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THESIS

**MANUFACTURING AMATEURISM:
MEDIA DEPICTIONS OF THE U.S. MILITARY AND
THEIR INFLUENCE ON CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

by

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December 2021

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MILITARY AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

A professional military is vital to civil-military relations and a healthy democracy. Moreover, while the military's actions certainly impact its public image as a professional body, public perception is largely fashioned from the military's depiction in the media. Additionally, a free press serves a crucial democratic role. The citizenry must be well-informed and powerful institutions must be held accountable by outside actors. But what is to be done when leading media institutions, meant to provide accountability, exercise their position to advance their own power and profit? Herein lies the problem. This thesis claims that the media narrative covering U.S. armed services impacts civil-military relations by favoring provocative depictions that negatively influence the public's perception of military professionalism. Through analysis of three cases from the year 2020, this research provides evidence that coverage of the military typically conveys five themes: pity, reverence, disgust, incompetence, and partisanship. These themes exist in tension with Samuel Huntington's notion of military professionalism, consisting of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness. Utilizing this model of professionalism and Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model of communication, this study reveals that prominent media publications favor narratives that emphasize lapses in military professionalism, manifesting in warped popular perceptions and the degradation of civil-military relations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	MEDIA MATTERS: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND THE FOURTH ESTATE.....	1
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
B.	METHODOLOGY	7
C.	ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY	8
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW: MEDIA, MILITARY, AND THE CAVE.....	11
A.	SOLDIER, STATE, AND THE ORIGINS OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS	11
B.	PROMINENT MEDIA AND THE FORMULATION OF PUBLIC THOUGHT	16
III.	THE ROLE OF MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM.....	19
A.	HUNTINGTONIAN PROFESSIONALISM AND MEDIA DEPICTION.....	19
B.	MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.....	19
	1. Ambiguous and Essential	19
	2. Civilian Control, Liberal Democracy, and the Suspicions of the Founders.....	21
	3. Military Professionalism as a Check to Tyranny	24
C.	HUMAN PERCEPTION AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION	27
D.	CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS: THE INTERSECTION OF TWO DOMAINS	31
IV.	CRISIS, FAILURE, AND EMBARRASSMENT: COVID-19 ON THE ROOSEVELT.....	33
A.	CASE SUMMARY: BAD NEWS SPREADS VIRALLY	33
B.	EXPERTISE: NAVAL LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE.....	34
C.	RESPONSIBILITY: DISGUST AND PERCEIVED COLDNESS.....	40
D.	CORPORATENESS: PITY, REVERENCE, AND THE MILITARY PROFESSIONAL AS A PARTISAN TOOL.....	44
E.	CONCLUSION	51
V.	DABBLING IN THE RUBICON: CALAMITY AND DISGUST AT LAFAYETTE SQUARE	55

A.	CASE SUMMARY: A POWDER KEG SUMMER WITH GENERALS AT THE CENTER	55
B.	EXPERTISE: MILITARY INCOMPETENCE AS A THREAT TO THE CONSTITUTION	57
C.	RESPONSIBILITY: BRUTALITY, AUTHORITARIANISM, AND THE MILITARY IN AMERICAN CITIES.....	60
D.	CORPORATENESS: “CADET BONE SPURS,” A CHORUS OF RETIRED GENERALS, AND A PUBLIC STRUGGLE AGAINST THE PRESIDENT	67
E.	CONCLUSION.....	75
VI.	ONE MEASUREMENT OF THE MILITARY IS HOW IT TREATS ITS MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS	79
A.	CASE SUMMARY: A GRISLY CRIME WHICH SHOCKED AND EVOKED A NATIONWIDE RESPONSE	79
	Case Chronology:.....	80
B.	EXPERTISE: INCOMPETENCE ENABLES A TRAGEDY	82
C.	RESPONSIBILITY: DISGUST WITH THE MILITARY CULTURE	87
D.	CORPORATENESS: SHOCK, PITY, AND HORROR AT FORT HOOD	91
E.	CONCLUSION	95
VII.	ANALYSIS: CORPORATE MEDIA IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT	99
A.	HOW MAJOR PUBLICATIONS CHARACTERIZE THE MILITARY.....	99
B.	UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE: WE ARE WHAT THE PEOPLE PURCHASE.....	103
VIII.	FUTURE RESEARCH AND THE WAY FORWARD.....	107
A.	FRAMING: EVERY NARRATIVE ALLOWS PASSIONATE DEBATE WITHIN A CONFINED AND ACCEPTABLE WINDOW	108
B.	OMISSION: IF A TREE FELL IN THE WOODS... ..	108
C.	LANGUAGE AS A TOOL: WORDS ARE USED TO EVOKE FEELINGS, NOT TO COMMUNICATE IDEAS.....	109
D.	THE ROLE OF THE PAO: WHAT SHOULD THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND MEDIA LOOK LIKE?.....	110
E.	FOREIGN POLICY, MEDIA, AND THEIR HISTORY.....	110
F.	HOW TO MEASURE POLITICIZATION: HAVE THINGS <i>REALLY</i> GOTTEN WORSE?	112

G.	THE VOCAL FEW IMPACT THE SILENT MAJORITY: WHAT CAN MILITARY MEMBERS DO?.....	112
H.	CLOSING THE GAP: A MILITARY <i>OF THE PEOPLE</i>	114
LIST OF REFERENCES.....		117
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST		129

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

This thesis makes the case that media depictions of the American military overwhelmingly depict unprofessionalism and that these press representations damage civil-military relations. While the armed service is necessarily held responsible and accountable for any misconduct, prominent media publications are financially incentivized to emphasize unprofessional depictions of the armed service. These depictions matter because the public's understanding of the military derives from a combination of language, perception, and reality, where the public's impression of the armed service is largely a by-product of the messaging from leading media publications. In this sense, pre-eminent newspaper companies hold immense power over the armed service with the ability to generate widespread perceptions of the military institution as a whole. Military leadership must, first of all, become more aware of how the media operates on financial incentives to depict an unprofessional military. Secondly, military members at all levels must become more media literate and savvy to how media institutions operate. These behavioral changes will limit service members negatively adding to this media dynamic while mitigating irrational responses to media depictions that do not always reflect reality.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy requires an independent news media capable of holding government and private agencies accountable. It is *not* the role of media companies to appease military leaders by projecting idealistic images of the armed service and its members. However, this research illustrates that media depictions tend to favor unprofessional depictions of the American military. This is not due to any inherent vice or sinister plot on behalf of these publications, but instead because they are self-interested profit-driven companies (just like every other company) who understand that provocative coverage that may consequentially damage popular conceptions of the armed service are in the best interest of their business. The military bears full responsibility for its actions, but prominent media institutions possess the power to mold public perception regardless of the reality on the ground. Civil-

military relations are rarely viewed through the perspective of the media's impact, and military members must become more aware of the significant influence that leading newspapers companies hold over the public perception of the armed forces. The purpose of this research is to examine the media narrative of the American military from the year 2020 using case studies to answer the questions: **What narrative of the U.S. military is presented to the public by prominent newspapers? How do themes of military professionalism come across in this narrative? How does this media depiction impact the armed service's public representation as a professional institution?**

METHODOLOGY

Chapters II and III establish the context for military professionalism's role in civil-military relations and the immense importance within a representative government, such as the United States, to maintain an armed service with a high degree of professionalism. These Chapters will also establish *how* and *why* media depiction possesses a self-actualizing power to mold widespread public belief—leading media depictions of the military to conceive public perception. Chapters IV-VI are case studies providing evidence of how media depictions of the armed service overwhelmingly degrade military professionalism by comparing the media depictions to the standard of military professionalism outlined in Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*. Last, Chapter VII analyzes these negative media depictions of the American military and Chapter VIII provides possible solutions and future research to address the issue.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature analyzing civil-military relations, military professionalism, and media communication does not account for how media messaging impacts public perception of the armed service as a professional institution. Additionally, the research accepts Huntington's conception of military professionalism and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's notion of "manufactured consent" to analyze how the media shapes the public's view of the armed service.

CHAPTER III. THE ROLE OF MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM

At the heart of civil-military relations, military professionalism is especially vital to democracy. Due to this reality, it is invaluable that the American military is professional. However, the title of “professional” requires certain traits that must be earned and vigorously maintained within the organization first, which can impact how the public recognizes them. Multiple academic domains corroborate the notion that media messaging influences public views, and the research accepts the idea that media depictions *do* shape widespread thought.

CHAPTER IV. CASE STUDY: USS ROOSEVELT

This case study from March 2020 frequently portrayed all five of the previously mentioned media themes. Depictions of military incompetence frequently implied that the armed service was incapable of managing the COVID-19 outbreak. Such messaging resulted in a tone of disgust toward the apparent indifference toward the vulnerability of the average sailor. Pitiful and reverential depictions portrayed the sailors as helpless victims and Captain Crozier as a heroic figure watching over the helpless sailors. Partisan characterizations portrayed the sailors as disliking and resisting senior military leadership, civilian leaders, and even the president himself. Thus, this story became largely framed as the sailors “speaking truth to power” against the president.

CHAPTER V. CASE STUDY: LAFAYETTE SQUARE

Coverage of the June 1 incident at Lafayette Square during the civil unrest in the summer of 2020 produced illustrations of military incompetence as a threat to the Constitution—implying that the military was incapable of being entrusted with such immense responsibility. Depictions conveying disgust portrayed the military as complicit in violating the Constitution and human rights at the event. At different points in the coverage, service members received both reverential and pitiful depictions. These characterizations positioned the military as a resistance against the President—framing the armed service as an entirely partisan body. Such partisan coverage oscillated from labeling service members as part of the President’s personal “palace guard” to labeling them as “speaking truth to power” in efforts to purposely resist the President.

CHAPTER VI. CASE STUDY: FORT HOOD

This case from April 2020 portrayed the military as incompetent for allowing such a crime to occur and repeated blundering throughout the investigation. In addition, disgusted media coverage presented the Army as indifferently responding with a lack of urgency to the death of Vanessa Guillen as well as the deaths of other soldiers. Spc. Guillen received reverential and pitiful depictions due to her innocence and character. These depictions were then applied to the military soldiery at large—portraying them as victimized by the military system.

CHAPTER VII. ANALYSIS

The themes of media coverage identified throughout the case studies—pity, reverence, disgust, incompetence, and partisanship—exist in tension with Huntington’s conception of military professionalism: consisting of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness. As a result, military members—and civilians alike—must become more media literate and aware of how media messaging misleads them. Before enacting any policy or organizational changes to adapt to this media landscape, military members must first address our own lack of media literacy and understand the profit-driven news cycle. To better grasp the nature of the news media and its influence, armed service members must understand how media organizations function regarding their incentives to favor certain depictions of the military service.

CHAPTER VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH

Potential follow-on research topics resulting from this study include topics that arise as logical questions from this analysis. The media selectively frames military portrayals with details often omitted to create compelling stories within an acceptable scope of discussion. These media depictions hold incredible power in their influence over society—including the ability to influence how the population perceives the military—and demand further analysis regarding *how* this influence takes place. Another topic is the hypothesis that the armed service must maximally abstain from involvement in the regular media cycle at the risk of becoming politicized and wholly unprofessional. Each instance of military members adding to the media coverage further politicized the force, leading to

questions on whether such participation should be limited as a matter of policy. Additionally, this research reveals a need for further analysis regarding the frequency of retired members authoring books and editorials where they speak on behalf of military members or publicly declare partisan opinions while claiming military affiliation.

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I. MEDIA MATTERS: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND THE FOURTH ESTATE

A. INTRODUCTION

The fields of civil-military relations and media communications often start with two essential texts. The meticulous study of civil-military relations and military professionalism did not wholly begin until Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* (1957).¹ Huntington outlines an incisive theory regarding what military professionalism entails, narrowing it down to three primary traits: expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.² Huntington determined what military professionalism should look like, and this ideal—while often criticized—endures as an accepted framework for the military. Also in the 20th century, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* exists as a foundational text relaying how prominent media publications are capable of molding popular perception on a massive scale.³ Although these two fields at first appear seemingly unrelated, they can be combined to frame a study concerning the coverage of pre-eminent newspaper narratives and their influence on civil-military relations. This thesis analyzes how prominent newspaper media companies represent the military and assesses the impression of military professionalism created or supported by that media narrative.

Seeking out patterns from media narratives of the military is useful because it addresses the sensitive bond connecting the armed service and the public. In a democratic government, the military simultaneously offers the state's only means for security through force while also representing the capability to topple the state's civilian leadership.⁴ As

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 51; JT Golby, "Improving Advice and Earning Autonomy: Building Trust in the Strategic Dialogue," Strategy Bridge, 2017, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/10/3/improving-advice-and-earning-autonomy-building-trust-in-the-strategic-dialogue>.

² Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 8–10.

³ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁴ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 15.

Huntington argued, the crucial regulator restraining the military from asserting authority over the state is its degree of professionalism.⁵ If the military is professional—meaning it possesses the qualities of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness—it is less vulnerable to the temptations of power. Furthermore, while tangible traits—such as institutionalized professional military education and meritocratic promotion—can help measure these three traits of professionalism, the public’s trust is substantially shaped by the media’s portrayal of the military. The military and the media are not allied, in partnership, or rivals. However, the military relies upon the media because the *fourth estate* represents the military to both the people and military members themselves, and there is no doubting the impact that media messaging has on a narrative.⁶ Moreover, perception is often equally as valuable as material reality in terms of widespread public understanding of a topic, and the most influential media outlets hold significant sway on how the populace comprehends information.⁷

Analysis of media messaging can provide key insight into public perception. It is worth examining the media narratives depicting military professionalism and the impression of military professionalism created by these depictions because assessing media narratives stands to illuminate the manufactured picture of the American military. The influence of the mainstream newspaper media impacts the daily life of every American citizen.⁸ As displayed in Chomsky and Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent*, major newspaper institutions possess significant influence, deliberately fashioning behaviors and mindsets.⁹ Populations are regular recipients of illustrations and information furnished by the controllers of content, ostensibly nudging the scale of public opinion and attitude.

⁵ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 11.

⁶ Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*.; Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1946).

⁷ Robert M. Entman, “How the Media Affect What People Think: An Information Processing Approach,” *The Journal of Politics* 51, no. 2 (1989): 347.

⁸ Anneliese Depoux et al., “The Pandemic of Social Media Panic Travels Faster than the COVID-19 Outbreak,” *Journal of Travel Medicine* 27, no. 3 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa031>.

⁹ Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*.

The power and influence of pre-eminent newspaper media must not be underestimated. Although the American military unquestionably possesses sole ownership and responsibility of its own actions, behavior, and culture, the armed service's public image is nevertheless chiefly in the hands of the press. Nor do media companies owe the military any favorable treatment. On the contrary, such publications are critical in holding powerful institutions accountable and exposing corruption and truth to the population. The military does not—and should not—attempt to regulate what the media exhibits, but it is worth understanding what dynamics media messaging can have on how the masses observe the military that serves them. This factors heavily in the United States as countless citizens do not personally know any military members; the only sincere “interplay” they have with a military member is through entertainment and media.¹⁰

A free press serves an essential function within a healthy democracy. The population *must* be well-informed, and governing institutions—like the military or any other place of power—*must* be held accountable by an external actor such as the media. However, what is to be done when the pre-eminent media organizations meant to ensure accountability use their position in the interest of furthering their own power and profit? Here lies the central problem behind this research.

These narratives communicated by leading media publications have great significance. This examination's objective is not to decipher whether or not the media is telling truths or falsehoods; the author is not interested in whether the media's portrayal is correct. Instead, the author is engaged in how media headlines and accounts shape the American military's public image to the population. This research seeks to uncover what bearing that narrative has on the sought-after ideal of a “professional military.”

Through this dynamic, there are material ramifications to massive changes in public opinion. An understanding of the military almost entirely shaped by prominent media outlets has the potential to creep from merely affecting perception to eventually moving real-world operations and practices. First, prominent media publications can mold popular

¹⁰ Jim Mattis and Kori N. Schake, *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 2016), 1.

opinions, leading to the widespread shaping of sentiment toward the armed service. Next—within a democracy—this widespread sentiment unavoidably confronts elected representatives beholden to their constituency as well as unelected administrators making up influential bureaucratic roles throughout the governmental system. Finally, once this sentiment has reached this level of power, the media-influenced perception begins to *actually impact* the military organization’s reality on the ground. This is the principal factor driving this research: civil-military relations heavily depend on public opinion, which is largely shaped by leading media publications, which are motivated by monetary profit, incentivizing these media outlets to favor narratives that present civil-military turmoil to drive *clicks*. The ideal treatment is a professional neutrality focused on facts and reality, but this is made difficult when media institutions are motivated by *clicks* and *income*.

This mechanism has already occurred with other institutions and facets of society. When the public favor for an entire institution drastically shifts, the reality and environment for its members will change for the worse. Such changes lead to unintended second and third-order effects on actual operations and degrade the reputation of the entire institution and its members. In the case of the military, however, the ramifications of losing the population’s trust are even more significant—chafing at one of the foundations of representative democracy itself.

Similarly, warped positive perceptions can yield comparably problematic outcomes. For example, excessive *hero-worship* or reverential treatment of the armed service makes it more prone to politicization and partisan involvement. When an institution such as the military receives unrealistically valorous depictions through a public narrative, it can become a valuable tool as a means to an end for outside political actors. As a result, any manner of warped perceptions—positive or negative—regarding the military pose similar dangers to civil-military relations. Moreover, this research requires examination because there is currently little to no scholarly discussion on this possible course of events, with media coverage impacting public sentiment toward the military.

At present, the U.S. military maintains an astoundingly high approval rating—the most formidable of any government institution—but this popularity will not persist

eternally.¹¹ Past historical periods have transpired where the military endured low levels of public favor, and it is unwise to assume similar disdain will not one day make a resurgence.¹² Furthermore, changes to this degree of public approval are acceptable and natural so long as they stem from a clear and accurate perception of the military's actions and performance. However, the current state of the military's public perception is vulnerable and prone to outside manipulation by skewed media depictions, swaying public favor for reasons other than actual performance. Moreover, while there is significant literature examining the disconnect between the population and the military, this investigation specifically analyzes media coverage and its effect on civil-military relations. Not to suggest that private citizens lack the free will or ability to discern reality independently, but there is an established phenomenon regarding what the media projects to the population and its influence on judgment on a massive scale.¹³ Under this tacit understanding, military professionalism—including the public's faith that it exists—is vital to democracy, acting as the most significant instrument for current and future stability.¹⁴ Moreover, the perception of military professionalism is a vital quality that the U.S. military must possess, and this research problem is crucial because military leadership does not have the power to regulate its media portrayal.

This importance of accurate public perception of military professionalism necessitates the research goals to identify the narrative of the U.S. military that is presented to the public, discern what themes of military professionalism come across in this narrative, and their impact on the armed service's public perception as a professional institution. Despite this absence of agency over the public's information, the military must understand the perception—and the causes of this perception—of the population they serve.

This research will investigate media portrayals of 1) The COVID-19 outbreak aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt and the leadership responses to the situation, 2) Military

¹¹ "Military and National Defense," Gallup, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1666/military-national-defense.aspx>.

¹² Spencer and Haberichter, "Public Trust in the Military," 3.

¹³ Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, 1.

¹⁴ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 11.

presence at Lafayette Square amidst the Summer 2020 civil unrest, and 3) The death of Spc. Vanessa Guillen and the circumstances surrounding the event at Fort Hood. Using these three case studies from the year 2020 to gain insight into the nature of media coverage of the military, the research will seek to answer the following questions: **What narrative of the U.S. military is presented to the public by prominent newspapers? How do themes of military professionalism come across in this narrative? How does this media depiction impact the armed service's public representation as a professional institution?**

In seeking to answer this question, the research uncovered five recurring media themes—pity, reverence, disgust, incompetence, and partisanship—all of which oppose Huntington's notion of military professionalism and harm the military's public image. Furthermore, recurring themes of media coverage erode the public's perception of military expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.

Of course, these representations were often merited by the military's seeming unprofessional conduct in each case study. Representative government demands the presence of a functional media capable of shining light on mistakes, corruption, and improper behavior. This accountability is an irreplaceable balance of power to the immense authority granted to institutions like the military. Additionally, professional behavior is solely the responsibility of the military itself; nobody forced military members to act the way they did throughout each case. However, the resulting public perception from this media coverage also matters, and the nature of the coverage throughout these cases manufactured an especially unprofessional characterization of the armed service.

However, the coverage's particular emphasis and focus on these themes throughout the research is worth noting. Moreover, it was not the author's goal to assess whether the military received *fair* treatment or to *investigate* any sequence of events. Instead, this research points out the resulting media messaging from each case study and how it relates to military professionalism. This phenomenon adversely impacts American civil-military relations by warping the public's perception of the armed service, revealing that the overwhelming majority of prominent newspaper media coverage is harmful to the military's standing as a professional institution.

Military members must not waste energy thinking they can change the nature of the media. However, service members *must* make an effort to change the widespread degree of media literacy and awareness throughout the force. The initial step in addressing this predicament is to acknowledge the problem and become aware of how prominent publications influence the perception of the military. If unchanged, this current state of military representation in the media may lead to the politicization and demise of professionalism in the American armed service.

B. METHODOLOGY

This analysis was conducted by analyzing select cases. Applying a case study approach to this analysis allowed the research to isolate specific stories which each temporarily occupied the news cycle and uniquely portray how media messaging played a role in characterizing the armed service as an unprofessional institution.

The data used for this research was archival news coverage from the year 2020. The analysis utilized the ProQuest database and extracted any reports relating to the selected case studies from the following publications: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. The research remained confined to these publications because each newspaper experiences high levels of viewership and circulation, such newspapers of record influence the public discussion as well as the manner and tone of broader media conversation for topics reported on their pages, and limiting the range of sources clarified the study while simultaneously providing a snapshot of the mainstream newspaper media conversation by sampling three highly read (and commonly considered to be *high quality*) publications. The research's date range covered case studies from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020. This date range provided: up-to-date data regarding the topic, an abundance of news stories to select from in a shorter period, clearer methodology by narrowing the research's aperture.

The three relevant case studies were analyzed using Huntington's framework for military professionalism and accepting Chomsky and Herman's premise that the media considerably shapes popular opinion, utilizing their ideas as a baseline for further examination. The cases underwent a critical examination of how the media covered and

addressed them by dividing each case into Huntington's three categories of professionalism: expertise, responsibility, and corporateness. The investigation used these criteria as a baseline to assess how professional standards were depicted in each media narrative. This analysis was done without any expectation or requirement that the media present the military favorably—as it is not their job to do so—but rather to qualitatively examine the implications of each media narrative regarding military professionalism. This method was performed with a chapter dedicated to each case study to evaluate the case's impact on the military's public perception and professionalism.

