Staff of the Air Force was relieved and another retired early, as was a Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

away from the Curtis LeMays and Arleigh Burkes of yesteryear who brought powerful heroic personas into the civil-military relationship.

It is therefore clear that much of the criticism directed at "political" soldiers is not completely genuine or authentic. Far from wanting politically passive soldiers, political leaders in both the legislative and executive branches consistently seek military affirmation and support for their programs and policies. The proof that truly apolitical soldiers are not really wanted is found in the pressures forced upon military elites to publicly support the policy choices of their civilian masters. A strict adherence to the apolitical model requires civilian superiors to solicit professional military advice when needed, but not to involve the military either in the decision process or in the "marketing" process needed to bring the policy to fruition.

The practice is however altogether different. The military position of the Chairman, the Chiefs and the Combatant Commanders is always helpful in determining policy outcomes. The pressures visited upon military elites to support, or at least not publicly refute, the policy preferences of their civilian masters, especially in the executive branch, can be severe. Annually as part of the budget process, service chiefs are called upon to testify to Congress and give their professional opinions about policy decisions affecting their service. Often they are encouraged to publicly differ with civilian policy and program decisions they are known to privately oppose.[66]

[66] Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki's testimony on the Crusader cancellation in 2002 and post-war occupation policy in Iraq in 2003 are apposite examples. In both cases the OSD reaction was immediate, public and severe. Robert Burns, "Rumsfeld Set to Change Army Leadership", The Associated Press, April 26, 2003.

This quandary, partly a function of the constitutional separation of powers and partly due to party politics, drives the Chairman and the Chiefs to middle ground. Not wanting to publicly expose differences with the administration, yet bound by their confirmation commitments to render unvarnished professional military opinions to Congress, military elites routinely find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. These experiences, the bread and butter of military service at the highest levels, frequently produce exasperation and frustration. The consensus among civilian critics may be that the military dominates the policy process. But the view from the top of the military hierarchy is altogether different.

Conclusion

Increasingly the sense of incompatibility and friction between civilian and military elites has lost its traditional liberal versus conservative tone. The determination to "reassert" civilian control by the current Republican administration exceeds anything seen since the McNamara era. For military officers working at the politico-military interface the problem of civil-military relations exists in its most acute form. There is, after all, no real issue between the polity as a whole and the military as an institution. Across the country the Armed Forces are seen as organizations that work, providing genuine opportunities for minorities, consistent success on the battlefield and in civil support operations here at home, and power and prestige in support of American interests abroad. The military's direct role in the interagency process and in the making of national security policy is not only permissible – it is essential to informed governance and a strong national defense.

The arguments advanced in this paper attempt to show that the dynamic tension which exists in civil-military relations today, while in many cases sub-optimal and unpleasant, is far from dangerous. Deeply rooted in a uniquely American system of separated powers, regulated by strong traditions of subordination to civilian authority, and enforced by a range of direct and indirect enforcement mechanisms, modern civil-military relations remain sound, enduring and stable. The American people need fear no challenge to constitutional norms and institutions from a military which – however aggressive on the battlefield – remains faithful to its oath of service. Not least of the Framer's achievements is the willing subordination of the soldiers of the state.

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