The three case studies are valuable due to their broad scope and widespread coverage. Each case made national and world coverage, increasing the likelihood of the story interacting with the average American consumer of media information. This extensive coverage ensures that conclusions regarding public perception are relevant due to the stories' wide circulation. The three case studies are:

1. Captain Brett Crozier, the handling of COVID-19 aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt, and their management by senior military and civilian leadership.
2. The military presence at Lafayette Square during the Summer 2020 civil unrest, its context surrounding calls for military involvement in the policing of the riots, and the political fallout following the event.
3. The death of Army Specialist Vanessa Guillen and the crisis of leadership at Fort Hood in the events surrounding her death.

Each case study was analyzed through the framework of Huntington's three categories of professionalism (expertise, responsibility, and corporateness) to seek out patterns in the coverage relating to military professionalism.

C. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

I organize this thesis into eight chapters. Chapter I introduces the premise and background to the influence of media communications on civil-military relations. Chapter II reviews scholarly literature to the two domains. Chapter III provides a backdrop of why

military professionalism is so critical and provides evidence for the influence of media narratives. Chapters IV-VI are case studies providing data for analysis. Chapter VII is the analysis, conclusions, and takeaways. Chapter VIII concludes the thesis with recommendations for future research, additional themes arising from the research, and recommendations for consideration.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW: MEDIA, MILITARY, AND THE CAVE

A. SOLDIER, STATE, AND THE ORIGINS OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

The modern study of civil-military relations is a relatively new field. This contemporary examination of civil-military theory began in 1957 with Samuel Huntington's seminal *The Soldier and the State*.¹⁵ Huntington's groundbreaking work—which endures as a canonical document in line with comparable achievements such as Bernard Brodie's *War and Politics* (1973)—built a framework and language for a whole field of study, simultaneously establishing standards of practice and initiating a scholarly debate regarding the characteristics of what has become known as his “normal theory” of civil-military relations.¹⁶ *The Soldier and the State* establishes the importance of military professionalism as the key to maintaining military subservience to civilian leadership—allowing politicians to be wrong, the autonomy of military and civilian leaders within their established spheres of authority, and an apolitical military culture which sanctions the stability of civilian administration of the state and skirts involvement in partisan politics.¹⁷ Huntington asserts that separation between military and civilian leadership facilitates political leaders to dictate policy and military commanders to maintain their station as subject matter experts and administer operational and tactical matters as they see fit.¹⁸ Through these first principles, Huntington established a structure for later scholars to examine and critique the balance of power and authority between civil and military institutions.

However, Huntington's ideas faced immediate criticism. One initial point of contention that arose from the discourse surrounding *The Soldier and the State* addressed Huntington's concept of the “apolitical military.”¹⁹ Morris Janowitz immediately rejected this

¹⁵ Golby, “Improving Advice and Earning Autonomy.”

¹⁶ Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Pearson, 1973).

¹⁷ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 8–11.

¹⁸ Huntington, 8–11.

¹⁹ Huntington, 83.

prescription of an apolitical military in *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (1960), a title advocating that the military is intrinsically political due to the entangled nature of military and political decision-making as well as the soldiery's natural status as a reflection of the society it represents.²⁰ Mackubin Thomas Owens reiterated the diverse—and naturally political military soldiery—in “What Military Officers Need to Know about Civil-Military Relations” (2013) by exploring Janowitz's judgment that the essence of strategic decision-making forces military leadership to maintain an unavoidably political status.²¹ Owens contends that Huntington's notion of an apolitical military has negatively impacted the United States' military aptitude by empowering military leaders to disregard political and strategic factors—instead prioritizing focus on the operational and tactical levels of war.²² Owens argues this has produced a custom within the U.S. military to conduct operations entirely disconnected from the state's overarching political goals.²³

Despite the criticism, however, Huntington's “apolitical” military has its defenders. J.K. Dempsey—an active-duty Army officer—champions the concept of an apolitical military in *Our Army: Soldiers, Politics, and American Civil-Military Relations* (2009). Dempsey proclaims that his book serves as a reminder of the importance of “political neutrality” and semi-romantically harkens back to past military leaders who seemingly embodied Huntington's ideal through actions such as abstaining from voting.²⁴ It is not shocking that senior military leaders commonly defend such an “apolitical” notion.²⁵ An entirely “apolitical” military ensures complete autonomy in military matters for senior officers who, naturally, desire a certain level of freedom from political oversight in managing their force.

²⁰ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), xxxix.

²¹ James L. Abrahamson, review of *What Military Officers Need to Know About Civil-Military Relations*, by Mackubin Thomas Owens, *American Diplomacy*, 2013, 84, <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2013/07/what-military-officers-need-to-know-about-civil-military-relations/>.

²² Abrahamson, 84.

²³ Abrahamson, 84.

²⁴ Jason K. Dempsey, *Our Army: Soldiers, Politics, and American Civil-Military Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), xv.

²⁵ Eliot A. Cohen, “Playing Powell Politics-The General's Zest for Power,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 6 (1995): 108, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20047383>.

Huntington's "apolitical" ideal is naturally appealing to senior military leaders who prefer ownership of all military functions and passive oversight by their political superiors.²⁶

Another contested theme is Huntington's sentiment of separate political and military spheres of influence. Scholars have debated the boundaries between these spheres or whether there should even be theoretical boundaries. Eliot A. Cohen's *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (2002) refutes "normal theory" by asserting it has undermined civilian control over the military, eroding trust between civil and military leaders and—ironically—further politicizing the officer corps.²⁷ Cohen believes the culprit is a generation of military leaders educated on Huntington's idealized autonomous military model within its allocated sphere, engendering resentment and friction toward any civilian endeavor to intervene or probe into military decision-making.²⁸ Cohen proceeds to dismiss Huntington's military autonomy model, alleging it begets military leaders possessing a self-image impervious to civilian intervention, chafing at any attempt by political leaders to question their authority as subject matter experts in all military matters—themes also explored in his earlier work, *Commandos and Politicians* (1978).²⁹

Peter Feaver built on Cohen's critique in *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (2003). Feaver employs a "principal-agent model" to conceptualize the relationship between civilian and military leaders. Feaver concludes that military leaders—similarly to anyone in such a position and consistent with human nature—are inherently self-interested, "shirking" or avoiding civilian oversight if given the autonomy that those in Huntington's camp suggest.³⁰ Feaver's model illustrates the necessity for stern civilian supervision and suggests that dysfunctional civil-military relationships more

²⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 200.

²⁷ Cohen, 199–200.

²⁸ Cohen, 4.

²⁹ Cohen, 4; Eliot A. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³⁰ Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

commonly arise when political leaders fail to establish assertive control over senior military leadership.³¹

Other scholars have favored more military autonomy. One such critic is H.R. McMaster in *Dereliction of Duty* (1998), who champions military leaders' obligation to push-back on intrusive political leaders and establish an appropriate separation between civil and military leadership.³² Objective observation, however, suggests that McMaster—an active-duty Army officer at the time of writing—*would naturally* espouse increased military control.

An additional dialogue within civil-military relations addresses the matter of military non-partisanship. Scholars typically accept that the military is *political* to some widely varying degree, but the conversation regarding how to mitigate civil leaders appropriating the military as a *partisan* tool is under examination. Much of the contemporary research addresses the looming peril of future disingenuous actors employing the military as a politicized apparatus of a political party or some contingent of the population.³³ Kori Schake and Jim Mattis's book *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military* (2016) addresses the widening divide separating the American people and those in uniform to include the wide disparities in military participation as well as variations in political views between military members and the civilian population.³⁴ The disparity depicted by the authors between the military and the population it serves highlights a critical vulnerability to a non-partisan military.

Other commentaries on the widening divide include Jim Golby and Hugh Liebert's "Midlife Crisis? The All-Volunteer Force at 40," which outlines the "solidly—and increasingly—conservative" partisan membership within the military.³⁵ Risa Brooks'

³¹ Feaver, 2.

³² Herbert R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (Boston: HarperCollins, 1998), 45.

³³ Kori Schake, "An Honorable Man at the Heart of Civil-Military Turmoil," *War on the Rocks* (blog), May 22, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/05/an-honorable-man-at-the-heart-of-civil-military-turmoil/>.

³⁴ Mattis and Schake, *Warriors and Citizens*, 1–3.

³⁵ Hugh Liebert and James Golby, "Midlife Crisis? The All-Volunteer Force at 40," *Armed Forces & Society* 43, no. 1 (2017): 5.

“Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States” also highlights various recent instances where both individual members, as well as the military institution, were utilized—and portrayed in the media—as partisan actors.³⁶ This current research distinguishes military leadership’s helplessness when confronted with such issues in an increasingly partisan society. The continually evolving nature of technology and media makes these dynamics increasingly more volatile and challenging to manage. In recent years, senior leaders repeatedly find themselves in situations necessitating that they backtrack on a politician’s proclamations or clarify the non-partisan stature of the United States military.³⁷

Another heavily discussed topic stemming from *The Soldier and the State* is the concept of professionalism, what it means, and how it applies to the military. A work that addresses this topic is Scott Efflandt’s “Military Professionalism & Private Military Contractors” (2014), which contemplates the challenges to military professionalism from private security companies and armed contractors acting on behalf of the United States Government.³⁸ The incredible friction resulting from non-military individuals conducting violence on behalf of the government—a blatant case of a non-professional body acting alongside the “professional” active duty personnel.³⁹ Another such scholarly discussion encompassing the notion of military professionalism is exemplified by Thomas Crosbie and Meredith Kleykamp’s “Fault Lines of the American Military Profession” (2017), which contributes to the exhaustive conversation around recent ethical “lapses” by the military and how they impact its standing as a professional body.⁴⁰

³⁶ Risa Brooks, “Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States,” *International Security* 44, no. 4 (2020): 24, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00374.

³⁷ Helene Cooper, “Milley Apologizes for Role in Trump Photo Op: ‘I Should Not Have Been There.’,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2020; Dustin Jones, “Joint Chiefs Remind U.S. Forces That They Defend the Constitution,” *Capitol Insurrection Updates* (blog), January 12, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/insurrection-at-the-capitol/2021/01/12/956170188/joint-chiefs-remind-u-s-forces-that-they-defend-the-constitution>.

³⁸ Scott L. Efflandt, “Military Professionalism & Private Military Contractors,” *Parameters* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 49, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol44/iss2/20>.

³⁹ Efflandt, 59.

⁴⁰ Thomas Crosbie and Meredith Kleykamp, “Fault Lines of the American Military Profession,” *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 3 (2018): 521, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X17715437>.

Some scholars even question Huntington's view of what military professionalism entails. One such source of contention over Huntington's views on military professionalism has been a lively debate between his view of "objective" military control vs. Janowitz' "subjective" control, analyzed deeply in works such as Arthur D. Larson's "Military Professionalism and Civil Control: A Comparative Analysis of Two Interpretation" (1974).⁴¹ Nevertheless, this conversation emphasizes the relationship between civilian and military leadership and the dynamics the two parties must uphold to maintain optimal functionality rather than the basis for what professionalism means or whether the military confirms that definition.

Each of these discussions is relevant and important. While many disputes surround *The Soldier and the State*, scholars tend to agree with Huntington's emphasis on *why* military professionalism is so critical to democracy.⁴² What remains most incredible about Huntington's canonical composition—despite the multiple conversations within the field of civil-military relations disputing claims from his research—are the accepted truisms persisting since *The Soldier and the State's* publication in 1957, the most prevailing being how fundamental military professionalism is to the health of a state. This axiomatic claim prevails with relatively infrequent scholarly deliberation. While other aspects of Huntington's work remain hotly debated, the emphasis on the necessity for military professionalism endures.

B. PROMINENT MEDIA AND THE FORMULATION OF PUBLIC THOUGHT

However, professionalism is a diverse topic. It is essential not only to understand *why* military professionalism is so vital, but it is also necessary to comprehend *how* it is seen by the public. Media depiction of the military conveyed to the public is a relevant topic because the media's portrayal hugely influences how the citizenry understands its military—and how the military views itself. Since Plato and Berkeley, scholars have recognized that perception

⁴¹ Arthur D. Larson, "Military Professionalism and Civil Control: A Comparative Analysis of Two Interpretations," *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45292887>.

⁴² Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 81.

is often more influential than reality.⁴³ Additionally, more modern authorities such as Walter Lippmann and Noam Chomsky have illustrated the influential role media narratives perform in shaping public attitudes.⁴⁴ Furthermore, while headlines covering the military do not always flawlessly portray reality on the ground, those very headlines may be *more* critical to the U.S. military's status as a professional body due to their power to formulate *how* the population perceives its armed forces.

This notion of the public's perception of professionalism reveals a gap in the literature. While all of the previously mentioned scholars have extensively analyzed military professionalism, civil-military affairs, and media influence over public sentiment, what remains missing is research on media messaging and its impact on the military's perception by the public. Accepting Huntington and Chomsky's premises, the question remains: How does media messaging influence the public's perception of the U.S. military as a professional institution? Most Americans only possess knowledge of the information that the media provides them. The vast majority of Americans do not know a military member, nor have they served, and most public perception concerning the military stems from media information on the topic.⁴⁵ This pronouncement is neither a condemnation nor a judgment. The simple matter of fact is that ordinary people possess limited means of obtaining knowledge other than prominent news media companies. Huntington provides a specific—and detailed—outline of what military professionalism is supposed to resemble, and this research investigates whether the media's narrative depicting the military supports Huntington's standard and what the results suggest for the armed service's standing as a professional body in the eyes of the population in modern American society.⁴⁶

⁴³ Plato, *Allegory of the Cave* (Enhanced media publishing, 2017); Lisa Downing, "George Berkeley," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, January 19, 2011, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/berkeley/>.

⁴⁴ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*.; Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*.

⁴⁵ Mattis and Schake, *Warriors and Citizens*, 1.

⁴⁶ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 8–10.

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III. THE ROLE OF MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM

A. HUNTINGTONIAN PROFESSIONALISM AND MEDIA DEPICTION

Military professionalism is a vital characteristic for the United States armed service because it acts as a primary buttress to American constitutional health and is an irreplaceable barrier between civilian and military control of the government. Military members, politicians, and civilians must understand that the military is a professional institution that is subservient to elected leadership. It is a professionalized military that keeps the American armed service in its proper position: to serve the people and elected leadership of the United States. Furthermore, while this research will utilize Samuel Huntington's notion of military professionalism as a framework for analysis—focusing on expertise, responsibility, and corporateness—it is crucial to assess the varying conceptions of professionalism and how it impacts democratic governance, military effectiveness, the threat of tyranny, and the relationship with the media.

In an era of declining military participation, media coverage representing the military plays an essential role in shaping public perception of the armed service as a professional organization. Depending on the nature of the media representation, the military's image as being professional or lacking professionalism is largely contingent on the tone and framing of the popular media conversation. Media messaging can have a self-actualizing influence through the narrative it promotes. This chapter will explain *why* professionalism is a vital trait for the American military, its significance to democracy, how it relates to public perception, and how the media shapes it.

B. MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

1. Ambiguous and Essential

The conventional notion of professionalism applies to a person who earnestly engages in their craft, is high-grade in their trade, or as mere recognition for performing a

task.⁴⁷ Throughout Western history, the three principal “professional” titles were physicians, lawyers, and clergymen.⁴⁸ Like the three traditional vocations in the “professional” category, the military occupation involves a spirit of “higher calling” and immense responsibility to a society that insulates the profession from other trades with less societal consequence.⁴⁹ Casually designating someone as “professional” is a common practice, but the term’s meaning is rarely explicitly defined.⁵⁰ This ambiguity notably concerns the military profession because the military identity and ethos require a professional status. This common misapplication of the term “professional” produces constant ambiguity regarding how the public is supposed to view the American military, and we must understand the conceptual meaning of the term “professional” to examine the military accurately.⁵¹

Today’s American military members are—without question—deserving of the title of “professional.”⁵² Like the other three traditional professions, the military is an institution that upholds established standards of conduct and performance enforced by a unique moral code.⁵³ The military profession’s moral features motivate military members’

⁴⁷ Giuseppe Caforio, “The Military Profession: Theories of Change,” *Armed Forces & Society* 15, no. 1 (1988): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X8801500104>.

⁴⁸ Bradley J. Strawser, “Should Military Members Really Call Themselves ‘Professionals’?,” *CTX, Social Media in Jihad and Counterterrorism*, 2, no. 4 (November 2012): 65, <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/ctx-vol-2-no-4-november-2012>; Richard H. Kohn, “First Priorities in Military Professionalism,” *Orbis* 57, no. 3 (2013): 381, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2013.05.005>.

⁴⁹ Muthiah Alagappa, “Military Professionalism: A Conceptual Perspective,” in *Military Professionalism in Asia: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2001), 2, <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/22805>.

⁵⁰ Caforio, “The Military Profession,” 55. General characteristics are typically applied subjectively with no agreed-upon definition listing which jobs are “professional” or the implications of such a label. Common popular qualities attributed to this vague notion of professionalism could be someone who conducts “A lifetime work activity that is essential to the community” or a vocation where “knowledge is acquired through educational institutions at the university level dedicated to that specific profession.” However, this is done with no scrutiny regarding the title’s significance.

⁵¹ Strawser, “Should Military Members Really Call Themselves ‘Professionals’?,” 65.

⁵² The first scholar to label the military as a professional occupation was Samuel Huntington in *The Soldier and the State* (1957). Huntington received backlash from scholars who viewed the military’s inclusion among the class of professional occupations as exaggerating its significance and overstating the trust required between the military and society. See: Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*. Despite the criticism, Huntington’s concept won broad recognition, resulting in the military’s general acceptance as a profession. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.

⁵³ Alagappa, “Military Professionalism,” 2.

conduct and norms, setting them apart from other occupations and conceiving a clear division from the mercenary and the state-sponsored military. Civilian leadership, elected by the population, commands and oversees the military, but the standards are primarily upheld internally by a military culture of accountability.⁵⁴

2. Civilian Control, Liberal Democracy, and the Suspicions of the Founders

Military professionalism stands as the greatest buttress to the long-term vitality and continuance of liberal democracy.⁵⁵ Not only does a professionalized military optimize the effectiveness of the warfighting establishment, but it is vital for supporting the authority of the elected civilian leadership over the unelected military.⁵⁶ In the Huntingtonian model, the professional military ensure both of these factors.

This fundamental requirement was directly recognized by the American Founders in Article 2 of the Constitution, establishing the President as the civilian Commander-in-Chief over the military.⁵⁷ The Founders recognized history and were cognizant—even haunted—by examples in the recent past like radical turned military dictator Oliver Cromwell.⁵⁸ They understood that the most significant historical peril to representative government had been the military’s rejection of its civilian leadership.⁵⁹ As Sam Adams

⁵⁴ Alagappa, 2. Like the three conventional professional occupations, the military profoundly restricts whom it grants membership based on education, fitness, and proficiency. The military’s professional status enables it to admit and promote personnel singularly based on merit.

⁵⁵ Richard H Kohn, “How Democracies Control the Military,” *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 4 (1997): 147.

⁵⁶ Kohn, 147.

⁵⁷ “Article II of the Constitution,” September 17, 1787, <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/article/article-ii>.

⁵⁸ Alexander Hamilton, “Other Defects of the Present Confederation,” *The Federalist Papers*: No. 21, December 12, 1787, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed21.asp; Carl J. Richard, *Greeks and Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), xi; and Erich S Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley, CA: Univ of California Press, 1974).

⁵⁹ Kathleen J. McInnis, *Congress, Civilian Control of the Military, and Nonpartisanship*, CRS Report No. IF11566 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 1, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11566/3>; Peter D. Feaver, “Civil-Military Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 230.

stated in 1768, “Even when there is a necessity of the military power, within a land, a wise and prudent people will always have a watchful and jealous eye over it.”⁶⁰

The Founders fixated on the threat of military tyranny to avoid a similar fate and embraced it as one of their new constitutional government’s fundamental concerns.⁶¹ James Madison recognized the inclination for governments to manipulate crises to suppress their populations, insisting that, “Throughout all Europe, the armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people.”⁶² This trepidation concerning the balance of control between civilian and military authority was prominently debated and led many Founders to hesitate at establishing a regular standing Army.⁶³ Alexander Hamilton illustrated the danger of military empowerment and its tendency to destroy liberty in *Federalist No. 8*, stating that a continually standing Army “enhances the importance of the soldier, and proportionably degrades the condition of the citizen. The military state becomes elevated above the civil....and by degrees the people are brought to consider the soldiery not only as their protectors, but as their superiors.”⁶⁴

This apprehension originated the American standard to maintain a comparatively meager peacetime Army up until the Cold War and NSC-68.⁶⁵ This skepticism of the military—viewing it as a potential reservoir of despotism or else a wasteful diversion—spread to American martial culture and led to an internal military ethos of subservience to elected civilian officials, emphasizing the apolitical status of military commanders.⁶⁶ As

⁶⁰ Michael F. Cairo, “Civilian Control of the Military,” *Democracy Papers*, 2001, 1, <https://web-archive-2017.ait.org.tw/infousa/zhtw/DOCS/Demopaper/dmpaper12.html>.

⁶¹ McInnis, *Congress, Civilian Control of the Military, and Nonpartisanship*, 1.

⁶² Farrand, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, 354.

⁶³ McInnis, *Congress, Civilian Control of the Military, and Nonpartisanship*, 54.

⁶⁴ Alexander Hamilton, “The Consequences of Hostilities between the States,” *The Federalist Papers*: No. 8, October 20, 1787, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed08.asp.

⁶⁵ Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898–1941*, 2. The American Military particularly expanded upon the publication of NSC-68 in 1950, a document that laid the groundwork for militarization throughout the Cold War. See, Young, “Revisiting NSC 68,” 3.

⁶⁶ Feaver, “Civil-Military Relations,” 228.

Harry Truman reiterated regarding his dubiousness of power in military hands, “If there is one basic element in our Constitution, it is civilian control of the military.”⁶⁷

Large, standing armies not only threaten representation, but have the potential to over-militarize policy.⁶⁸ Civilian control of the military—on the other hand—stabilizes representative government and functions as an immediate prerequisite for working liberal democracy.⁶⁹ Civilian control also distributes authoritative decision-making to the elected civilian political leadership rather than the unelected professional military class.⁷⁰ Civilian leaders are usually best served to somewhat delegate to the military subject matter experts, but ultimately hold complete authority over military affairs. This relationship of civilian control ensures that even foreign policy and state strategy represent the population who elected the leaders. This dynamic and fragile process must constantly uphold through the integrity of elected officials and the military institution.⁷¹ As Richard Kohn notes, “The point of civilian control is to make security subordinate to the larger purposes of a nation, rather than the other way around. The purpose of the military is to defend society, not to define it.”⁷² To a similar point, Clausewitz notably emphasized the supremacy of politics and the fundamentally socio-political nature of war by famously asserting that, “War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.”⁷³

There is, however, a flipside to civil-military relations and professionalism. At its worst, civilian control over the military can resemble micromanagement, undesirable polarization of military matters, or amateur civilian politicians encroaching on the military

⁶⁷ Harry S Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman: Years of Trial and Hope*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 444.

⁶⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, “Civilian Control and the Constitution,” *American Political Science Review* 50, no. 3 (1956): 691, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1951551>. Also observed in Imperial Germany and Japan was the influence of military leaders on the governing of the state. See, Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 98.

⁶⁹ Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 2.

⁷⁰ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 14.

⁷¹ Richard H. Kohn, “An Essay on Civilian Control of the Military,” *American Diplomacy* 3 (March 1997), <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/1997/03/an-essay-on-civilian-control-of-the-military/>.

⁷² Kohn.

⁷³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 16.

experts.⁷⁴ Famously, for instance, Lyndon Johnson micromanaged bombing decisions at the tactical level in Vietnam.⁷⁵ However, these risks are comparatively minor. They are safer than the alternative of inadequate or weak civilian leadership, empowering military leaders to dominate decision-making with disproportionate power that should rightly be in the hands of elected officials.

In the United States, civilian and political control over the armed services has its origins in the fundamental ideals of representative democracy.⁷⁶ The supremacy of elected leadership derives from public self-determination, including the execution of defense and foreign affairs, which by design should be an extension of the people's will. This concept of civilian control over the military is the focal point of legitimacy for the armed forces and serves as an essential feature of the United States' constitutional framework.⁷⁷ Military action is only legitimate if it serves civilian leadership's intent and within the proper military station as an institution subservient to elected politicians.⁷⁸ This civilian control of the military is an essential aspect of democratic government and is one of the critical indicators of a democracy's health and stability.⁷⁹

3. Military Professionalism as a Check to Tyranny

Without a high quality of military professionalism imbued into the armed service, civilian leaders have limited means of securing governmental control over a military that

⁷⁴ Richard H. Kohn, "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," *The National Interest*, no. 35 (Spring 1994): 7, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/42894926>.

⁷⁵ Sean J. Savage, "Management and Vision," in *A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson*, ed. Mitchell B. Lerner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 76.

⁷⁶ McInnis, *Congress, Civilian Control of the Military, and Nonpartisanship*, 1.

⁷⁷ Stefan Sarvas, "Professional Soldiers and Politics: A Case of Central and Eastern Europe," *Armed Forces & Society* 26, no. 1 (1999): 99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9902600106>.

⁷⁸ Sarvas, 99.

⁷⁹ McInnis, *Congress, Civilian Control of the Military, and Nonpartisanship*. 1. Some American Civil-Military conflicts have been Lincoln's firing of McClellan during the Civil War after McClellan regularly neglected Lincoln's intent to pursue the Confederate Army, the "Revolt of the Admirals" in 1949 when senior Naval leaders publicly questioned the budgeting decision-making on behalf of civilian officials, Harry Truman firing Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War after MacArthur repeatedly opposed Truman's intent and policies, and Barack Obama dispatching Stanley McChrystal after McChrystal publicly criticized members of the Obama administration. However, none have reached the threat levels feared by the Founders.

could effortlessly seize power.⁸⁰ After all, the military institution's sole function is to administer violence on behalf of the state, and any politician endeavoring to match such violence would quickly degenerate into a warlord.⁸¹ The only protection that elected leadership possesses is the establishment of norms and policies which instill values of civilian control throughout the military institution. This ingrained ethos of civil authority manifests as military professionalism and is irreplaceable for representative government.⁸²

Representative nations face several menaces to the governmental balance of power, and solid constitutional checks and balances are required to protect the state, the military, and the population from the possible vulnerabilities inherent to democracy. Such democratic hazards result from ambitious politicians seeking control exceeding their office's reach and ambitious military officers wishing to extend their authority beyond their designated boundaries. The presence of a professional military hugely mitigates both scenarios. Although not elected—and thus not always ideally representative of the public—a professional military is the most effective instrument to circumvent demagogic personages from either the military or civilian domain.⁸³ Constitutional boundaries regarding the relationship between the soldier and the state are potentially nebulous and cannot singularly be relied upon to supervise military leadership's relationship to political

⁸⁰ Huntington, "Civilian Control and the Constitution," 679; Feaver, "Civil-Military Relations," 230.

⁸¹ Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996): 149, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9602300203>.

⁸² Feaver, "Civil-Military Relations," 228. Alternate—but thoroughly flawed—means of securing civilian control over the state are private police forces, militias, or other paramilitary entities intended to balance the military's monopoly on force. This approach eventually regresses into a contest of mafia-style gang violence jockeying for dominance, incompatible with healthy representative government and reminiscent of the Roman Republic's late stages immediately preceding its backslide into dictatorship. If a military does not possess professionalism, the temptation of power—particularly in a crisis—is too accessible for military leaders to resist.

⁸³ Larson, "Military Professionalism and Civil Control," 60.

affairs. The only barrier that ensures respect for the military's civilian control is the armed service's thorough professionalization.⁸⁴

Immense trust is consigned to professional occupations to act on behalf of society in highly sensitive domains (such as the military, medicine, law, and religion) where amateur private efforts would be inadequate, and the need for skilled individuals is irreplaceable.⁸⁵ Similarly, a military must maintain this professional status because a functional state cannot delegate violence to the general population or private parties. The state must possess a regulated military, capable of organized violence, and with a standard of professionalism due to the inherent delicacy and trust of committing violence on society's behalf.⁸⁶ Only professionalism can ensure the military will act in society's best interests and under its command, and consequently, only professionalism can inspire the necessary trust from the population and civilian leadership.⁸⁷

Many demanding jobs require brilliant and skilled individuals, but rarely does a vocation meet all the professional criteria like the three previously mentioned examples (physicians, lawyers, and clergymen).⁸⁸ The military trade satisfies all the necessary criteria to designate it as a profession, and the military's degree of professionalism carries significant importance to the state they serve.⁸⁹ The professional military status indicates

⁸⁴ Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, "The Concept of Military Professionalism," *Defense Analysis* 6, no. 2 (1990): 117, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07430179008405441>. Military professionalism also keeps military leaders from overstepping boundaries while empowering appropriate spheres preventing civilian leadership from overstepping their role. These boundaries enable complete military subservience to elected leadership and help professional military leaders navigate possible demagogic elected leaders.

⁸⁵ Strawser, "Should Military Members Really Call Themselves 'Professionals'?", 66.

⁸⁶ Kohn, "First Priorities in Military Professionalism," 386.

⁸⁷ When a trade earns the title of being "professional," members inherently experience heightened distinction from the population. However, they likewise undergo heightened scrutiny due to the prominent obligations and special permissions. This presents an unspoken bargain that demands the population and professionals agree that the vocation's members receive special status if they responsibly uphold their obligations. Regulation is regulated internally by each professional establishment. Laws do not govern clergy members' actions, but—ideally—the profession self-regulates and upholds community standards. When doctors become "board-certified," it is a certification granted by their peers. For all professions, accreditations can be internally rewarded or revoked to uphold the exclusive membership. This exclusivity and self-regulation are unique to occupations bestowed the title of "professional." See, Strawser, 65–67.

⁸⁸ Strawser, 67.

⁸⁹ Strawser, 67.

that the armed forces require tremendous trust granted by society to maintain the authority and respect that a professional institution demands.⁹⁰ In this capacity, the military—much like other professions—must self-regulate to maintain the professional label because its professionalization is vital for preserving representative government.

This professionalized military model ensures a definite barrier between military leadership and any possible vacuum of power that has historically led to the bastardization of the civilian rule of democratic states.⁹¹ Less astute and unprofessional military leaders would take action upon an apparent opportunity for control. Thus, the military's professionalization must be one of the most significant priorities of liberal democracy. The only feature the military can control is its degree of competence and professionalism.⁹² Furthermore, with an optimized level of military professionalism, even the most incompetent civilian leadership in U.S. history has allowed the continuance of the Republic. The inherent relationship between military professionalism and civilian control is indisputable and central to civil-military relations.⁹³

C. HUMAN PERCEPTION AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Prominent media publications—such as those selected for analysis in this research—hugely impact the narrative and framing of the public conversation regarding any given topic. This impact includes the public perception of the military and its standing as a professional institution—a dynamic which curiously remains understudied. This section will seek to outline a few prominent theories of media perception and how they relate to the widespread view of the military. Additionally, these models of media perception can be used to explain how public opinion towards the military forms from the messaging of prominent media outlets. This phenomenon has great significance because

⁹⁰ Kohn, "First Priorities in Military Professionalism," 381.

⁹¹ Alagappa, "Military Professionalism," 10.

⁹² Feaver, 233.

⁹³ Possible threats to military professionalism include domestic use of the military for policing actions, extreme public political orientations of military leaders, and extensive use of mercenaries by the state, eroding the military's legitimate monopoly on violence. See, Alagappa, "Military Professionalism," 2–10.

the messaging from the media alone controls how and why the general American public views the American military the way they do.

Philosophers from Plato to George Berkeley have reflected on the nature of perception and belief. Berkeley asserted that all knowledge originates from perception alone, and whatever is perceived arises from thoughts rather than things in themselves—*esse est percipi* or “to be is to be perceived.”⁹⁴ While Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” observes the human condition to possess perception restricted only to the information presented to us.⁹⁵ This emphasis on perception corresponds to newspaper media and the reality that whatever information is omitted or assigned to the page directly influences the reader’s perception. For instance, if popular newspaper outlets regularly withhold information, then that information is not perceived by the readers and—in their reality—does not exist. As Berkeley might say of the modern media, “To be is to be posted.”

Contemporary scholars have also addressed this facet of human perception and applied it to the design and understanding of media communication. Perhaps the most famous examination of the mechanisms of media discourse and the human tendency to conform to the information presented them was produced by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in their book *Manufacturing Consent*.⁹⁶ Chomsky and Herman demonstrate the shaping of human perception in a media context by portraying their “propaganda model” of mass media, contrasting to the “adversarial model” advocated by most journalists and communication scholars.⁹⁷ This theory describes information “filters” through which information must pass in order to reach the news-consuming population.⁹⁸ These filters

⁹⁴ Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 34.

⁹⁵ Bloom and Kirsch, *The Republic of Plato*, 403.

⁹⁶ Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, “Noam Chomsky and the Manufacture of Consent for American Foreign Policy,” *Political Communication* 21, no. 1 (2004): 93.

⁹⁷ Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, 1.

⁹⁸ Lang and Lang, “Noam Chomsky and the Manufacture of Consent,” 94. While pragmatic in depicting how information develops before public consumption, critics point out the selective collection of case studies and supporting data in Chomsky in Herman’s writing. Critics—including this author—point out that although the propaganda model is a valuable instrument for considering how the media shapes perception by manipulating or omitting information and the consistent messaging by reputable news agencies, the model is limited. Moreover, *Manufacturing Consent*’s seemingly biased analysis makes the reader wonder if the authors suffer from the same manufactured consent they profess to expose.

configure and frame information to be “fit to print” and align with powerful interests seeking public favor.

Such informational filters concentrate on particular features beginning with the profitability of the news media.⁹⁹ Due to media organizations’ reliance on advertising for profit, they tend to favor information and messaging predisposed to appeal to the wealthy and cater to the commercial backers which finance the newspaper.¹⁰⁰ Other filters of information include the dependence of journalists on sources deemed credible to a mainstream publication, commercial interests which make an organization vulnerable to “flak” and criticism for coverage straying from the standard narrative, and an ideological slant which creates a dichotomous worldview where entities emerge as being on “our side” or as “enemies.”¹⁰¹ Only once information has been thoroughly vetted through each filter is it worthy of print within this “propaganda model.” Such news filtering would harshly restrict the population’s exposure and would essentially mold the average citizen’s perception via the sheer repression and one-sided nature of information from the media.¹⁰²

On the receiving end of media messaging, human behaviors, norms, and opinions are easily influenced or “nudged” by external forces.¹⁰³ As the social scientists Thaler and Sunstein explain, social nudges through media information and peer influence can instigate significant transformations in societal views. Although free will and individuality remain fundamental, humans are easily impressed by prestigious news sources’ actions, judgments, and framing.¹⁰⁴ This reality of human nature is observable in both small and

⁹⁹ Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Lang and Lang, “Noam Chomsky and the Manufacture of Consent,” 94.

¹⁰¹ Lang and Lang, 94.

¹⁰² Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, 306. This model also asserts that the news that becomes “fit to print” unavoidably reflects the interests of powerful commercial entities upon which a news corporation relies.

¹⁰³ Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (London: Penguin, 2009), 53.

¹⁰⁴ Steven Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention*, Research Paper R-18 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, The Joan Shorenstein Center, 1997), 1, <https://shorensteincenter.org/clarifying-the-cnn-effect-media-effects-and-military-intervention/>.

large-scale examples. Smiling actors in a movie are more likely to induce the audience to smile themselves (whether or not the scene is funny), yawns are contagious within groups, and people's behaviors reliably affect their peers to conform to societal and group expectations.¹⁰⁵

This flexible quality of the human psyche is precisely why the prestigious *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* are ideal for analysis in this research. These prominent publications possess an incredible sway on the perception and beliefs of their readership and have a tremendous capacity to set narratives due to their significant legacies and funding.¹⁰⁶ The messaging and tone of these publications proliferate throughout society and profoundly shape public perception due to their status as credible and trusted—even in an age of social media. If these newspapers communicate consistent messaging of a specific tone, the opinions of the recipient of this information will inevitably be affected and altered.¹⁰⁷ If a viewpoint is declared frequently enough by a prestigious publication such as *The New York Times*, that attitude will also be reflected by those exposed to it.¹⁰⁸ Because people are hardwired to adapt to societal views, they will also often reflect the sentiments echoed by society's most prominent media outlets.¹⁰⁹

This research does not seek to prove or refute any of the models posed by Chomsky, Herman, or Lippmann—let alone Plato. Instead, this investigation stipulates that the media narrative shapes public sentiment. The author hopes to clarify that the information the population receives from corporate media heavily influences the general views and examine whether media narratives and methods of representation are compatible with the standard of professionalism the military seeks to uphold. Additionally, this research will focus on the media's *portrayal* of the quality of professionalism in the American military.

¹⁰⁵ Thaler and Sunstein, *Nudge*, 54.

¹⁰⁶ Lyse Doucet, "Syria & the CNN Effect: What Role Does the Media Play in Policy-Making?," *Daedalus* 147, no. 1 (2018): 141–57. 141.

¹⁰⁷ Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, 298.

¹⁰⁸ Chomsky and Herman, 303.

¹⁰⁹ Just as important as the absolute quality of a service's military professionalism is the public's *perceived* level of military professionalism.

Because of the manipulatable nature of public opinion, the media narrative's messaging regarding the American military is highly significant. This media portrayal influences public opinion and has a plausible impact on the actual value of professionalism possessed by the American military due to service members and American people buying into the popular narrative. Moreover, media communication's mechanisms and methods are of great importance to military leaders at all levels. Self-awareness of how the media depicts the military and how that depiction impacts public opinion is irreplaceable in the repertoire of an educated military professional.

**D. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS:
THE INTERSECTION OF TWO DOMAINS**

No laws or constitutional amendments ensure the utmost professionalism of the American military. The U.S. armed service's thorough professionalization relies upon the ongoing education and thorough installation of a professional ethos throughout the military ranks. This inculcation of professional values is vital to the U.S. military's effectiveness as a fighting force. More importantly, it is necessary for the health and continuation of the American representative system. At the core of civil-military relations is the irreplaceable need for a professional military that understands the limits to its sphere of influence and boundaries of authority.

Prominent media's capability to mold the opinion of its readership has massive implications for the military's perception by the public, politicians, and even the military's own members. Prominent publications—such as the ones selected for this research—impact both the popular perception and self-image of the military as a professional institution. Recent crises in civil-military relations have received extensive coverage in the media, and analysis of such media coverage illuminates the health and state of American military professionalism—as well as how it can be lost.

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IV. CRISIS, FAILURE, AND EMBARRASSMENT: COVID-19 ON THE ROOSEVELT

A. CASE SUMMARY: BAD NEWS SPREADS VIRALLY

In late March 2020, COVID-19 broke out aboard the aircraft carrier USS Roosevelt. Following the initial evacuation of the known infected crew members, the ship received orders to transport its remaining crew to Guam.¹¹⁰ The ship's Captain—Brett Crozier—requested his superiors to evacuate most of his sailors from the Roosevelt to prevent the spread of the virus—which he had deemed uncontrollable. Days later—after the initial denial of his request—Captain Crozier sent a more widely distributed email reiterating and explaining his desire to evacuate most of the crew due to his confidence that the virus would continue to spread aboard the ship.¹¹¹ Somehow—precisely how remains unknown—Captain Crozier's email leaked to media outlets. The following day, Naval leadership had most of the crew depart the ship and quarantine on-shore.¹¹²

As a result of the leaked email—and the resulting public embarrassment following the leak—Captain Crozier was relieved of command by the acting Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Thomas Modly. Modly's decision to fire Crozier immediately brought extensive media scrutiny. This scrutiny intensified after released recordings went viral of a speech Modly delivered to the crew where he appeared to criticize Captain Crozier's leadership and another viral video portraying the crew's venerating sendoff of their Captain.¹¹³ The controversy surrounding the incident resulted in Mr. Modly's resignation,

¹¹⁰ Mary Van Beusekom, "COVID-19 Spread Freely Aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt, Report Shows," Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, October 1, 2020, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/10/covid-19-spread-freely-aboard-uss-theodore-roosevelt-report-shows>.

¹¹¹ US Naval Institute, "Timeline: Theodore Roosevelt COVID-19 Outbreak Investigation," USNI News, June 23, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/06/23/timeline-theodore-roosevelt-covid-19-outbreak-investigation>.

¹¹² US Naval Institute.

¹¹³ US Naval Institute.

and by mid-April, 1,200 crew members—including Captain Crozier—testing positive for COVID-19, a number that included the death of one sailor.¹¹⁴

The story consumed the early-April 2020 news cycle and attracted harsh media criticism for its handling.¹¹⁵ The media depiction of the U.S. military’s professionalism—or lack thereof—was a constant theme throughout the story’s coverage. Moreover, these media portrayals of the military at all levels discreetly framed the story to communicate distinct narratives. This case study’s coverage displayed the military with themes of incompetence, disgust, untrustworthiness, pity, reverence, and politicization—all of which run counter to the Huntingtonian model of military professionalism. This chapter will evaluate how these themes came across in the coverage and evaluate them against Huntington’s professional characteristics of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.

B. EXPERTISE: NAVAL LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

One of the most prevalent themes throughout the media coverage of the Captain Crozier affair was the portrayal that both military and civilian leadership were incompetent and incapable of managing American personnel and resources through the ordeal of COVID-19. The media-driven perception that, “The saga has shined a harsh spotlight on Pentagon leadership...[for]...failing to act swiftly and aggressively enough to stop a rapid spread of disease among the carrier’s nearly 5,000-person crew,” persisted throughout the coverage and illustrated a notion that American institutions were ill-prepared for adversity.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Van Beusekom, “COVID-19 Spread Freely.”

¹¹⁵ Thomas Gibbons-Neff et al., “‘There Will Be Losses’: How a Captain’s Plea Exposed a Rift in the Military,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2020, ProQuest; Courtney Mabeus, “How an Island Oasis Became the Navy’s Coronavirus Epicenter: At War,” *New York Times*, April 11, 2020, ProQuest; Eric Schmitt and John Ismay, “He Led a Top Navy Ship. Now He Sits in Quarantine, Fired and Infected.,” *New York Times*, April 5, 2020, ProQuest; Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt, “How a Ship’s Coronavirus Outbreak Became a Moral Crisis for the Military,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest.

¹¹⁶ Paul Sonne, Dan Lamothe, and Alex Horton, “Virus-Stricken Aircraft Carrier Erupts in Applause and Cheers as Ousted Navy Captain Departs: Videos That Emerged on Social Media Showed a Groundswell of Support for Capt. Brett Crozier among the Crew of USS Theodore Roosevelt,” *Washington Post*, April 3, 2020, ProQuest.

The story supposedly represented significant degeneration across the board. According to most media coverage on the subject, the case of USS Roosevelt was merely another sign of the utter incompetence and oversight throughout American institutions—to include the military, federal government, and the elected officials responsible for supervising the crisis.¹¹⁷ This theme of incompetence saturating all levels of American leadership came to define the media coverage—producing a narrative that American leaders were more concerned with covering their failures than protecting Americans from the outbreak.¹¹⁸

Consequently, the media narrative portrayed Captain Crozier as his leadership's scapegoat. In contrast to the broad narrative of American incompetence, much of the coverage depicted the resulting firing of Captain Crozier as punishment for his valiant objection to callous and inadequate senior leadership. As Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt illustrated in the *New York Times*, Captain Crozier's punishment was "viewed by some in the military as indicative of the government's handling of the entire pandemic, with public officials presenting upbeat pictures of the government's response, while contrary voices are silenced."¹¹⁹ It suggested, they continued, "a chilling effect on the willingness of commanders to bring bad news to their superiors."¹²⁰ This portrayal of a lone, heroic dissent from Captain Crozier was typical throughout the story's coverage and communicated that American institutions like the military were unable to perform in the face of adversity, intolerant of dissent, and willing to scapegoat honorable figures such as Captain Crozier.¹²¹ High-ranking military and civilian leaders fared less well. Most were portrayed by the dominant media narrative as more concerned with transferring blame to innocent subordinates such as Captain

¹¹⁷ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Navy May Reinstate Fired Captain to Command of Roosevelt," *New York Times*, April 15, 2020, ProQuest.

¹¹⁸ Eric Schmitt and John Ismay, "Navy Captain, Fired after Dissent, Is Now Sick," *New York Times*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest.

¹¹⁹ Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt, "The Navy Fired the Captain of the Theodore Roosevelt. See How the Crew Responded," *New York Times*, April 3, 2020, ProQuest.

¹²⁰ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt.

¹²¹ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, "How a Ship's Coronavirus Outbreak Became a Moral Crisis for the Military."

Crozier—or external actors like China—for their failures at managing the COVID-19 crisis.¹²²

However, incompetence has consequences. Such media accounts of incompetence regarding the military institution bear great significance because all professional vocations require a vital quality of expertise particular to the craft.¹²³ If the client-society recognizes a lack of expertise on behalf of a professional institution, the public's trust in the profession to uphold its duty will naturally decline. The relationship between a profession and its society mandates that the professional provides a mastery of its craft through prolonged and consistent education and experience.¹²⁴ Similarly, if media coverage shapes the public perception that an institution no longer possesses such mastery, the institution will no longer possess credibility.

The fallout for such perceived ineptitude resulted in death. The media messaging of military and government incompetence grew upon the tragic death of 41-year-old Chief Petty Officer Charles Thacker Jr., a USS Roosevelt crew member.¹²⁵ News of his death added to the media-driven account of institutional incompetence, making a sorrowful situation significantly worse. Stating on April 7, 2020, Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt of the *New York Times* labeled the crisis a “public relations disaster” due to the “bungled response” and even went as far as to declare that the story was a “crisis of morals and morale for the Navy.”¹²⁶ Dan Lamothe, Missy Ryan, and Paul Sonne of *The Washington Post* echoed that USS Roosevelt symbolized a “leadership crisis for the Navy,” and that “the virus has had a major impact on Pentagon operations, halting global movements, delaying training and deployments and, in the case of the Roosevelt, infecting about a

¹²² John Ismay and Geoff Ziezulewicz, “Acting Navy Secretary Slams Fired Captain as ‘Stupid’: At War,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest.

¹²³ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 7.

¹²⁴ Huntington, 7.

¹²⁵ Eric Schmitt, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Helene Cooper, “Sailor on Roosevelt, Whose Captain Pleaded for Help, Dies from Coronavirus,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2020, ProQuest. This view evokes the Hippocratic Oath, “First, do no harm.” Instead, leaders were portrayed as making the situation significantly worse.

¹²⁶ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Acting Navy Secretary Resigns after Outcry Over Criticism of Virus-Stricken Crew,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2020, ProQuest.

quarter of the crew and putting one of a handful of deployed aircraft carriers out of commission for weeks.”¹²⁷ Such coverage communicated that the Navy was incapable of safeguarding its sailors from avoidable death and was unfit to perform basic mission-sets in a state of disorganized chaos.¹²⁸ Some coverage even suggested that the incompetence threatened the stability of civil-military relations. This notion was made worse by remarks from retired Admiral Mike Mullen, stating that the incident “undermines the authority of the military commanders who are trying to take care of their troops, and significantly negatively impacts the willingness of commanders to speak truth to power.”¹²⁹ Ironically, such statements only worsened the narrative of a civil-military crisis.

Disaster became the narrative communicated in these leading publications. Due to this coverage, the readership of these three pre-eminent publications received no counter-narrative other than that American institutions were ill-prepared and left decimated by COVID-19. Such media representation and omission leaves no alternative hypothesis other than that the supposedly professional military could not navigate an adverse—but manageable—situation.¹³⁰ Whether or not these accounts are accurate is still up for debate; however, it is indisputable that these themes arising from such prominent newspapers set the terms of discussion, giving the American populace little alternative than to accept this narrative—as it was the only information at their disposal.¹³¹

Ultimately, the professional military suffered. The depiction of the U.S. military’s failure and incompetence during the COVID-19 crisis aboard the ship—and more broadly in general—contradicts military professionalism’s requirement for superior skill and

¹²⁷ Dan Lamothe, Missy Ryan, and Paul Sonne, “Navy Upholds Firing of Aircraft Carrier Captain Who Pleaded for Help with Coronavirus: The Fallout from Captain Brett Crozier’s Handling of the Outbreak Abroad the USS Theodore Roosevelt Led to a Political Scandal in Washington,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2020, ProQuest.

¹²⁸ Schmitt and Ismay, “He Led a Top Navy Ship.”

¹²⁹ Max Boot, “Capt. Crozier’s Firing Shows the Growing Trumpification of the Military,” *Washington Post*, April 7, 2020, ProQuest.

¹³⁰ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Cooper, “Sailor on Roosevelt.”

¹³¹ David Ignatius, “The Firing of Capt. Crozier Was Meant to Head off Trump,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest.

expertise.¹³² As Huntington reminds, the principal duty of the military profession is to provide expertise in “the management of violence.”¹³³ However, the media depiction of USS Roosevelt characterized neither mastery nor expertise. If the American public were to assess their military based on this case study, a likely verdict would be that minimal skill separates the military from society.

Another prevailing theme throughout the event’s coverage was that senior leaders were so thoroughly out-of-touch with the sailors aboard USS Roosevelt that they willingly prioritized trivial missions over the lives and safety of their service members. Stacie Goddard, William Cameron, and Pierce MacConaghy of *The Washington Post* depicted inconsistent senior Naval leadership as prioritizing unnecessary “presence missions” in Vietnam over the safety of their sailors in the initial days of the COVID-19 outbreak.¹³⁴ This depiction resulted in a media narrative portraying a flawed and dysfunctional Navy command structure primarily concerned with avoiding political embarrassment and prepared to let Captain Crozier—the single leader willing to address the issue—take the fall for their failures.¹³⁵

Characterizations of these ill-placed priorities impacted those most vulnerable. Nancy Youssef and Gordon Lubold of *The Wall Street Journal* reflected this view when stating on April 2, 2020, that “Even then, not all sailors were taken off the ship and sailors and their families felt a lack of urgency.”¹³⁶ While such coverage is understandable due to the undeniable reality that the Navy’s handling of coronavirus was far from perfect, nevertheless absent from the coverage is any admission that nowhere was the handling of

¹³² Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 7.

¹³³ Huntington, 11.

¹³⁴ Stacie Goddard, William Cameron, and Pierce MacConaghy, “The Navy Won’t Reinstate Captain Brett Crozier. There’s More to the Story than the Navy Is Saying,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2020, ProQuest.

¹³⁵ Lindsay Cohn, Alice Friend, and Jim Golby, “This Is What Was so Unusual about the U.S. Navy Making Captain Brett Crozier Step Down,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2020, ProQuest; Wall Street Journal, “Capt. Crozier’s Removal from His Command,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2020, ProQuest.

¹³⁶ Gordon Lubold and Nancy A. Youssef, “Navy Is Removing Captain of Coronavirus-Stricken Aircraft Carrier; Capt. Brett Crozier in Memo Called for Immediate Attention to Outbreak at Sea,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2020, ProQuest.

COVID-19 perfect and that such a global crisis had not occurred in generations. With hindsight—separated from the emotions of the time—it is not surprising that the coronavirus outbreak’s initial treatment was far from ideal. However, the story’s media coverage provided very little recognition of the situation’s complexity and instead proposed a narrative that the American military had bungled a situation with otherwise easy solutions.¹³⁷

Interestingly, very little of the coverage genuinely questioned whether Captain Crozier may have acted wrongly. At the end of the day, Captain Crozier released a widespread unclassified email that somehow reached the press. In a vacuum—although it is still publicly unknown how the email leaked—this is an action that warrants reprimand of some sort, but very little coverage of this perspective was communicated in these prominent publications. Such omission of vital perspectives of a story can significantly shape mass opinion.

However, the dissenting voice came from the wrong place. Strangely, one of the only conflicting opinions supporting the government’s handling of the case came in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* on April 6, 2020, from Thomas Modley, the acting Secretary of the Navy himself.¹³⁸ In the letter, Mr. Modley expressed that Captain Crozier’s actions generated panic and uncertainty in a time of crisis when calm was needed. He went on to explain that Captain Crozier “failed his sailors and the rest of our Navy when he created an atmosphere of crisis, while it was his primary duty to be a steady hand on a stormy sea.”¹³⁹ Ironically—and not surprisingly—this direct communication by the Secretary of the Navy only further alienated military and political leaders. The result was that the *New York Times*’ coverage of the story presented the lone dissenting view coming from a person who *obviously* had something to gain by having that opinion, a look that only served to diminish the credibility of his claims.

¹³⁷ Lubold and Youssef.

¹³⁸ “Captain Crozier: Navy Hero, or Unsteady Leader?,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest.

¹³⁹ *New York Times*.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of news coverage focused on the failures and inherent incompetence of the Navy, Department of Defense, and government institutions rather than the possible errors of a few individuals confronting an incredibly complex problem.¹⁴⁰ The media depiction of Captain Crozier and USS Roosevelt is significant because it demonstrates how a popular narrative can erode the public perception of the professional military. Society needs to trust that its professional military leaders possess elevated expertise and the ability to navigate difficult situations.¹⁴¹ The more that this trust erodes due to negative media representation, the less legitimacy the professional military has in the eyes of society.

C. RESPONSIBILITY: DISGUST AND PERCEIVED COLDNESS

Largely present in this case's media coverage was a tone of disgust towards military leadership. Moreover, a common theme impacting the military's image as a trustworthy and responsible institution was the depiction of senior leadership as indifferent to the well-being of their sailors and prioritizing a meek subservience to President Trump over the suffering of their service members. This narrative places Captain Crozier as a heroic figure who "pleaded for more help fighting a novel coronavirus outbreak aboard his ship" and was "viewed as a hero by his crew for putting their lives above his career" while the sycophantic Secretary of the Navy, "Modly, believing Trump wanted the captain [sic] dismissed, ignored them."¹⁴² Such a narrative depicts a *banality of evil* throughout the military command structure that undoubtedly disgusted many readers. This depiction of unethical leadership at the top of the military hierarchy resulted in Captain Crozier's removal from command, and the crew members of USS Roosevelt left "feeling hopeless."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Eric Schmitt and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Navy Inquiry Faults Two Top Officers Aboard Roosevelt for Handling of Virus," *New York Times*, June 19, 2020, ProQuest.; Goddard, Cameron, and Pierce MacConaghy, "The Navy Won't Reinstate Captain Brett Crozier." As news cycle bypassed the story of Captain Crozier, later coverage became more dispassionate and less focused on the crumbling of American institutions.

¹⁴¹ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*: 11.

¹⁴² Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, "Navy May Reinstate Fired Captain."

¹⁴³ Mabeus, "How an Island Oasis Became the Navy's Coronavirus Epicenter."

This “hopelessness” was represented as a creation of poor military leadership. The bureaucratic and cruel representation of Navy leadership emphasized a crony dynamic among civilian and military leaders aspiring to impress President Trump—acting as yes-men seeking to gain his favor.¹⁴⁴ This narrative pointed to reckless governmental waste (SECNAV’s “round-trip flight to Guam, at the cost of \$243,116.65”), vulgar leadership (SECNAV “called Captain Crozier either ‘too naïve’ or ‘too stupid’ to command an aircraft carrier”), and an overall betrayal of American public trust that their leaders were operating with the best of intentions.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Captain Crozier’s depiction was that he was fired, infected with coronavirus, and betrayed by careerist senior leadership who prioritized the president’s wishes over their moral compass.¹⁴⁶ This media portrayal continued well after the initial breaking of the story, as the Roosevelt’s deployment extended to satisfy the seemingly contradictory desires of its leadership.¹⁴⁷ As Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Eric Schmidt of the *New York Times* described it, “although one crew member said that it most likely had to do with the Navy’s desire to simultaneously deploy three nuclear-powered carriers in the Western Pacific for a symbolic show of American might and a photo op.”¹⁴⁸ Not mentioned in the coverage was the regularity that extensions and mission changes occur for ships like the Roosevelt.

The participation of ex-service members did not help this representation. The media coverage presented an overt betrayal of trust, which was—yet again—made more damaging by the participation of former military members. As Dan Lamothe, Missy Ryan, and Paul Sonne illustrated in *The Washington Post*, “‘I’m appalled,’ said Brett Odom, a former Navy officer and friend of Crozier’s. ‘I think it’s very clear that once you’ve got more than two stars, you’re untouchable in the Navy.’”¹⁴⁹ The consensus media depiction of the story illustrated a military that was unfit to carry out its responsibility to the

¹⁴⁴ Gibbons-Neff et al., “‘There Will Be Losses.’”

¹⁴⁵ Gibbons-Neff et al.

¹⁴⁶ Schmitt and Ismay, “He Led a Top Navy Ship.”

¹⁴⁷ Schmitt and Gibbons-Neff, “Navy Inquiry Faults Two Top Officers.”

¹⁴⁸ Schmitt and Gibbons-Neff.

¹⁴⁹ Lamothe, Ryan, and Sonne, “Navy Upholds Firing of Aircraft Carrier Captain.”

American population. As Nancy Youssef and Gordon Lubold of *The Wall Street Journal* quoted “Ret. Navy Capt. Bill Cameron” on April 3, 2020, “This looks like [Naval leaders] don’t want to hear the truth.”¹⁵⁰

Another dominant theme throughout the media coverage surrounding this story was the unprofessional conduct by the acting Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Thomas Modly. Most media depictions portrayed Mr. Modly as the ultimate sycophant, acting solely to impress the president and even firing Captain Crozier due to “believing Trump wanted the captain dismissed.”¹⁵¹ Additionally, the media narrative highlighted his interactions with the crew of USS Roosevelt, depicting him as insensitive and contemptuous toward the sailors.¹⁵² Frequent quotations attributed to Mr. Modly throughout the story’s coverage were his characterizations of Captain Crozier as “naive” and “stupid.”¹⁵³ This behavior—coupled with the media’s reverential treatment of Captain Crozier—made Mr. Modly an easy target for ridicule, a dynamic which presented its own challenge to civil-military relations.

Modly evolved into a villain in the narrative. Calling it “another chapter in the hollowing out of the Navy’s leadership, in particular under the Trump administration,” Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmidt, and John Ismay of the *New York Times* reported that “Mr. Modly...was keenly aware that his predecessor in the job had been fired after tangling with Mr. Trump. But in trying to please the president, Mr. Modly miscalculated and destroyed his own career.”¹⁵⁴ The media seemingly chose the acting Secretary of the Navy as the story’s predominant *bad guy* for his innate likeness as a yes-man, his awkward interactions with ordinary sailors, and his tendency to blame others (including China and Captain Crozier) rather than accepting responsibility himself.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Nancy A. Youssef and Gordon Lubold, “Captain Fired by Navy Gets Rousing Farewell from Sailors; Videos Show How Capt. Crozier Walked down Gangplank of the USS Theodore Roosevelt to Cheers,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2020, ProQuest; Ignatius, “The Firing of Capt. Crozier.”

¹⁵¹ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Navy May Reinstate Fired Captain.”

¹⁵² “Capt. Crozier, Navy Leadership and a Coronavirus Controversy, Explained” (WP Company, April 7, 2020), ProQuest.

¹⁵³ Washington Post.

¹⁵⁴ Gibbons-Neff et al., “There Will Be Losses.”

¹⁵⁵ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, “How a Ship’s Coronavirus Outbreak Became a Moral Crisis for the Military.”

John Ismay and Geoff Ziezulewicz' reporting in the *New York Times* even went as far as to claim that Mr. Modly—of whom they quoted a crew member describe as “whiny, upset, irritated, [and] condescending”—had effectively widened a schism between the Trump administration and the uniformed military.¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, portrayals of this behavior pointed to more significant ramifications. Because Mr. Modly was an appointed civilian and not a uniformed military member, he became a token of the endangered status of American civil-military relations and employed as evidence that American institutions were fracturing.¹⁵⁷ The perceptions that the SECNAV readily employed Captain Crozier as a scapegoat and acted solely to avoid political embarrassment damaged the perception of the professional military—which requires a trust in the competence and intentions of the armed service.¹⁵⁸ As the *Washington Post*'s editorial board declared regarding the “disgraced acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly” on April 16, 2020, “Careers in the Trump administration may be secured by craven declarations of loyalty and frantic efforts to subscribe to his ever-changing whims on policy.”¹⁵⁹ Such statements diminish the respect for positions like the Secretary of the Navy and further degrade the trustworthy image of the professional military. These typical media characterizations of senior leaders conceived a popular narrative that the military institution does not seriously exercise its professional responsibility. Moreover, although Thomas Modley soon left office after the ordeal, instances of perceived untrustworthiness have lasting effects on the institution.

The corrupt civilian leader is often an all-too easy trope to depict. Furthermore, media depictions of out-of-touch military leadership, the behavior of the Secretary of the Navy, and the perceived injustice done to Captain Crozier all culminate to erode the American military's perception as a professional body. Military professionalism requires

¹⁵⁶ Ismay and Ziezulewicz, “Acting Navy Secretary Slams Fired Captain.”

¹⁵⁷ David Ignatius, “Inside the Ouster of Capt. Brett Crozier,” *Washington Post*, April 4, 2020, ProQuest. The Secretary of the Navy also received depictions as just another addition to the Trump administration's “revolving door of appointees” to administer a “bungled response” to the COVID outbreak. See, Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Acting Navy Secretary Resigns.”

¹⁵⁸ Ignatius, “The Firing of Capt. Crozier.”

¹⁵⁹ “Mr. Modly's Naivete,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 2020, ProQuest.

that the American military reflect society's values and live up to an ethical standard.¹⁶⁰ Because of this, the most fundamental feature of the military profession is its ethical responsibility placed upon them by society.¹⁶¹ Moral trust and societal responsibility are easy to lose and very difficult to win back, and anytime the public loses faith in the military as a trustworthy institution, the status as a professional body erodes with it.

D. CORPORATENESS: PITY, REVERENCE, AND THE MILITARY PROFESSIONAL AS A PARTISAN TOOL

Throughout the coverage of this case there was a sense of pity placed upon Captain Crozier and the ship's crew by the dominant media narrative. While being pitied by the public does not necessarily lower public opinion or trust in the military, it certainly degrades the military's professional perception. Professionalism demands an earned respect of an institution's standards and discipline—not pity for its victim status. Even if the portrayal of pity towards service members does not lower public opinion, it degrades the perception of military professionalism because the two notions are incompatible.

From the earliest news coverage, Captain Crozier and his sailors were portrayed as entirely powerless to their circumstances. The most common theme throughout the coverage was that Captain Crozier and his sailors were being “punished” by their superiors' indifference and disregard.¹⁶² The thousands of sailors aboard the ship were typically homogenized and simplified into a vulnerable group stuck “feeling hopeless” and trapped aboard a virus-infested USS Roosevelt.¹⁶³ Portrayed as powerless and exposed—the sailors' depictions were as victims caught in the middle of a struggle between their heroic Captain and the vindictive senior naval and political leadership.¹⁶⁴ The media representation of the sailors defined them as trapped aboard the Roosevelt while unfeeling

¹⁶⁰ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 10.

¹⁶¹ Huntington, 9.

¹⁶² Tweed Roosevelt, “Captain Crozier Is a Hero,” *New York Times*, April 3, 2020, ProQuest.

¹⁶³ Mabeus, “How an Island Oasis Became the Navy's Coronavirus Epicenter.”

¹⁶⁴ Gibbons-Neff et al., ““There Will Be Losses.””

leadership ignored Captain Crozier's pleas that his "sailors don't need to die."¹⁶⁵ While there is likely considerable truth to this depiction—as numerous sailors *did* contract COVID-19, including one tragic death—the vast majority of media coverage solely depicted an oversimplified and helpless mass of sailors and denied any nuance or agency to the situation. As a result, this overwhelming tone of pity became synonymous with the sailors within the story.

Media depictions framed the sailors as victims of cronyism, incompetence, and the callousness of Naval leadership and the Trump administration.¹⁶⁶ As Eric Schmitt and John Ismay put it in the *New York Times*, the Roosevelt crew were "trapped in a petri dish of a warship" while senior political and military leaders denied that anything was wrong.¹⁶⁷ While having their support for Captain Crozier being scolded by the Secretary of the Navy as "naïve" and "stupid," the crew of USS Roosevelt was portrayed as receiving criminal treatment by their leadership while COVID-19 cases mounted and their superiors pretended that everything was fine.¹⁶⁸ The pathos of this theme was incredibly compelling, with provocative statements in the coverage such as "disease-threatened aircraft carrier," "Crozier sent an emotional email pleading for help," and article titles like "The firing of Capt. Crozier was meant to head off Trump."¹⁶⁹ There was no question in the coverage of the story that senior military and political leadership were the *bad guys*, and the sailors aboard the Roosevelt were the victimized and helpless *good guys*.

However, this pitiful treatment did nothing to reinforce civil-military relations or professionalism. The pitying tone toward the sailors aboard the Roosevelt is antithetical to military professionalism and degrades the perception that service members are esteemed individuals who do not want society's pity. Admittedly, pity is better than the alternatives of disgust or incompetence, but it nevertheless diminishes the perception that the professional military can take care of itself and its mission. Military professionalism does

¹⁶⁵ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Cooper, "Sailor on Roosevelt."

¹⁶⁶ Schmitt and Ismay, "He Led a Top Navy Ship."

¹⁶⁷ Schmitt and Ismay.

¹⁶⁸ Ismay and Ziezulewicz, "Acting Navy Secretary Slams Fired Captain."

¹⁶⁹ Ignatius, "The Firing of Capt. Crozier."

not allow for a victim-status that enables pity from society.¹⁷⁰ If service members are worthy of pity, then they are also incapable of upholding their responsibility to society. The professional military is better off without pitiful media depictions because they contradict what the military seeks to embody.

Equally as common as the pitying portrayal of the crew were the reverential and heroic depictions of Captain Crozier. This near-consensus form of hero-worship placed Captain Crozier as the unmistakable *good guy*—looking out for ordinary people’s well-being. One notable and overt example of this reverence came from the great-grandson of Teddy Roosevelt and labeled Captain Crozier as a “hero” in the article’s title.¹⁷¹ Without subtlety, the column associates Captain Crozier to President Theodore Roosevelt and likens TR’s actions during The Spanish American War to Crozier’s during the COVID-19 outbreak. Additional coverage illustrated that Captain Crozier was “viewed as a hero by his crew for putting their lives above his career.”¹⁷² This narrative—coupled with the pitying coverage of the crew—communicated that Crozier was a noble figure standing up to brutal leadership.

The coverage made it abundantly clear that Captain Crozier willingly sacrificed his career to protect his sailors. As Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmidt, and John Ismay of the *New York Times* stated, Captain Crozier understood the ramifications to his career, and “He hit ‘send’ anyway.”¹⁷³ The media coverage left no doubt that Crozier received overwhelming adoration from his crew—who fervently chanted his name as he departed the ship following his dismissal.¹⁷⁴ As a viral video circulated showing the crew of the Roosevelt giving Captain Crozier a “send-off for the ages” for “putting their safety ahead of his career,” it became clear in the media coverage that there was a struggle between senior leaders in the Trump administration versus the common people (the

¹⁷⁰ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 10.

¹⁷¹ Tweed Roosevelt, “Captain Crozier Is a Hero.”

¹⁷² Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Navy May Reinstate Fired Captain.”

¹⁷³ Gibbons-Neff et al., “There Will Be Losses.”

¹⁷⁴ Gibbons-Neff et al.

sailors).¹⁷⁵ This depiction of a power struggle made Crozier a natural choice as the leader of the “resistance” against abusive authority.¹⁷⁶

It is unclear whether any of this was Captain Crozier’s actual intention. Nevertheless, the media narrative of the heroic figure standing up to tyranny dominated the coverage.¹⁷⁷ In this sense, the reverential hero-worship of Captain Crozier quickly evolved into a means for partisan ends. Without their permission or initial awareness, Captain Crozier and his sailors were made into symbols by the media and used as evidence of dissent against the political leadership.¹⁷⁸ Examples of this partisan framing of the story appear in pieces with titles such as “Trump’s Actions Rattle the Military World: ‘I Can’t Support the Man,’” where the plight of Captain Crozier and his crew function as further evidence that the uniformed military was a dissenting force against the president.¹⁷⁹ This narrative was likely never Captain Crozier’s intention, but the reverential depiction and status as a popular hero made him a convenient tool in the culture wars of American domestic politics.¹⁸⁰ This media depiction thrust the American military into partisan politics and threatened the civil-military balance in the United States. In a presidential election year, the character of Captain Crozier presented the media’s perfect *Man In the Arena* in a manufactured resistance against the incumbent president.¹⁸¹

Once characterized as a hero, Crozier became useful in the partisan debate. In a situation where leaders at all levels confronted a nearly impossible task, the narrative

¹⁷⁵ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, “The Navy Fired the Captain.”

¹⁷⁶ Schmitt and Ismay, “He Led a Top Navy Ship.”

¹⁷⁷ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, “How a Ship’s Coronavirus Outbreak Became a Moral Crisis for the Military.”

¹⁷⁸ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Acting Navy Secretary Resigns.”

¹⁷⁹ Jennifer Steinhauer, “Trump’s Actions Rattle the Military World: ‘I Can’t Support the Man,’” *New York Times*, June 12, 2020, ProQuest.

¹⁸⁰ “The Irony in the Crozier Affair,” *Washington Post*, June 25, 2020, ProQuest.

¹⁸¹ “Covid-19 Is Our Common Enemy, but Not Everyone Is Handling It Right,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest; See, Theodore Roosevelt, “The Man in the Arena,” *Speech given at the Sorbonne, Paris*, 1910.

around the story became simplified and reduced into ammunition for partisan politics. As Paul Waldman put it in *The Washington Post*, “Make Trump look bad? You’ll get fired.”¹⁸² Moreover, Captain Crozier’s reverential treatment and heroic comparisons to Theodore Roosevelt made him the perfect instrument against the current presidential administration.¹⁸³ His heroic depictions made the story more salacious and effectively evoked a sense of injustice towards the administration. As Nancy Youssef and Gordon Lubold quoted a sailor’s family member as saying in *The Wall Street Journal*, “He was only looking out for his sailors and this is what happens to him. It’s all about covering up for themselves.”¹⁸⁴

However, these impressions only served the publications creating them. Ironically, while the media repeatedly proclaimed that the Trump administration was merely sacrificing Captain Crozier to cover their own mistakes, the media also—if not more so—utilized the Captain as a means to an end. Immediately upon the story breaking, it became clear that Captain Crozier emerged as a heroic figure in the narrative.¹⁸⁵ As a result, he was quickly utilized as a tool for political purposes until his utility had run out. This narrative undermines the military’s corporate and professional ethos by pitting service members like Captain Crozier against their political leadership. If Captain Crozier is the unmistakable *good guy*, then there must be a *bad guy*. Moreover, whether overtly stated or insinuated, the *bad guys* in the narrative were consistently the senior military and political leaders.

The most significant theme from Captain Crozier and USS Roosevelt was the immediate thrust into partisan politics. The pitying and reverential depictions of Captain Crozier and his crew intensified due to their political convenience as rhetorical tools in the culture wars. This story pervaded the news cycle and gained input from relevant political

¹⁸² Paul Waldman, “Make Trump Look Bad? You’ll Get Fired,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 2020, ProQuest.

¹⁸³ “Captain Crozier Followed USNS Roosevelt’s Namesake,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2020, ProQuest.

¹⁸⁴ Lubold and Youssef, “Navy Is Removing Captain of Coronavirus-Stricken Aircraft Carrier.”

¹⁸⁵ Youssef and Lubold, “Captain Fired by Navy Gets Rousing Farewell from Sailors.”

figures, including the president, numerous members of Congress, and presidential candidates (including now President Biden). The convenient media framing of Captain Crozier and his sailors resisting the Trump administration's incompetence and cronyism perfectly fit the intentions of partisan actors. The narrative of these three leading publications portrayed that Crozier spoke out against President Trump and his obsequious cabinet members in the act of "speaking truth to power"—signifying a failing administration. This narrative was not at all the intention of Captain Crozier or the sailors of USS Roosevelt, but they found themselves thrust into political dynamics that had the potential to quickly erode American civil-military relations.

Inevitably, the coverage found a way to implicate the President directly. A prominent narrative throughout the story was that the only reason Captain Crozier lost his job was that the Secretary of the Navy—and other appointees in the Trump administration—believed that President Trump wanted him fired.¹⁸⁶ As Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmidt, and John Ismay of the *New York Times* confidently proclaimed, "The secretary, Thomas B. Modly, removed the captain because he thought that was what President Trump wanted."¹⁸⁷ While such assertions may possibly contain truthful elements, it is clear is that the complete account was routinely withheld by the media. The notion that President Trump pressured his cabinet members to remove Captain Crozier was—while also perfectly within his Constitutional authority—speculation that was nonetheless presented as the definitive account of the story. Such depictions leave very little room for uncertainty or nuance and overtly frame the military on one side of the political debate. This manner of commentary placed military members against the Trump administration with statements such as, "If the commander is looking out for you and doesn't go about it the right way, he's going to get punished. It's dangerous, it's going to impact morale and retention rates."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, "Navy May Reinstate Fired Captain."

¹⁸⁷ Gibbons-Neff et al., "There Will Be Losses."

¹⁸⁸ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, "The Navy Fired the Captain."

Captain Crozier's heroic media status became a natural protagonist in partisan politics. His reverential treatment magnified this partisan outcome because of his portrayal as the unmistakable *good guy* that was punished by the Trump administration to "[Sit] in Quarantine, Fired and Infected."¹⁸⁹ This simple narrative refused to acknowledge any successes by Navy leadership or the Trump administration and equally refused to acknowledge any possible failures by Captain Crozier and the officers aboard the Roosevelt. The media's narrow framing manifested a "schism between a commander in chief with little regard for the military's chain of command and the uniformed Navy that is sworn to follow him."¹⁹⁰ The standard media narrative aggressively suggested that military members generally detested President Trump and especially disdained the Secretary of the Navy, whom John Ismay and Geoff Ziezulewicz of the *New York Times* quoted a sailor describing as "whiny, upset, irritated, [and] condescending."¹⁹¹ One *New York Times* article by Jonathan Stevenson even suggested that this specific instance had caused President Trump to lose support from the military.¹⁹² Such partisanship directly contradicts the ideals of military professionalism and overtly degrades civil-military relations. Public pronouncements which purposely appropriate the military and its members as political tools endanger the military's reputation and credibility as a professional institution.

This story's coverage thoroughly dragged the military into domestic partisan politics. Opportunistically, media coverage used this story as a chance to make the case that President Trump had been *especially* harmful to the troops and that military members were turning their back on him and his party.¹⁹³ Such overt generalizations did not produce supporting evidence, polling, or data other than anecdotal quotations, yet this messaging still firmly placed the military against President Trump and the entire Republican party.

¹⁸⁹ Schmitt and Ismay, "He Led a Top Navy Ship."

¹⁹⁰ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, "How a Ship's Coronavirus Outbreak Became a Moral Crisis for the Military."

¹⁹¹ Ismay and Ziezulewicz, "Acting Navy Secretary Slams Fired Captain."

¹⁹² Jonathan Stevenson, "The Commander in Chief's Following Wanes," *New York Times*, May 18, 2020, ProQuest.

¹⁹³ Steinhauer, "Trump's Actions Rattle the Military World."

Unsubtle framing of the story with statements like “Trump made clear his distaste for Crozier and his plea for help” and article titles like “Capt. Crozier’s firing shows the growing Trumpification of the military,” clearly illustrated that the military—which experiences relatively high approval among the population—was dissenting and displaying distaste for the president and his administration.¹⁹⁴ Such an obvious narrative of *good* versus *bad* created convenient opportunities for political clout—from which political figures could not help but opportunistically benefit.¹⁹⁵

While this case study did not bring catastrophic results to the military’s reputation as a professional institution, it reveals how easily the media injects the military into a partisan context. While most scholars acknowledge that military strategy and the armed service are inherently *political*, a healthy military institution cannot afford to become *partisan* under any circumstances. The ease with which the military was unwillingly drawn into partisan politics should concern military leaders. In this case study, most depictions of military members were as the *good guys*; however, there is no guaranteeing this dignified status in future cases, as the media holds no loyalty to the military or any other institution over its own interests. The same actors who praised and took sides with the military in this case study will just as quickly turn their back and condemn the military and its members once it becomes politically beneficial. The only people who will protect the military institution and seek to uphold its professional status are military members themselves, and they must overtly counteract any efforts by outside actors to politicize their institution.

E. CONCLUSION

The incompetence of the American military was emphasized and made front and center throughout the coverage of this case.¹⁹⁶ All three publications depicted senior naval leadership, civilian leadership, and the Department of Defense as utterly incompetent and unable to manage American lives through the adversity of COVID-19. This projection

¹⁹⁴ Ignatius, “The Firing of Capt. Crozier”; Boot, “Capt. Crozier’s Firing.”

¹⁹⁵ Sonne, Lamothe, and Horton, “Virus-Stricken Aircraft Carrier Erupts.”

¹⁹⁶ Schmitt and Ismay, “Navy Captain, Fired after Dissent, Is Now Sick.”

erodes the image of the American military profession by presenting it as lacking expertise and incapable of fulfilling its most basic duties.

The coverage of this story was likewise thoroughly saturated with a tone of disgust—specifically towards senior military and civilian leaders.¹⁹⁷ Senior military leadership’s depiction was callous towards the suffering of the sailors, and senior civilian leaders received portrayals as sycophants who would readily allow sailors to die to please the president. Criticism of Captain Crozier’s treatment provoked harsh criticism and presented the American military as lacking a moral compass.

Other themes in the coverage contrasted portrayals of pity and reverence toward Captain Crozier and the sailors aboard USS Roosevelt—with serious political ramifications.¹⁹⁸ They were pitied due to their helplessness in their circumstances and victimization by callous senior leadership. The reverential treatment appeared in heroic portrayals of Crozier “speaking truth to power” by publicly disagreeing with their superiors. These descriptions effectively thrust the military into partisan politics and enabled their employment by others as instruments for political purposes. The caricatures of the pitied crew and revered Captain Crozier became rhetorical tools for political figures seeking to gain influence or diminish the opposition’s reputation. This placement into partisan conflict directly contradicts the ideals of military professionalism and presents the possibility for great harm done to American civil-military relations.

Noticeable throughout the coverage was the framing that the media consistently utilized regarding how to present this story. Precisely, the power of omission—not necessarily facts, but perspectives—can powerfully shape the reader’s judgment. Examples such as the perspective that Captain Crozier may have possibly misjudged the situation and overreacted were almost entirely omitted from the story’s coverage.¹⁹⁹ This framing by

¹⁹⁷ Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, and Schmitt, “How a Ship’s Coronavirus Outbreak Became a Moral Crisis for the Military.”

¹⁹⁸ Gibbons-Neff et al., “There Will Be Losses.”

¹⁹⁹ William J. Toti, “A Failure of Discipline under Capt. Crozier’s Command,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2020, ProQuest. One of the few alternate perspectives stated, “this event’s legacy also includes thousands, military and civilian, beguiled into rooting for an ineffective form of leadership, a loss of faith in a chain of command that was never properly invoked, and a horrified home front—not to mention media

omission manipulates the discourse surrounding the story to convey a specific narrative that utilizes *facts*—but is not concerned with *truth*. Such coverage as seen in this case study tends to divide audiences and produce media revenue based on controversy and emotion. Moreover, when the media inserts the military onto one side of an argument, half of the American population will inevitably be on the other side of the debate. This placement on a *side* is an inherently unprofessional depiction of the military because the American armed services do not represent half—or even a majority of the population—instead, the military serves the *entire* population.

pundits making matters worse by sounding off on issues they don't understand.” This view, however, represented a small minority of the coverage and was buried under headlines placing guilt on the president.

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V. DABBLING IN THE RUBICON: CALAMITY AND DISGUST AT LAFAYETTE SQUARE

A. CASE SUMMARY: A POWDER KEG SUMMER WITH GENERALS AT THE CENTER

On June 1, 2020, in Washington, D.C., during the demonstrations following the death of George Floyd, police and the D.C. National Guard employed tear gas and riot-control tactics to remove protesters from Lafayette Square and the neighboring area.²⁰⁰ That evening, President Donald Trump and members of his administration marched from the White House to St. John's Church, adjacent to Lafayette Square. Once at the Church, President Trump posed for a photo holding a Bible in front of the church's parish house that had been set on fire during demonstrations the previous night.²⁰¹ Before he visited the church, the President delivered a speech imploring state governors to suppress violent demonstrations and rioting by employing the National Guard to "dominate the streets." Otherwise, the President suggested, he would deploy the U.S. military and "quickly solve the problem for them."²⁰² At the photo-op, the President was accompanied by, inter alia, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and General Mark Milley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.²⁰³ The two men's presence at the incident, the employment of the D.C. National Guard, and the tactics used to quell the protests became central to a national dialogue regarding the event.

These events at Lafayette Square received wide condemnation by prominent media outlets and quickly became a major focus of the news cycle, attracting harsh criticism for its militant character and friction with First Amendment rights. The presence of an ostensibly non-partisan military figure made for added controversy. General Milley later apologized for

²⁰⁰ Ted Johnson, "Park Police Claim That Protesters Threw Projectiles at Lafayette Square Park, but Reporters Say They Saw Peaceful Demonstration," *Deadline*, June 2, 2020, <https://deadline.com/2020/06/donald-trump-george-floyd-demonstrators-lafayette-square-park-1202949717/>.

²⁰¹ Tom Gjelten, "Peaceful Protesters Tear-Gassed to Clear Way for Trump Church Photo-Op," *NPR*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/01/867532070/trumps-unannounced-church-visit-angers-church-officials>.

²⁰² Jill Colvin and Darlene Superville, "Tear Gas, Threats for Protesters before Trump Visits Church," *Associated Press*, June 1, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-ap-top-news-dc-wire-religion-politics-15be4e293cdebe72c10304fe0ec668e4>.

²⁰³ Cooper, "Milley Apologizes for Role in Trump Photo Op," June 11, 2020.

his presence at Lafayette Square, and numerous retired and current military members publicly denounced the event, emphatically condemning the incident and conduct of the President.²⁰⁴

At the time of the initial news cycle, June 2020, the coverage of Lafayette Square was nearly unanimous in the assertion that the military and police had forcibly cleared protesters for the sake of the President's photo-op at St. John's Church.²⁰⁵ Over a year later, reports surfaced that protestors were, in fact, *not* cleared for Trump's photo but rather for reasons unrelated to the President.²⁰⁶ The accepted assumptions throughout the initial coverage that the government had violently cleared peaceful demonstrations for a staged photo—holding a Bible—instigated harsh condemnation and led to discussions of an American civil-military

²⁰⁴ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Milley, America's Top General, Walks into a Political Battle," *New York Times*, June 5, 2020, ProQuest; David E. Sanger, "Trump and the Military: A Mutual Embrace Might Dissolve on America's Streets," *New York Times*, June 12, 2020, ProQuest; Philip Rucker, Missy Ryan, and Dan Lamothe, "Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders Intensifies as Milley Apologizes for Photo Op: The Admission of Regret from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Capped Nearly Two Weeks of Public Discomfort with and Outright Condemnation of Trump's Leadership amid Nationwide Protests of Racial Injustice from Some of the Nation's Most Revered Military Figures.," *Washington Post*, June 11, 2020, ProQuest; Eric Schmitt, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Peter Baker, "Trump Agrees to Send Home Troops from Washington, Easing Tensions with the Pentagon," *New York Times*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest; Lawrence Roberts, "Who Was Behind the Largest Mass Arrest in U.S. History?," *New York Times*, August 6, 2020, ProQuest; Thomas Gibbons-Neff et al., "Former Commanders Fault Trump's Use of Troops against Protesters," *New York Times*, June 2, 2020, ProQuest; and David E. Sanger and Helene Cooper, "Military Vets Break Silence on President," *New York Times*, June 5, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁰⁵ Gjelten, "Peaceful Protesters Tear-Gassed to Clear Way for Trump Church Photo-Op"; Katie Rogers, "Protesters Dispersed with Tear Gas so Trump Could Pose at Church," *New York Times*, June 1, 2020, ProQuest; Al Jazeera, "In Pictures: Protesters Teargassed for Trump Photo-Op," *Al Jazeera*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2020/6/2/in-pictures-protesters-teargassed-for-trump-photo-op>; and Zach Beauchamp, "Officers Fire Tear Gas on Peaceful Protesters to Clear the Way for Trump's Photo Op," *Vox*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/6/1/21277530/trump-speech-police-violence-dc-tear-gas>.

²⁰⁶ Glenn Greenwald, "Yet Another Media Tale -- Trump Tear-Gassed Protesters For a Church Photo Op -- Collapses," *Substack* (blog), June 6, 2021, <https://greenwald.substack.com/p/yet-another-media-tale-trump-tear>; Al Jazeera, "Trump Photo Op Was Not Reason for Removal of Protesters: Report," *Al Jazeera*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/10/report-concludes-protesters-not-removed-for-trump-photo-op>; Melissa Quinn, "Watchdog Finds Clearing of Protesters from Lafayette Park Wasn't for Trump Photo Op," *CBS News*, June 9, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-photo-op-lafayette-park-protesters-report/>; and Domenico Montanaro, "Watchdog Report Says Police Did Not Clear Protesters to Make Way for Trump Photo-Op," *NPR*, June 9, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/09/1004832399/watchdog-report-says-police-did-not-clear-protesters-to-make-way-for-trump-last->.

crisis. Likewise, concerns over the perception of White House-directed military conduct on American soil—for a Bible-holding photo-op—brought widespread coverage and discussion regarding the domestic use of the armed service and the responsibility of military leaders to navigate the Constitution and their apolitical status. Some of these initial assumptions, however, turned out to be false.

Nevertheless, the story’s treatment from leading media publications was extensive and harsh. Several recurring themes stuck out in the coverage. First, depictions of incompetent military leadership absent-mindedly endangering American democracy were consistently featured. Second, pitiful imagery of junior soldiers frequently occurred, characterizing them as victims of the unjust civilian leadership putting them into such a position. Third, anyone willing to criticize the President typically received reverential treatment—including current and former military personages. Disgust toward the notion of enabling an ostensibly terrible event while endangering the Constitution frequented the coverage. Lastly, a severe degree of partisanship and politicization of the armed service occurred throughout this case study. These themes all exist in tension with the Huntingtonian idea of military professionalism and degrade the military’s perception of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness. The media depictions from this case significantly damaged the military’s image as a professional institution.

B. EXPERTISE: MILITARY INCOMPETENCE AS A THREAT TO THE CONSTITUTION

One of the primary themes throughout the media coverage of the Lafayette Square case study was the depiction of incompetent leadership of General Mark Milley and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. The two leaders were regularly represented as ill-suited for their office and absentmindedly blundering into a civil-military disaster. Moreover, especially before General Milley’s public apology for the incident, the two men received overwhelming media portrayals as subpar sycophants of the Trump administration—falling in line with their leader’s commands and oblivious of their ramifications to the nation. Consider Helene Cooper’s reporting in the *New York Times* that “The General believed that he was accompanying Trump and his entourage to review National Guard troops and other law

enforcement personnel outside Lafayette Square.”²⁰⁷ Such media portrayals conveyed a bewildered tone that such high-ranking individuals could flounder into a constitutional crisis at the President’s direction. Made worse by the General’s later insistence that “he had no prior knowledge of the forcible clearing of Lafayette Square,” the impression that he and Mr. Esper were oblivious of the potential implications of their presence only worsened the media projection of their weak leadership at the head of the military.²⁰⁸ With explanations like “We participated in the walk with the aim of observing damage in Lafayette Square and at St. Johns Church, and meeting with and thanking the National Guard members who were on duty,” General Milley and Secretary Esper clarified their pure intent during the incident; however, these statements exacerbated the media narrative that the military leaders were not in control of or cognizant of their circumstances.²⁰⁹ The media representation communicated that the DOD’s inadequate leadership was too incompetent to avoid walking themselves into a compromising position that placed the nation’s current and future stability in jeopardy. Even after the public denouncement of their actions, the two men remained easy targets of media ridicule as followers of the Presidential administration willing to endanger the nation’s well-being rather than disappoint their boss.²¹⁰

Some reporting went further, suggesting that General Milley was neither originally intended nor suited to serve as the CJCS. Despite the General’s impressive credentials, media depictions contended that he only received the appointment to his position out of blind obedience to President Trump and the President’s vindictive attitude towards the former Secretary of Defense James Mattis—who supported an alternative Officer for the role.²¹¹ Such framing that General Milley was undeserving of his office made for easy depictions that

²⁰⁷ Cooper, “Milley Apologizes for Role in Trump Photo Op,” June 11, 2020.

²⁰⁸ Tom Jackman and Carol D. Leonnig, “Witness Casts Doubt on Lafayette Square Claims,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁰⁹ J. M. Rieger, “How the Trump Administration Has Tried to Explain Clearing Protesters from Lafayette Square,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 2020, ProQuest.

²¹⁰ Dan Lamothe, “Pentagon’s Top General Apologizes for Appearing alongside Trump in Lafayette Square,” *Washington Post*, June 11, 2020, ProQuest.

²¹¹ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Milley, America’s Top General.”

he “has quickly become the face of what could amount to the American military’s fall from public grace, to levels not seen since the Vietnam War.”²¹²

This media representation of Secretary Esper and General Milley’s incompetence attracted bipartisan criticism. For example, notable conservative writer George Will marveled “that specimens such as Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper and Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman [sic] of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have reached positions of considerable responsibility in today’s government.”²¹³ Mr. Will additionally declared that past American military leaders such as Dwight D. Eisenhower would not have accompanied President Trump at Lafayette Square and that the actions reflect a moral bankruptcy and total inadequacy.²¹⁴ Accompanied by comparisons of President Trump to Julius Caesar (no less), Mr. Will and other media members frequently emphasized the historically shameful nature of the event and the depravity of those involved.²¹⁵ The sentiment expressed in the media was that the nation was enduring possible Republic-ending trauma while under the direction of mediocre men communicated reason to fear the future and lose faith in American institutions—including the military.²¹⁶ Media representation following Lafayette Square made clear that the nation was in imminent peril due to placement a few ill-equipped and average individuals into leadership positions.²¹⁷

When comparing Huntington’s conception of military professionalism to the tone of incompetence surrounding Lafayette Square, the media’s representation of military shortcomings becomes self-evident. In its ideal form, a military professional is intellectual

²¹² Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff.

²¹³ George F. Will, “The Same Damn Thing over and Over,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest.

²¹⁴ Will.

²¹⁵ Will. Domestic use of American troops is not new, however. While it always provokes civil-military tension—and is morally debatable—past cases include 1863: The New York City Draft Riots, 1932: MacArthur Disbanding the “Bonus Army,” 1967: Detroit’s 12th Street Riot, 1967: Newark Riots, and 1992: The Los Angeles Riots. Moreover, such domestic military use is dictated by the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 and the Insurrection Act of 1807. Thus, while unsavory and Constitutionally debatable, the domestic use of troops to halt unrest does have *some* precedent.

²¹⁶ Much of the coverage conveyed a feeling of doom regarding the United States. This tone of American decline, comparisons to Cesar, and the insistence that the situation held historical significance undoubtedly had a frightening impression on the American readership.

²¹⁷ Eric Schmitt et al., “Esper Breaks with Trump on Using Troops against Protesters,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2020, ProQuest.

and possesses a vital sense of historical awareness about the proper bounds of civil-military authority.²¹⁸ This ideal dramatically contrasts with the media illustrations of Mr. Esper and General Milley's unawareness of the serious implications of their actions.

C. RESPONSIBILITY: BRUTALITY, AUTHORITARIANISM, AND THE MILITARY IN AMERICAN CITIES

Another theme consistent throughout the coverage of this case study was the impression that Mr. Esper and General Milley were complicit in what was essentially a violation of human and Constitutional rights. This sentiment suggested that not only had the military been thrust into domestic politics, but—even worse—it was involved in outrageous acts of brutal treatment of innocent protesters by the government. Provocative imagery detailing the “gassing of peaceful protesters outside the White House” coupled with the military's presence at the event assured the readers that the armed service was complicit in a horrible event delivering needless human suffering.²¹⁹ Such suffering witnessed “Remnants of gas” leaving countless innocents “coughing and choking” due to the government's actions and the participation of military leadership at the scene.²²⁰ In Aaron Davis' reporting in *The Washington Post*, which included a quote from a source labeling the event a “mass violation of constitutional rights,” military leadership was depicted as on-hand during a “wholesale brutal assault.”²²¹ Graphic depictions of military members taking part in an event “in which federal authorities attacked peaceful protesters so that the president could hold up a Bible in front of St. John's Church” framed the armed service as an organization willing to overstep its bounds to exercise violence onto American citizens.²²² Evocative imagery depicting

²¹⁸ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 8–9.

²¹⁹ “Republican Senators Dodge Questions, Defend Clearing out Peaceful Protesters,” *Washington Post Video*, June 2, 2020, ProQuest.

²²⁰ Philip Bump, “Timeline: The Clearing of Lafayette Square,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2020, ProQuest.

²²¹ Aaron C. Davis et al., “Explanation of Lafayette Square Clearing Disputed,” *Washington Post*, June 15, 2020, ProQuest.

²²² Helene Cooper, “Milley Apologizes for Role in Trump Photo Op: ‘I Should Not Have Been There,’” *New York Times*, June 11, 2020, ProQuest.

“frightened teenagers...sobbing two blocks away” questioned the military’s standing as a trustworthy institution.²²³

Quotations in the *New York Times* from Richard Kohn, “an expert on civil-military relations who is a professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina,” declared that, “There is the stench of authoritarianism and intimidation—and even illegality” insinuated that the events at Lafayette Square were deliberate acts of tyranny on behalf of the White House and its military leaders.²²⁴ This evocative imagery coupled with tone-deaf statements from the President and a contentious editorial by Senator Tom Cotton to “Send In the Troops” only worsened this impression.²²⁵ The widespread messaging of the military’s use to “secure people inside the United States of America” by employing vicious and unconstitutional tactics communicated that the armed service had violated the trust of the American people.²²⁶

The most senior military leadership was seen as wholly complicit in the event. Resulting in near-immediate calls for the resignation of Secretary Esper and General Milley, the two men received extensive media depictions as “toy soldier [s] in the president’s political ops” who threatened democracy and “sparked a national debate about the role of the military in civil society.”²²⁷ Such depictions communicate negative impressions concerning the virtue and trustworthiness of the armed service, a sentiment reflected in reporting by Philip Rucker, Missy Ryan, and Dan Lamothe in *The Washington Post*, which asserted “The perception that

²²³ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Milley, America’s Top General.”

²²⁴ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker, “Trump Agrees to Send Home Troops.”

²²⁵ Tom Cotton, “Tom Cotton: Send in the Troops,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2020, ProQuest
Massive backlash to the piece resulted in a statement by The New York Times proclaiming “that the essay fell short of our standards and should not have been published.” The backlash came from outside readers, public figures, and even “and many Times colleagues.” The NYT statement also says “the published piece presents as facts assertions,” carries “life-and-death” ramifications, and “is needlessly harsh and falls short of the thoughtful approach that advances useful debate.” Overall, the Cotton piece solidified the impression of wanna-be authoritarianism on American streets.

²²⁶ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker, “Trump Agrees to Send Home Troops” As long as military members—especially high-ranking leaders—are depicted by the media as taking part in “violat [ing] protesters’ constitutional rights,” the audience will inevitably lose trust in the whole institution. If the public perception of the military becomes that it is willing and able to participate in the mistreatment of American citizens protesting on American streets, then there is no remaining room for the label of “professional.”; See, Spencer S. Hsu and Peter Hermann, “Suit: D.C. Police Helped Clear Lafayette Square by Force,” *Washington Post*, July 9, 2020, ProQuest.

²²⁷ “Mark Milley Should Resign,” *Washington Post*, June 15, 2020, ProQuest.

Pentagon leaders went along with Trump's desire to use military force against domestic protesters has caused the biggest civil-military crisis in more than a decade."²²⁸ The consistent media depiction that Secretary Esper and General Milley took part in a violation of the Constitution and human rights runs counter to the theory of military professionalism.²²⁹ The military professional operates in a cultural context and must earn its trust from society.²³⁰ When professionals squander their reputation as being trustworthy, they cease to be functionally professional. Moreover, it is a truism of human nature that it takes extended time and repeated proof to earn trust, but it requires only a single breach of trust to lose it.²³¹

Another theme throughout the coverage of Lafayette Square was the notion that the Trump administration was an authoritarian-esque regime propped-up and supported by military leaders such as Secretary Esper in General Milley. Comparisons of Tiananmen Square portrayed the Trump administration as a military-backed regime seeking to crush democracy to pursue fanatical interests.²³² As Adam Taylor's article in *The Washington Post* declared, "This week, global human rights activists are not focused on Tiananmen Square, but on Lafayette Square, outside the White House."²³³

Even months after the Lafayette Square incident, this illustration of glaring tyranny by the highest levels of government continued throughout media depictions. Not-so-subtly, *The Washington Post* printed an op-ed by Dana Milbank titled "This is not a drill. The Reichstag is burning" in which "a top authority on Nazism and Stalinism" proclaimed that "The Reichstag has been on a slow burn since June... The language Trump uses to talk about

²²⁸ Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe, "Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders."

²²⁹ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 9–10.

²³⁰ Huntington, 9.

²³¹ In the United States, the government maintains a monopoly on the authority to employ violence and carries immense responsibility to the public to perform its function only in service to the American people. Depictions of Lafayette Square contradict this principle of societal responsibility, thus violating a basic tenet of professionalism. See, Huntington, 9–10.

²³² Adam Taylor, "From Tiananmen Square to Lafayette Square," *Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest.

²³³ Taylor.

Black Lives Matter and the protests is very similar to the language Hitler used.”²³⁴ Such associations with Nazism and the burning of the Reichstag is severe enough language to frighten the most even-keeled of readers. With the military depicted as enabling a White House’s “abuse of power” on par with the CCP, Nazi Germany, and the Kremlin, the media illustrated a present-day American authoritarian regime sanctioned by the armed service, which was indifferent to the suffering of the people.²³⁵

Such tyranny was portrayed as being enabled by military leaders. The repetition of the explicit messaging that the most senior military leaders were mere “sycophants and enablers” facilitating a “sashay of shame across Lafayette Square” defies the concept of an apolitical military and communicates to the readership that the Department of Defense was embracing the authority of a would-be-dictator.²³⁶ Labeling the incident an “assault” on American citizens—media depictions consistently expressed that the “aggressive tactics” employed on protesters had been “Ordered to Appease Trump.”²³⁷ As Max Fisher’s column in the *New York Times* asserted while describing President Trump as “A Strongman Imposing Order,” the president had appropriated “the military to serve as a personal shock force.”²³⁸ The image of Lafayette Square consistently depicted by the media to the American public was of “Trump rallying the military to his side” and employing “a playbook used by the very strongmen he has praised.”²³⁹

²³⁴ Dana Milbank, “This Is Not a Drill. The Reichstag Is Burning,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2020, ProQuest.

²³⁵ Radley Balko, “Real Police Reform Begins with Lafayette Square,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 2020, ProQuest.

²³⁶ Max Boot, “The Entire Republican Party Is Complicit in the Assault on Lafayette Square,” *Washington Post*, June 3, 2020, ProQuest The irony of this media messaging is that the news coverage itself is what injures civil-military relations more than the actual events. There is an “alternate universe” where the media covers this event without evoking visions of the CCP, Kremlin, or the burning of the Reichstag. Instead, what occurred was that the media consistently characterized the military as complicit in enabling an American dictatorship, which then in-turn has a self-actualizing effect of creating a civil-military crisis.

²³⁷ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt, and Helene Cooper, “Aggressive Tactics by National Guard, Ordered to Appease Trump, Wounded the Military, Too,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2020, ProQuest.

²³⁸ Max Fisher, “Trump Tests a Role He’s Long Admired: A Strongman Imposing Order,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest.

²³⁹ Fisher.

Milley fared poorly in these accounts. In a column from *The Washington Post's* editorial board titled "The Battle of Lafayette Square," the account declared the American public was witnessing the "undermining of American democracy" and that "We cannot rely on the military's refusal to deploy against American citizens."²⁴⁰ Such depictions regularly emphasized that General Milley arrived at Lafayette Square donning "battle fatigues"—which are coincidentally also his everyday office uniform—and gave "tangible meaning to the president's threat to deploy the U.S. military to put down 'domestic terror' in the United States" with a "presence [that] also raised questions about the military's role."²⁴¹ This messaging directly illustrated that the American democratic experiment was in immediate danger and at risk of falling into the hands of a military-enabled dictatorship—as evidenced by the participation of the military and its perceived eagerness to deploy force against American citizens. With declarations that "Dictators rule by controlling the 'power ministries'" such as "the domestic police and intelligence services, foreign intelligence services, and armed forces," the media accounts made abundantly clear to the readers that the American military was compromised and willing to partake in a dictatorship.²⁴² Media depictions of "Milley's disturbing compliance" indicated to the reader that the American system was in danger because its military leaders were setting a precedent of involvement in domestic politics which would have long-term implications dangerous to democracy.²⁴³ Characterizations of military participation in a Trump dictatorship communicated to the reader that the apolitical American military was a relic of the past.²⁴⁴ As Robert Kagan suggested in an op-ed in *The Washington Post*, General Milley's presence at Lafayette Square

²⁴⁰ Robert Kagan, "The Battle of Lafayette Square and the Undermining of American Democracy: We Cannot Rely on the Military's Refusal to Deploy against American Citizens," *Washington Post*, June 2, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁴¹ Kagan.

²⁴² Kagan.

²⁴³ Robert Kagan, "Milley's Disturbing Compliance," *Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁴⁴ Kagan.

would likely “turn out to be the first in a series of pictures in some future history text about the undermining of American democracy.”²⁴⁵

Another media theme present throughout the coverage of Lafayette Square was the notion that the incident was a formal military operation staged against American citizens—comparable to a battlefield in Iraq or Afghanistan. Frequent use of Secretary Esper’s quotations to “mass and dominate the battlespace,” were utilized as fitting material to depict senior military leadership as indifferent to human suffering and in breach of their duties.²⁴⁶ With unblushing article titles such as “Trump Uses the Military to Prove His Manhood,” media messaging regularly depicted the White House as working to “turn American cities into Falluja.”²⁴⁷ Moreover, media messaging articulated that the American military had violated its constitutional contract and carried out unjust violence on peaceful protesters—crossing a line that could not be undone. Not helping matters were frequent quotes of the president calling for “retribution” and labeling protesters as “terrorists.”²⁴⁸

If Lafayette Square was a “battlespace,” the armed service became portrayed as the aggressor. In addition to the frequent references to Mr. Esper wanting to “dominate the battlespace” and General Milley’s “combat fatigues” were comparisons to the American Civil War and an overall attitude that the military had been corrupted and employed against American citizens for purely political purposes.²⁴⁹ Military pilots were related as having utilized “standard tactic [s] used by military aircraft in combat zones to scatter insurgents,”

²⁴⁵ Kagan Whether such charges are accurate is irrelevant when reputable publications like the New York Times repeatedly characterize the military as losing the public’s trust. These sorts of statements consistently produced by prominent media outlets have a self-actualizing influence on the audience. If something is asserted by reputable sources often enough, the audience eventually has no choice but to accept that it is presumably correct.

²⁴⁶ Editorial Board, “Gen. Milley’s Apology Shows Respect for the Principles Trump Tramples on: The General Apologizes for Being a Prop in Trump’s Political Show.,” *Washington Post*, June 11, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁴⁷ Nicholas Kristof, “Trump Uses the Military to Prove His Manhood: [Op-Ed],” *New York Times*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest In the media’s efforts to influence the president’s public image—in an election year—the major media institutions effectively smeared the American military’s reputation while using it as a means to an end for the media’s desired narratives—which had nothing to do with the military and more to do with partisan politics.

²⁴⁸ Jonathan Martin, Katie Rogers, and Maggie Haberman, “Trump Calls Protesters ‘Terrorists’ and Urges Governors to Seek ‘Retribution,’” *New York Times*, June 1, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁴⁹ Gibbons-Neff et al., “Former Commanders Fault Trump’s Use.”

and the media commonly referred to the military as acting as President Trump’s personal “palace guard.”²⁵⁰ This media messaging signaled that the American military lacked any pretense of professionalism and was effectively a mafia-style praetorian guard acting on behalf of a single politician.²⁵¹ These depictions suggested that civil-military relations in the United States were irreparably damaged and that the military institution was no longer worthy of trust from the American populace. This media projection that the American military as President Trump’s personal “palace guard”—enabling authoritarianism and unjust violence—is thoroughly incompatible with the notion of military professionalism.²⁵² As reported by Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt, and Helene Cooper in a *New York Times* article titled “Aggressive Tactics by National Guard, Ordered to Appease Trump, Wounded the Military,” there had been a violation of fundamental civil-military relations, and the American military “came to be used to terrorize protesters in Washington.”²⁵³ Depictions of a breach of American founding principles expressed by proclamations that leaders were “symbolically embracing the use of American military forces.....to suppress peaceful protest” communicated to the American public that their military was thoroughly unprofessional and had abused society’s trust.²⁵⁴

Overall, this was a critical blow to the concept of military responsibility. Consistently highlighting General Milley’s “battle fatigues” and “camouflage uniform,” media representation made abundantly clear to the public that it was very likely witnessing “the American military’s fall from public grace, to levels not seen since the Vietnam War.”²⁵⁵ The presence of Secretary Esper and General Milley at Lafayette Square led the media portrayal to make it clear that the public was watching the “corroding [of] the professionalism of the military” and that it “shows the damage this is doing to the covenant between the American

²⁵⁰ Gibbons-Neff et al.

²⁵¹ Gibbons-Neff et al.

²⁵² Gibbons-Neff et al.

²⁵³ Gibbons-Neff, Schmitt, and Cooper, “Aggressive Tactics by National Guard.”

²⁵⁴ Roberts, “Who Was Behind the Largest Mass Arrest.”

²⁵⁵ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Milley, America’s Top General.”

people and the military.”²⁵⁶ Such descriptions overtly declare an erosion of the fundamental principles of military professionalism with the events of the summer of 2020 as evidence. The only client a professional military is authorized to serve is society itself; however, if the military is perceived as willing and capable of conducting violence out of self-interest or the interest of individual politicians, the concept of military professionalism erodes.²⁵⁷

D. CORPORATENESS: “CADET BONE SPURS,” A CHORUS OF RETIRED GENERALS, AND A PUBLIC STRUGGLE AGAINST THE PRESIDENT

Alongside the narrative of military incompetence was a narrative of political misuse—particularly representations of victimization of the military by President Trump. The President was consistently portrayed as disrespectful of the military and its members while placing them in delicate and constitutionally dangerous situations. Frequently depicted as a narcissistic draft-dodger, the media represented the President as the antagonist of military members—who received descriptions as being victimized by the President’s authoritarian temperament.

This angle illustrated service members as helpless victims for their place in the event. Once numerous military figures had publicly condemned the incident—particularly following General Milley’s public apology on June 11—the media coverage began consistently portraying military members in a reverential tone—emphasizing their victimized status at the hands of the President. Characterizing President Trump as an “insult to our men and women in uniform,” media coverage regularly depicted how his actions took advantage of vulnerable military members.²⁵⁸ Describing the President’s view of the military as a “twisted and utterly transactional relationship with America’s armed forces,” Frank Bruni’s op-ed in the *New York Times* alleged that to Trump flag officers “were trophies, their stars and medals merely ornaments on his ego.”²⁵⁹ Thus, while the military had earlier undergone harsh criticism for

²⁵⁶ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker, “Trump Agrees to Send Home Troops” Such statements reveal the media’s ironic lack of awareness because it is the media coverage that chiefly politicizes the military. Media depictions have the power to manufacture the public perception that the military is undermined and no longer a trustworthy institution that can be relied upon to remain apolitical. .

²⁵⁷ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 14–15 In efforts to undermine the Trump administration, the media continued broad-sweeping assertions that the military was a tool of a would-be dictator, regardless of the accuracy or the costs to public perception and civil-military relations.

²⁵⁸ Frank Bruni, “The Court-Martial of Donald J. Trump,” *New York Times*, June 15, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁵⁹ Bruni.

its role at Lafayette Square, once it became clear that several military members publicly criticized the event, the media coverage opportunistically used the armed service's prestige to criticize the President and framed military members as his victims.

Once General Milley issued an apology and publicly condemned Lafayette Square, the media coverage of the General promptly about-faced, depicting him with reverence and pity. After the apology, General Milley received media portrayals as patient, wise, and considerate of civil-military and constitutional principles.²⁶⁰ Common quotations portray him directing National Guard members at Lafayette Square to “ensure that National Guard personnel remained calm, adding that we were there to respect the demonstrators’ First Amendment rights.”²⁶¹ After condemning the events at Lafayette Square, General Milley’s media image quickly metamorphosed from being a criminal violating the Constitution into a noble figure worthy of reverence and respect. Declaring that the General had “for the past 10 days...agonized about appearing,” media depictions quickly changed course to highlight General Milley’s credibility and track record.²⁶² The media’s newfound tone emphasized the General’s intelligence and competence with statements such as “A combat veteran who peppers his speech with references to the history of warfare,” and introduced his family’s military history to highlight his valiant status as an American hero with depictions of when “The General went against the wishes of his own father -- who fought at Iwo Jima as a Marine -- when he joined the Army.”²⁶³ These depictions sharpened the General’s credibility after the previously negative media coverage and portrayed him as a sympathetic figure who deserved better than to be mistreated by the President.

²⁶⁰ Jackman and Leonnig, “Witness Casts Doubt on Lafayette Square Claims.”

²⁶¹ Jackman and Leonnig.

²⁶² Helene Cooper, “General Regrets Joining Photo Op Staged by Trump,” *New York Times*, June 12, 2020, ProQuest. When the General was perceived initially as siding with the President, his media description was as incompetent and corrupt; once the circumstances changed following his public apology, the coverage of the General immediately switched. The media’s complementary representations of military members were applied whenever the serviceman was relevant to the media’s narrative against the President. However, if a military member linked to the story did not publicly condemn the event—such as General Milley earlier in the news cycle before his public apology—they would experience especially critical press descriptions.

²⁶³ Cooper.

Additional depictions of the victimization of military members repeatedly compared President Trump's track record with that of combat veterans.²⁶⁴ For example, in Nicholas Kristof's op-ed in *The New York Times*, brazenly titled "Trump Uses the Military to Prove His Manhood," the President is contrasted against service members in the statement, "When you've seen the ugliness of war, you don't lightly summon tanks, helicopters or heavily armed troops to deal with civil disturbances; that's a dangerous and damaging tactic of an insecure old man who claimed heel spurs to dodge the Vietnam draft and now needs to prove his own manhood."²⁶⁵ Such statements present the President as weak and cowardly compared to the bravery of the service members he thrust into Lafayette Square.²⁶⁶

Opinionated public participation of current and retired military members further complicated matters. Typically condemning the incident and the Trump administration, retired military members spoke as non-uniformed civilians exercising their First Amendment rights, but with the unmistakable resume, credibility, and gravitas of flag officers. Even when the individual's retired status was clear to the reader, there was always a distinct sense that they spoke on behalf of the military. The chorus of military opinions was constant throughout this story's coverage, and those who spoke out received reverential depictions as heroes with esteemed credentials and integrity. Furthermore, whether intentional or not, those who publicly spoke out were granted the right by the media to speak on behalf of the military institution and its members—almost always criticizing Trump for misusing the military as a political prop. One such outspoken critic was retired General and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, whom media publications provided emphatically positive representation after publicly

²⁶⁴ Kristof, "Trump Uses the Military to Prove His Manhood: [Op-Ed]."

²⁶⁵ Kristof.

²⁶⁶ This theme of victimization among military members was also depicted along racial lines, with depictions of non-white service members being especially victimized under the Trump administration. As one article in *The New York Times* described, "Some members of the D.C. Guard — comprising more than 60 percent people of color — have not told family they were part of the crackdown." Another example is the telling of the National Guard's experience in the statement: "A white National Guard commander called the standoff in Lafayette Square "the Alamo," implying that the White House was under siege. Black members of the D.C. Guard objected to turning on their neighbors." See, Gibbons-Neff, Schmitt, and Cooper, "Aggressive Tactics by National Guard."

condemning the incident.²⁶⁷ The press exclusively described Mattis as noble, intellectual, and impressive; “a student of the rise and fall of civilizations.”²⁶⁸

Once established, Mattis’ credibility and reputation then became a rhetorical tool to speak authoritatively on the incident. Suggestive remarks regarding how President Trump used to call him Mad Dog, “an appellation the General hated,” depict an unfriendly relationship between the General and the President.²⁶⁹ Media depictions of Mattis’ public statements also made sure to draft the remarks as a “scathing message” and reiterated his attitude that the President was a “threat to American values and to the Constitution itself.”²⁷⁰ These descriptions communicate that Mattis—and the rest of the military he is unwittingly speaking on behalf of—is one of the *good guys* helping to fight against Trump.²⁷¹ While Mattis is retired and has the right to exercise his First Amendment rights, such brazen language from a military figure communicates a message that his commentary is indicative of how *all* military leadership regards the White House.

The public participation of former military personnel continually impacted the coverage. Other examples included the comments of “Retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffrey, a West Point graduate and former national security professor” who, when speaking on the President, “said the chances are “50-50 he’ll disgrace himself.”²⁷² These depictions overtly position the military against the President and politicize the armed service. Additionally, retired Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta asserted that the military was in danger of becoming

²⁶⁷ Sanger, “Trump and the Military.”

²⁶⁸ Sanger. Military professionalism demands that service members maintain an organizational identity that sets them apart from the general population; however, the identity of a beaten victim or pitiful character to be taken advantage of is incompatible with the concept of professionalism. Moreover, pitiful depictions of the military further enable their value as rhetorical devices for politicians and the media. In the 21st century, all media attention is harmful if one wishes to keep the public’s trust. Therefore, the military must widen its separation from the media marketplace and provide as little as possible for the corporate news to broadcast. The military does not benefit from any media coverage, and every military depiction in media or entertainment inevitably diminishes its professional reputation.

²⁶⁹ Sanger.

²⁷⁰ Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe, “Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders.”

²⁷¹ This positive characterization was most likely used on the condition that he corresponded with the narrative the newspaper was seeking to promote. If the General had expressed the contrary view, he would likely either receive an overwhelmingly negative description or remain omitted entirely.

²⁷² Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe, “Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders.”

“a political arm of the president.”²⁷³ This media trend gained backing from the public outspokenness of Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, Gen. Tony Thomas, Adm. Mike Mullen, CSM Kaleth O. Wright, Gen. James Mattis, and more.²⁷⁴ Such declarations illustrate a terrifying state of the nation and communicate to the reader that while the President desires dictatorial control, the *good guys* in government are vigorously resisting. This notion of military members being the *good guys* on a specific side of a partisan debate is thoroughly unprofessional and depicts a deviation from the military’s apolitical principle. Nonetheless, the media depictions of Lafayette Square consistently assigned military members to a political side of the debate.

Additionally, prominent throughout the coverage was the notion that the military acted as an adversary of the President. Particularly after General Milley publicly denounced the event—consistent throughout the media coverage were representations of the military as speaking truth to power and resisting the President’s abuse of the office. This theme thoroughly politicized the military by communicating that the armed service took a definite side in partisan discourse with leadership openly opposing the sitting President. Frequent application of statements such as how “the president picked another fight with the military” sharply characterized the military institution as the enemy of the President and signaled a divide between the civilian and military leadership in the United States.²⁷⁵ Other instances such as Helene Cooper’s reporting in the *New York Times* proclaimed that “The back and forth between Trump and the Pentagon in recent days is evidence of the deepest civil-military divide since the Vietnam War — except this time, military leaders, after halting steps in the beginning, are now positioning themselves firmly with those calling for change.”²⁷⁶ This notion that the military was openly “positioning themselves firmly with those calling for change” signaled that the military institution—designed to be apolitical and under civilian

²⁷³ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker, “Trump Agrees to Send Home Troops.”

²⁷⁴ Gibbons-Neff et al., “Former Commanders Fault Trump’s Use.” Paradoxically, while many of the condemnations by retired flag officers decry the event’s politicization of the military, the outcry of retired military members through the media doubly politicized the military—with seemingly no awareness of the irony.

²⁷⁵ Cooper, “Milley Apologizes for Role in Trump Photo Op,” June 11, 2020.

²⁷⁶ Cooper.

control—actively opposed the President.²⁷⁷ This media representation unquestionably depicted the military as *one of the good guys* in the struggle against Donald Trump and indicated “a critical moment of reckoning in the military” to oppose the President.²⁷⁸

This theme of a civil-military divide portrayed the *entire* armed service as against the President. With a tone suggesting that “The intensifying rift between the military and the president demands attention,” military leaders—portrayed as those resisting the President—received heroic characterizations from the media with descriptions like, “Even the most dutiful soldier has a breaking point, and even a culture of deference finds its moment of defiance.”²⁷⁹ Such representations blur the line between a military officer and a political actor, and this rhetoric clearly communicated to the audience that the military had picked a side in the partisan dispute and was staunchly opposed to the President. The media continuously asserted that “The split evident in the past few days between Trump and current and former military leaders...has laid bare the chasm in the national security community that was forming even when he ran for office in 2016.”²⁸⁰ Such depictions illustrated to the reader that not only does the military currently oppose the President, but they have *always* opposed him. The media coverage emphasized a perceived consensus of military figures condemning the President with statements like “This week, it was his former defense secretary, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a range of other retired senior officers who were saying in public what they previously said only in private.”²⁸¹ Such depictions throughout the media coverage create the impression that respectable military figures unanimously despise—and have always despised—the President. Repeatedly suggesting that military members resented Trump because he “avoided the risk of being drafted into the Vietnam War

²⁷⁷ Cooper.

²⁷⁸ Cooper.

²⁷⁹ Bruni, “The Court-Martial of Donald J. Trump.”

²⁸⁰ Sanger, “Trump and the Military.”

²⁸¹ Sanger; Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Milley, America’s Top General, Walks Into a Political Battle;” Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe, “Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders Intensifies as Milley Apologizes for Photo Op: The Admission of Regret from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Capped Nearly Two Weeks of Public Discomfort with and Outright Condemnation of Trump’s Leadership amid Nationwide Protests of Racial Injustice from Some of the Nation’s Most Revered Military Figures;” Gibbons-Neff et al., “Former Commanders Fault Trump’s Use.”

with a diagnosis of bone spurs,” the readership received constant messaging that military leaders were annoyed and offended by the President.²⁸²

Beyond antagonism, a number of outlets began to portray Milley and other flag officers as righteously insulating the military from its civilian leadership. As the story progressed—particularly after General Milley’s apology that “show [ed] respect for the principles Trump tramples on”—the armed service came to be portrayed as the vanguard protecting and assuring the nation that “the nation’s principles are stronger and larger than Mr. Trump’s greed for approbation.”²⁸³ In language communicating a message that the military was pitted against the President, the actions of senior leaders were said to have “triggered Mr. Trump’s fury” due to their defiance of his impulses.²⁸⁴ Characterized as a “Quarrel between Trump and military leaders,” media messaging portrayed the military institution as having “outright condemnation of Trump’s leadership.”²⁸⁵ With retired generals labeling the President as “working to divide the country” and “a threat to American values and to the Constitution itself,” media messaging left little doubt that the military was opposed to the President.²⁸⁶ With comments describing service under President Trump as “a travesty to their oath of office,” media depictions thoroughly politicized the military and made the institution out to be the enemy of the White House.²⁸⁷

The coverage painted this supposed split as an almost-personal feud against the White House. The characterization of a “deep schism between the commander in chief and the military” repeatedly reinforced the notion that the President had repeatedly thrown the military under the bus while “hail[ing] himself for victory in the battle against the Islamic State in the Middle East,” and exaggerating—“as he often does”—his positive influence on the military. Coupled with scenes portraying an “Oval Office meeting that turned into a heated

²⁸² Sanger, “Trump and the Military”; Peter Baker and Zach Montague, “Trump Speaks at West Point Graduation Amid Tensions with Military Leaders,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2020, ProQuest; Jennifer Rubin, “Revolt of the Generals,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁸³ Editorial Board, “Gen. Milley’s Apology Shows Respect.”

²⁸⁴ Editorial Board.

²⁸⁵ Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe, “Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders.”

²⁸⁶ Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe.

²⁸⁷ Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe.

argument” and an attitude that the President narcissistically used military members for egotistical reasons, media representation communicated to the reader that President Trump was the enemy of *all* military members.²⁸⁸

The upcoming presidential election loomed large over the event. The coverage also communicated a sentiment that President Trump’s actions were “fueling a rising revolt among retired officers in the thick of a re-election campaign” to combat the “stench of authoritarianism and intimidation — and even illegality — in Mr. Trump’s attitude and bluster and his intended actions.”²⁸⁹ The framing of this discussion communicated an ultimatum to the reader that either Americans could remain silent and passively support the tyrannical President or publicly condemn him in the act of “speaking up in support of the Constitution.”²⁹⁰ The military was plainly portrayed as the side protecting the Constitution and mitigating the “damage this is doing to the covenant between the American people and the military.”²⁹¹ As “One general officer” stated in the *New York Times* “on the condition of anonymity to avoid punishment from his superiors, “ he was simply “hoping to make it through another day without having to cite his constitutional obligations to decline an illegal order. He said he would not be surprised if he faced such a dilemma in the coming weeks.”²⁹²

In the end, the sense was of a Rubicon moment. The media’s depiction of a divide between the President and military alluded to irreparable damage to American civil-military affairs because “relatively minor episodes have accumulated imperceptibly, but we are now at a point of where real damage is being done.”²⁹³ In what was identified as “Military Vets Break[ing] Silence On President,” President Trump was said to have “crossed that line” where the military needed to take a stand against his actions.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, the divide between the President and the military, characterized as a “heated and eventually public resistance from Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper and Gen. Mark A. Milley,” resulted in a “rift still

²⁸⁸ Baker and Montague, “Trump Speaks at West Point Graduation.”

²⁸⁹ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker, “Trump Agrees to Send Home Troops.”

²⁹⁰ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker.

²⁹¹ Schmitt, Gibbons-Neff, and Baker.

²⁹² Sanger and Cooper, “Military Vets Break Silence on President.”

²⁹³ Roberts, “Who Was Behind the Largest Mass Arrest.”

²⁹⁴ Sanger and Cooper, “Military Vets Break Silence on President.”

unhealed.”²⁹⁵ This rift was portrayed as irreconcilable because the “Pentagon brass was finally fed up,” resulting in “a direct clash with the military.”²⁹⁶ The media also communicated a *with us or against us* message to the reader regarding members of the military with statements such as, “We are at a uniquely precarious time in U.S. history, one in which the American people will need to rely on the decency and patriotism of those who have sworn an oath to defend and protect the Constitution. It’s a time for choosing for military officials, for politicians, for law enforcement and, most of all, for all Americans of good will.”²⁹⁷

E. CONCLUSION

Many major themes in the media coverage relating to civil-military relations acted to erode the perception of military professionalism: incompetence, the perception of enabling authoritarianism, antagonism between military and civilian leadership, and the overwhelming vocalization of retired military figures adding public input to the story. Depictions of military incompetence and obliviousness to the implications most often regarded Secretary of Defense Esper and General Milley.²⁹⁸ The two men were extensively criticized for unwittingly entering the military into circumstances that could produce a civil-military disaster. Additionally, the two men endured extensive media depictions as permitting American troops to serve as the President’s “palace guard” to remove protesters off American streets forcibly.²⁹⁹ This pattern of media coverage depicting inadequate military leadership projected a negative image of the American military and contradicted the notion of expertise demanded of a professional military.

The abuse of civil-military authority was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, note the sentiment that Secretary Esper and General Milley were complicit in corrupting the American Constitution and violating human rights.³⁰⁰ Explicit depictions of Americans

²⁹⁵ Peter Baker and Helene Cooper, “Trump Rejects Renaming Military Bases Named after Confederate Generals,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2020, ProQuest.

²⁹⁶ Rubin, “Revolt of the Generals.”

²⁹⁷ Rubin.

²⁹⁸ Will, “The Same Damn Thing over and Over.”

²⁹⁹ Gibbons-Neff et al., “Former Commanders Fault Trump’s Use.”

³⁰⁰ Bump, “Timeline: The Clearing of Lafayette Square.”

forcibly cleared from the streets of Washington, D.C., framed the military as performing a tyrannical role for the President by conducting violence onto American citizens. This media representation opposed the American apolitical prototype and provoked a public dialogue concerning a potential Constitutional crisis due to the domestic use of American troops.

On the other hand, the Trump administration received descriptions as an authoritarian regime empowered by the acquiescence of the military's senior leadership.³⁰¹ At times in the media's coverage, the story's framing depicted the military as facilitating offensive acts of government overreach by the White House directed onto American citizens. Prompting the coverage to dispute the integrity and trustworthiness of the military institution, this theme from the media coverage again violated the apolitical principle and sank the inherent necessity for trust between society and a professional institution. Media imagery also described the armed service as conducting military operations—comparable to missions conducted abroad against enemy combatants—upon American citizens on domestic soil.³⁰² Moreover, depictions of service members treating peaceful protesters as enemy combatants spoiled much of the media coverage and demonstrated a media characterization of the American military as unethical and unprofessional.

A final trend from the media coverage of Lafayette Square was a tone of pity and reverence for the military members depicted as disrespected and exploited by the President.³⁰³ In addition, the media coverage regularly communicated imagery of American service members inserted into undesirable and corrupt situations on American streets against their will. Depictions of a victimized status are—while at face value not terrible—thoroughly unprofessional because they enable external actors such as the media or politicians to appropriate the image of the military for self-serving purposes. Furthermore, military members' depictions of victimization dragged them further into domestic politics and politicized the military institution.

³⁰¹ Milbank, "This Is Not a Drill."

³⁰² Kristof, "Trump Uses the Military to Prove His Manhood: [Op-Ed]."

³⁰³ Cooper, "General Regrets Joining Photo Op."

Throughout the story's coverage were current and retired military figures publicly speaking out and condemning the Trump administration and the actions at Lafayette Square.³⁰⁴ Unfortunately, this participation in the coverage by mostly retired military members further politicized the military institution and inescapably pitted the military on one side of the partisan dispute. Despite most of the outspoken personalities being retired, the perception of military members addressing domestic politics and denouncing the acting President of the United States violated the apolitical ideal of military professionalism. This media depiction of military resistance against the White House was made more acute by an overwhelming portrayal of military hostility towards the President.³⁰⁵ This notion of actively countering the American President is unprofessional because it directly violates the basic principles of a civilian lead apolitical-military.

Combining the following media themes: military figures speaking out against the President, depictions of reverence, the tone of pity and victimization, and the notion that the military openly opposed the White House, media characterizations installed the military as an adversary of the President on as distinct faction of the partisan discourse—exacerbated by the trend of ex-flag officers editorializing and publicly commenting on the matter. These themes from the narrative of pre-eminent newspapers exist in tension with the notion of military professionalism and resultingly harm civil-military relations in the United States. Overall, the media coverage from this case study resulted in an immense politicization of the military institution. Media depictions raised the alarm of a Constitutional disaster. However, alas, the Rubicon remained uncrossed.

³⁰⁴ Rubin, "Revolt of the Generals."

³⁰⁵ Rucker, Ryan, and Lamothe, "Quarrel between Trump and Military Leaders."

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VI. ONE MEASUREMENT OF THE MILITARY IS HOW IT TREATS ITS MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS

A. CASE SUMMARY: A GRISLY CRIME WHICH SHOCKED AND EVOKED A NATIONWIDE RESPONSE

On April 22, 2020, Private Vanessa Guillén was bludgeoned to death by Specialist Aaron Robinson in an armory at Fort Hood, Texas. After striking Guillén in the head multiple times with a hammer, Robinson laid Guillén's body in a plastic box, wheeled it to his car, and drove off base. Later that evening, Robinson picked up his girlfriend, Cecily Aguilar, from the gas station at which she was employed and drove her to an enclosure nearby the Leon River. The crate bearing Vanessa Guillén's body was already at the site, transported by Robinson. The two employed a hatchet and machete to dismember the body, followed by an attempt at burning the remains.³⁰⁶ Then, they placed the remains in multiple holes before covering them with dirt. The remains of the crime were discovered months later, leading to Aguilar's confession to the killing and indictment on 11 counts by a federal grand jury. Robinson, however, took his own life before law enforcement could make an arrest.

The media coverage of this case produced an overwhelming perception of military incompetence. The perception stemmed from military leadership permitting the crime to occur, allowing the killer to escape justice by fleeing and taking his own life, and the perceived mishandling of the investigation. The coverage also produced an overall tone of disgust toward the military. This disgust emerged from the thought that the military culture enabled the crime while failing to express concern or urgency during the investigation. Lastly, media messaging conveyed a heavy sense of pity toward Vanessa Guillén for the fate she suffered. This theme of pity originated with the coverage of Ms. Guillén, but grew into a public conversation regarding the victimization and neglect of other service members. Such pity toward military members is especially toxic to the Huntingtonian notion of military professionalism, because it depicts military members as helpless and

³⁰⁶ "Vanessa Guillen: Timeline Offers Look at Tragedy and Legacy of Ft. Hood Soldier," ABC11, August 14, 2020, <https://abc11.com/vanessa-guillen-missing-fort-hood-soldier-texas/6288273/>.

incapable of fending for themselves—an inherently contradictory idea for the institution with a state monopoly on violence. The media coverage of this story served to erode the impression of a professional military. Moreover, the ideas expressed by the prominent media publications exacerbated this unprofessional perception and suggested that the failures from this particular case applied to the entire military.

Case Chronology:

The investigation of the crime proceeded with difficulty and attracted much controversy due to the prolonged period it took to resolve the case. The chronology follows: Vanessa Guillén was last observed on April 22 at 1 p.m. in a parking lot outside her workplace at Fort Hood.³⁰⁷ Once her absence became apparent, investigators located Private Guillén's car keys, barracks room key, ID, and wallet in the armory where she worked earlier that day. On April 23, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID) received notification of Private Guillén's disappearance, and the soldier was reported missing.³⁰⁸ The next day, the Fort Hood Military Police issued an advisory of her absence. As a result, military personnel, civilian law enforcement, and military police searched for Vanessa Guillén. Meanwhile, On April 26, according to cellular data secured by investigators, Robinson and Aguilar returned to the site of the buried remains to further cover and disguise the scene. Two days later, on April 28, the CID interrogated Robinson for the first time.³⁰⁹

The case quickly attracted attention from the Pentagon. On April 30, Ryan McCarthy, the Secretary of the Army, commented on the case, assuring the investigation's integrity and extending condolences to the Guillén family. However, later that day, Vanessa's family publicly verbalized dissatisfaction with the military investigation and its failure to produce results. On May 18, 26 days after the crime, two witnesses claim to have observed Robinson struggle to move a heavy plastic box outside the armory on April 22. The next day, Robinson allowed investigators to examine his personal phone and extract

³⁰⁷ ABC11.

³⁰⁸ ABC11.

³⁰⁹ ABC11.

cellular data. On June 10, 50 days after the murder of Vanessa Guillén, the Guillén family publicly proclaimed their belief that Vanessa was still alive and demanded clear communication from Army investigators. By mid-June, the story grew into a viral social media response, attracting attention from celebrities and civil rights groups demanding that Vanessa Guillén be found.³¹⁰ On June 18, charges of sexual harassment surfaced from the Guillén family. These reports alleged that Vanessa Guillén had experienced harassment while in the military, but avoided reporting it through her chain of command out of fear of reprisal.³¹¹

The investigation converged on upon the perpetrators, but with no arrests. On June 19, 59 days after the crime, Cecily Aguilar was questioned by investigators for the first time. The next day, the search uncovered the remains of Private Gregory Morales, another Fort Hood soldier missing since August 2019 after crashing his car several miles from Fort Hood. On June 21, cellular data revealed Robinson and Aguilar's previous activity near the Leon River.³¹² Investigators combed the area and uncovered the charred piece of what appeared to be a plastic transport case but failed to unearth a body. On June 30, 70 days after Vanessa Guillén's disappearance, workers at a construction site near the location came across partial human remains exposed in the soil. After the finding, law enforcement uncovered the remainder Vanessa Guillén's scattered body, coalesced within a concrete-like material and buried in the field.³¹³

That same day, Aguilar was interrogated and confessed to the killing, leading Robinson to flee Fort Hood. In the early-morning hours of July 1 in Killeen, Texas, Aaron Robinson killed himself with a gunshot wound to the head as law enforcement approached him. Later that day, Vanessa Guillén was posthumously promoted to the rank of Specialist.

³¹⁰ Arelis R. Hernández, "Foul Play Suspected in Case of Missing Fort Hood Soldier Vanessa Guillén: The Family of the 20-Year-Old Private, Who Was Last Seen at the Texas Base, Suspects Sexual Harassment," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2020, ProQuest.

³¹¹ Alex Horton, "'The Military's #MeToo': In Wake of Vanessa Guillén Death, Servicewomen Bear Deep Scars," *Washington Post*, July 7, 2020, ProQuest.

³¹² ABC11, "Vanessa Guillen."

³¹³ ABC11.

On July 4, crowds assembled to march in Vanessa Guillén's memory through downtown Houston.

By this point, the story was a prominent feature of the national media news cycle and widely viewed on social media. On July 10, Secretary McCarthy announced an independent review of the case, finding at a later date that 14 senior officers deserved punishment for failures surrounding the case. On July 13, Cecily Aguilar was indicted on 11 counts by a federal grand jury for the crime. The Guillén family met President Donald Trump in the White House on July 30 to discuss the case. Earlier that day, the family held a rally calling for accountability for the failures leading to Vanessa Guillén's death. Finally, On August 10, a public memorial for Vanessa Guillén was held at Cesar Chavez High School in Houston, followed by a private funeral hosted by the family on August 15.³¹⁴

B. EXPERTISE: INCOMPETENCE ENABLES A TRAGEDY

Throughout the case, the Army's media portrayal was as incompetent and unable to perform its duties. Multiple issues throughout the coverage implicated the armed service in the incident: the perception that the Army's command climate possibly influenced the events surrounding Vanessa Guillén's death, the improper treatment of her disappearance and extended AWOL status, the flawed investigation into her murder, and the poor communication with the Guillén family and the public.³¹⁵ At every point in the story, media messaging portrayed the Army as clumsy and inept, making clear that this was an account of the armed service's inability to perform essential duties of protecting soldiers during peacetime—with the highest possible consequence in the death of Vanessa Guillén.

This problem of abject incompetence was depicted as widespread. Throughout the coverage, leading print media described Vanessa Guillén's murder as a manifestation of a systemic and organizational degeneration throughout the Army.³¹⁶ Not only does the

³¹⁴ ABC11.

³¹⁵ Alex Horton, "Army Punishes More Fort Hood Leaders after Vanessa Guillén's Killing Reveals Command Failures," *Washington Post*, April 30, 2021, ProQuest.

³¹⁶ "Trump Vows to Help Family of Vanessa Guillén," *Washington Post Video*, July 30, 2020, ProQuest.

Army appear negligent and derelict of its duties to protect its junior soldiers, but it also comes off as primarily liable for what befell Vanessa Guillén. Media messaging conveyed a spirit of tragedy toward the death of a young, innocent girl and expressed outrage concerning the Army's culpability in the event. This charge of incompetence not only condemned Fort Hood's leadership, but the Army and American military at large—evidenced by Fort Hood's status as “the nation's third-largest Army base.”³¹⁷ With such a prominent military establishment allowing such a horrible crime and requiring a severe turnover in leadership, the media coverage asserted a comprehensive military breakdown.

Press coverage also conveyed that the Army mishandled the investigation. At one point in the story, military leadership had even detained the perpetrator for “the killing of Specialist Guillén just hours after her remains were found, but a series of missteps allowed him to flee, then fatally shoot himself.”³¹⁸ A blunder made more acute considering that the killer “had also been accused of [an] unrelated sexual harassment” and was highly suspected by the criminal investigators.³¹⁹ Overwhelmingly, media depictions portrayed abject Army incompetence leading to a terrible miscommunication that allowed a murderer to escape justice. Conflicting reports regarding Vanessa Guillén's whereabouts leading up to her murder also added to the portrayal of Army incompetence. As one report revealed, “the Army initially said Guillén had reported for a 3 p.m. check-in with her supervisor, but, when pressed, admitted the report was erroneous” and neglected essential details such as “who called Guillén into work that day and the location of her cellphone.”³²⁰ These discrepancies only added to the sense that the Army mishandled the handling of the case and purposely misled the public to cover for its failings.³²¹

³¹⁷ Johnny Diaz, Maria Cramer, and Christina Morales, “What to Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2020, ProQuest. In what the coverage labeled “‘major flaws’ in the culture at Fort Hood”—enabling “a command climate ‘that was permissive of sexual harassment and sexual assault’”—a sense of the Army's glaring ineptitude to shield its most vulnerable members pervaded the coverage.

³¹⁸ Diaz, Cramer, and Morales.

³¹⁹ Diaz, Cramer, and Morales.

³²⁰ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.” As the Guillén family's lawyer declared, “I think a lot of people dropped the ball. They were being disingenuous about their efforts to find her.”

³²¹ Azi Paybarah, “Vanessa Guillen Died ‘in the Line of Duty,’ Army Officials Say,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2020, ProQuest.

Unfortunately, it appeared that this case was not unique. Adding to the perception that the Army failed to properly manage the case, the coverage also highlighted a pattern of Fort Hood soldiers disappearing and investigators failing to find them. For instance, investigators discovered another Fort Hood soldier's remains during the search for Vanessa Guillén—likely due to the public attention placed on the latter case which garnered a more comprehensive effort.³²² As Arelis Hernández reported in *The Washington Post*, “Guillén’s disappearance is the latest in a series of missing persons cases in recent years at Fort Hood, one of the Army’s largest military installations. Gregory Wedel-Morales went missing in August 2019, days before his expected discharge. His remains were found earlier this week, buried in a field in Killeen.”³²³ This similar incident propagated the impression of a pattern of military incompetence because—as Gregory Morales’ mother declared, “Maybe if they had just been searching from the beginning, we’d have some answers.”³²⁴ Another such case similarly described as a failure of the Army’s capacity and willingness to search occurred when “Patrice Wise-Franklin hired a private investigator and felt dismissed by Army commanders when she pressured them to keep searching for her son, Dakota Stump, after he went missing from Fort Hood in October 2016. Investigators followed false leads before finding his body three weeks later beneath his car in a wooded area on the base. He died in a single-vehicle car accident.”³²⁵ This repeated inability to find missing soldiers in situations as uncomplicated as a car crash—and allowing them to go missing in the first place—again communicated how the incompetence and carelessness of the Fort Hood leadership repeatedly resulted in dead service members and often went unaddressed.³²⁶ As Dakota Stump’s mother pronounced, “It felt like it was

³²² Alex Horton, “‘The Military Failed Him’: Soldier’s Bones Found Months after He Was Labeled a Deserter,” *Washington Post*, July 15, 2020, ProQuest.

³²³ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.”

³²⁴ Hernández. Even Vanessa Guillén’s case took “more than two months after her disappearance” to locate her remains. A fact widely attributed to the increased public and media scrutiny; without which, some suggest it would have taken much longer. See, Alex Horton, “Proposed Vanessa Guillén Law Would Transform Military’s Sexual Misconduct Inquiries,” *Washington Post*, September 16, 2020, ProQuest.

³²⁵ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.”

³²⁶ John Wagner and Alex Horton, “Trump Pledges Case of Slain Army Soldier Vanessa Guillén Won’t Be ‘Swept under the Rug,’” *Washington Post*, July 30, 2020, ProQuest.

a joke to them,” adding that “Until Fort Hood makes the hard decision on changing the protocol on how they handle missing soldiers, they are going to keep having this happen with the same outcome.”³²⁷ The media’s impression that this case study represented systemic flaws in the military establishment suggested to the readership that the armed service could not be trusted with the lives of its members.³²⁸

Moreover, the Army’s investigative method appeared incompetent. One report noted that “Scorched portions of a box were found, and there was an odor of decomposition...but investigators couldn’t find a body. Guillén’s remains were just a few feet away...but they went undiscovered for an additional nine days until men building a fence nearby smelled the odor on Tuesday and looked around.”³²⁹ These workers, unattached to the investigation, ultimately completed the task that Army investigators were unable to when “They saw hair and called police.”³³⁰ In a *New York Times* headline reading “Vanessa Guillén Died ‘in the Line of Duty,’ Army Officials Say,” reporting by Azi Paybarah described how the investigation into her death, “was expanded to include the entire chain of command at Fort Hood after both male and female soldiers described a culture of sexual harassment and bullying that they said was ignored by leadership.”³³¹ The media coverage left no ambiguity that Vanessa Guillén’s actual cause of death was the toxic military command climate and poor leadership.³³² The flawed investigation and the reported notion that “Guillén confided in her family that she had been sexually harassed

³²⁷ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.” Instead, critics proclaimed to witness nothing but “‘total and reckless mishandling’ of the investigation by the Army.”

³²⁸ Ben Kesling, “Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood After Investigation Prompted by Murder of Vanessa Guillen; Report Found That Base Officials Didn’t Properly Handle Sexual Assault and Harassment Claims,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2020, ProQuest. As the *Washington Post* explained, there had been “Five suspected homicides of Fort Hood soldiers...reported between March and June, more than in the past four years combined. Fort Hood for years has recorded the highest numbers of violent and nonviolent crimes Army-wide.” See, Horton, “Proposed Vanessa Guillén Law.”

³²⁹ Alex Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier Vanessa Guillén Identified by Army, Family Says,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2020, ProQuest. The investigation—which essentially occurred to the public in real-time due to the media coverage—found that that “The remains found Tuesday were so close to a site searched by investigators nine days earlier that they unknowingly stood on top of them.”

³³⁰ Horton.

³³¹ Paybarah, “Vanessa Guillen Died ‘in the Line of Duty.’”

³³² “Remains of Missing Soldier Vanessa Guillén Identified by Army,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2020, ProQuest. As Vanessa Guillen’s sister proclaimed, “The Army killed her.”

but feared surfacing the incidents to her leaders” communicated to the readership that this case represented a small part of a grand systemic bankruptcy throughout the military—plagued by backwardness and incompetence.³³³ The impression that this was a story of military leadership’s negligence was unambiguous in media statements relating the military chain of command as consisting of “systemic failures, including ignoring harassment that tormented Spc. Vanessa Guillén.”³³⁴ Moreover, the Army itself described its failures with statements such as Maj. Gen. Gene LeBoeuf’s characterization that “We as an Army failed to protect Vanessa Guillén.”³³⁵

The Army seemed to lack urgency. Media depictions ensured to illuminate that only with the additional scrutiny from this extensive public spotlight was the lethargic and incompetent military structure mobilized into action. Even the President of the United States Donald Trump acknowledged that such incidents have the potential to be “swept under the rug” by military leadership, highlighting to the reader the extent of the military’s negligence as a well-known truism within government circles.³³⁶ As asserted by an investigative report published later in the year, “No commanding general or subordinate echelon commander chose to intervene proactively and mitigate known risks of high crime, sexual assault and sexual harassment,” which were all prevalent in Vanessa Guillén’s command.³³⁷ This institutional lack of urgency, as well as the characteristic that “the Army doesn’t see tracking down [AWOL personnel] as a priority,” essentially led to the delay in finding Vanessa Guillén’s remains and resolving the cause of her disappearance.³³⁸ Media

³³³ Alex Horton, “‘The Military’s #MeToo’: Vanessa Guillén’s Slaying Has Many Servicewomen Revisiting Their Own Deep Scars,” *Washington Post*, July 7, 2020, ProQuest.

³³⁴ Horton, “Army Punishes More Fort Hood Leaders.” These “sweeping failures” led to the punishment or suspension of “21 soldiers, including one general and other officers.”

³³⁵ Horton. As the *Washington Post* put it, the “permissive environment for sexual assault and harassment throughout the installation and within Guillén’s unit, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment,” was primarily to blame for the incident.

³³⁶ Wagner and Horton, “Trump Pledges Case of Slain Army Soldier.”

³³⁷ Kesling, “Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood.”

³³⁸ Kesling. One female service member described the story as “shocking and heartbreaking...And not surprising,” while the *Washington Post* characterized the case as “emblematic of a military culture that they say has downplayed or ignored allegations of sexual harassment and assault and created an atmosphere that pressures men and women to keep accusations quiet.” See, See, Horton, “‘The Military’s #MeToo,’” July 7, 2020.

representations showed an atmosphere meant to slow-roll the search for unfortunate individuals such as Vanessa Guillén, communicating a catastrophic lack of competence on behalf of the American military. Moreover, these depictions highlighted a perceived disparity between the urgency of the public in sharp contrast to the lethargy and near-criminal negligence on behalf of the armed service.

C. RESPONSIBILITY: DISGUST WITH THE MILITARY CULTURE

A second theme prevalent throughout the story's coverage was a tone of disgust towards Army leadership. In addition to the sentiment of abject incompetence—explored in the previous section—was a perceived indifference by the military toward the gruesome event. The apparent disinterest and lack of urgency in the military response to the event created the impression that leadership was disregarding the disappearance and graphic murder of one of its members by another soldier. Adding to this was an inflection of disgust towards the military culture itself. Apart from leadership, a number of articles depicted a corrupt Army culture as fundamentally responsible for harboring the workplace environment that permitted Vanessa Guillén's murder.³³⁹

Coverage depicted a neglectful military culture and organization. This sentiment of disgust framed military leadership as callous and self-centered to the point of indifference to the brutal murder of one of their junior soldiers. Family members were especially critical. At one point in the coverage, Vanessa Guillén's sister even proclaimed that Army leadership viewed the case "as a joke."³⁴⁰ This tone of disgust invites a perception of the military as predatory on young naïve individuals like Vanessa Guillén with statements like those from Guillén family members that "She went into the Army, you know, thinking it was a safe place for her to be there. And, you know, the Army killed her."³⁴¹ These representations of the Army's role in the incident frame the military as equally

³³⁹ Kesling, "Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood"; Diaz, Cramer, and Morales, "What to Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen"; Horton, "Proposed Vanessa Guillén Law."

³⁴⁰ Horton, "Remains of Missing Soldier." The findings that Vanessa Guillén was murdered on-base at Fort Hood and buried at a site that investigators had unknowingly stood on throughout the search only exacerbated this impression.

³⁴¹ Horton.

blameworthy as the murderer himself. In addition to representations of Army official statements appearing intended to save face and protect its reputation rather than directly address the crime, the military comes off in the coverage as cold and unsympathetic to the death of an innocent—a death for which the military is likely responsible.

This theme of neglect pervaded the coverage. The extended period after Specialist Guillén went missing for Army investigators to detect foul play exacerbated this perception that the Army did not take the case seriously. As Arelis Hernández stated in *The Washington Post*, “More than two months after a young soldier went missing from a Texas military base, U.S. Army investigators said this week that they suspect foul play related to her disappearance and have opened a separate inquiry into allegations that she was sexually harassed by a supervisor.”³⁴² While the prolonged time may have been excused by a meticulous investigation, the perception in the media coverage was of a military service that did not prioritize a missing soldier—placing minimal time, resources, and effort into finding her.³⁴³ Further demonstrating the media notion of the Army’s apparent indifference to the case were descriptions that the Guillén family had to “[press] the U.S. Army and federal lawmakers to pay attention to the case.” Depicting these narratives of indifference alongside the sheer brutality of the crime added to the tone of disgust toward the military’s treatment of the case. As a result of feeling compelled to appeal for external help, the Guillén family was highly “critical of military command, accusing it of indifference and failing to shut down Fort Hood in the hours after she disappeared.”³⁴⁴ Repeatedly, the perception of the Army’s handling of the case appeared nonchalant and casual in the face of the brutal murder of one of its junior members by a fellow soldier. These depictions intensified upon reports that Vanessa Guillén had previously complained

³⁴² Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.” Such sentiments in the media coverage signal that military culture casually permits sexual harassment and only combats it when it is advantageous for the sake of media and public support. The message from the media was clear that Vanessa Guillén died because “she didn’t have advocacy and protection and a chain of command that she trusted,” ultimately serving an example of “someone the U.S. military let down.” See, Horton, “The Military’s #MeToo,” July 7, 2020.

³⁴³ Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier.” As the Guillén family’s lawyer asserted, “[Army] Investigators moved too slowly to piece together evidence and secure phone data that led to the suspects more than two months after Guillén disappeared,” adding that “Her leadership failed her,” and “The Army failed her.”

³⁴⁴ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.”

about suffering harassment by coworkers and expressed an inability to speak up at work at risk of not being taken seriously or ostracized by her chain of command. Guillén had even “complained to friends and family about being sexually harassed by a sergeant,” but the Army’s response that “the harassment allegations ‘did not produce any viable leads’ related to the soldier’s disappearance” came off as absurd and only solidified the media impression that the military was more concerned with squelching negative press rather than addressing and resolving the case.³⁴⁵

Even worse, it appeared in the coverage that the military regularly allows such tragedies to occur with no end in sight. That such a horrific thing could happen to someone as innocent as Vanessa Guillén became a symbol for the notion of the military as an inhumane organization—unconcerned with even the most horrifying of crimes committed to its most helpless members. The media perception of a systemic pattern of “violent deaths, suicides and complaints of sexual harassment on the military base” became an assumed fact regarding the culture at Fort Hood and the military as a whole.³⁴⁶ There became no doubt in the media messaging that every junior and female service member was vulnerable to the “command climate ‘that was permissive of sexual harassment and sexual assault’” with no one to protect them—least of all the military institution that claims to care for them.³⁴⁷ Such coverage suggested that had her command not fostered an environment where “she didn’t think she could tell her superiors,” Vanessa Guillén likely would still be living.³⁴⁸ Adding to this perception, the coverage also frequently pointed out that this sort of culture is common throughout the military, and the case of Vanessa

³⁴⁵ Hernández. This story quickly became about more than just the death of Vanessa Guillén, but also about the plight of women in the armed service enduring within an abusive military culture. As stated by Martina Chesonis—an officer in the Air Force Reserve—in the *Washington Post*, “You know if it’s not you, it’s one of your peers who has experienced it...Her murder is rare, but the experiences of sexual harassment and being afraid of reprisal—that’s not unique.” See, Horton, “‘The Military’s #MeToo,’” July 7, 2020.

³⁴⁶ Diaz, Cramer, and Morales, “What to Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen.” This sentiment of overwhelming mistreatment of female service members led to calls in the coverage for a “larger reckoning over identity and values in the United States.” See, Horton, “‘The Military’s #MeToo,’” July 7, 2020.

³⁴⁷ Diaz, Cramer, and Morales, “What to Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen.”

³⁴⁸ Horton, “Proposed Vanessa Guillén Law.”

Guillén is only one example. As Alex Horton declared in *The Washington Post*, “Guillén’s death has become emblematic of harassment and sexual assault in the military, fueling calls for systemic changes to how allegations are handled.”³⁴⁹

The environment and circumstances that led to Specialist Guillén’s death were depicted in the media narrative as commonplace. The perception of the military’s complete disregard for its service members’ safety was made worse by the media depiction that the Army only became concerned with Vanessa Guillén’s disappearance once the story had become a public spectacle due to extensive media coverage and the Guillén family’s public outcry.³⁵⁰ Accusations from the press and the Guillén family that “the Army’s search for the 20-year-old soldier lacked urgency and care at the highest levels” became a central point of the coverage depicting the military as indifferent to the gruesome murder of one of its soldiers.³⁵¹ This perception became amplified by suggestions that the conditions leading to the murder are prevalent throughout the military and rarely addressed by leadership.³⁵² As Alex Horton of *The Washington Post* declared, “the sexual harassment allegations spurred many female service members and veterans to share their own stories about assault and harassment on social media with the hashtag #IAmVanessaGuillén,” adding to the impression that the Army systemically enables such crimes to frequently occur without any effort to change.³⁵³ The impression that “the Army was able to marshal significant additional investigative resources after her family began a social media campaign” further added to the public perception that the military was utterly indifferent to the well-being of Vanessa Guillén and more concerned with public appearances.³⁵⁴ This representation left the reader little other option than to feel disgust towards military

³⁴⁹ Horton. The impression that what happened to Vanessa Guillén was horrific but unsurprising to any female servicemember reverberated throughout the media coverage. As the *Washington Post* described it, “A grim but predictable story has played out for many servicewomen and female veterans, as a desperate search for Army Spc. Vanessa Guillén ended with confirmation of her death.” See, Horton, ““The Military’s #MeToo,”” July 7, 2020.

³⁵⁰ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.”

³⁵¹ Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier.”

³⁵² Kesling, “Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood.”

³⁵³ Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier.”

³⁵⁴ Horton.

leadership with reports that “both male and female soldiers described a culture of sexual harassment and bullying that they said was ignored by leadership.”³⁵⁵

Amid the negative press, the Army attempted to save face. Intensifying this message of a rotten culture was the perception that the Army acted to conceal its responsibility to the public. As Alex Horton of *The Washington Post* asserted, “For nearly a year Army officials have said they had no evidence Guillén faced sexual harassment, often denying the family’s specific allegations that Robinson was the culprit while refusing to address if there were other potential abusers.”³⁵⁶ This sentiment is especially damning with the information that Vanessa Guillén withheld her workplace harassment due to the culture of her military command. As an official report on the investigation was quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, “No commanding general or subordinate echelon commander chose to intervene proactively and mitigate known risks of high crime, sexual assault and sexual harassment,” describing a culture of neglect which added to the consistent sense of disgust throughout the media coverage.³⁵⁷ The media narrative concluded that the “egregious mistakes made by the chain of command that created an unacceptable environment for soldiers at Fort Hood, especially for female soldiers” is what led to the gruesome death of Vanessa Guillén and is representative of how the U.S. military treats its female service members.³⁵⁸

D. CORPORATENESS: SHOCK, PITY, AND HORROR AT FORT HOOD

An additional theme throughout the coverage was a tone of pity regarding what befell an innocent victim in Vanessa Guillén. The graphic nature of the crime, coupled with

³⁵⁵ Paybarah, “Vanessa Guillen Died ‘in the Line of Duty.’”

³⁵⁶ Horton, “Army Punishes More Fort Hood Leaders.”

³⁵⁷ Kesling, “Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood.” The narrative became that the Army’s leadership enabled a “silence of peers and platoon sergeants, all the way to generals,” which led to the tragic death of Ms. Guillén. See, Horton, “‘The Military’s #MeToo,’” July 7, 2020.

³⁵⁸ Kesling, “Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood.” This coverage communicated that the military’s culture was unfriendly, uninviting, and violent in its treatment of female service members—and that the case of Vanessa Guillén was yet another example of such a culture. One female service member claimed that “This is a version of the military’s #MeToo,” insinuating that the case was representative of all the harassment throughout the military towards women and that the death of Vanessa Guillén is a symptom of an organizational rot within the military. See, Horton, “‘The Military’s #MeToo,’” July 7, 2020.

Ms. Guillén's youthful innocence, compels a tone of tragedy and grief. Throughout the coverage, Vanessa Guillén embodies a radiant, blooming, and motivated character whose life ended horribly—presumably due to the neglect and incompetence of her military leadership. Her depiction in the media evolved to serve as a representation of all women and minorities serving in the military—enduring a toxic culture that permits sexual harassment and neglects to protect its most at-risk members. This depiction placed a victim status not only upon Vanessa Guillén, but on many members of the military.

The imagery often spoke louder than words. Depictions of the crime often stressed her death's apparent pointlessness and futility—emphasizing the tragedy of seeing an exemplary young person murdered. Heartbreaking scenes portraying “The only sound during a one-minute moment of silence below the blazing Texas sun was the wailing of her grandmother, Lorenza Almanza, as she touched the end of the carriage, which had windows surrounding the coffin” illustrated an emotional aspect of the story, likely to elicit sadness, pity, and melancholy from the readership.³⁵⁹ Heartbreaking imagery depicting “Specialist Guillén's mother, Gloria Guillén, [taking] deep breaths through her face mask as she touched the glass” while wearing “a white T-shirt displaying a photo of her daughter depicted with angel wings” unquestionably evoked an emotional response, compelling the reader to feel heartfelt compassion and grief for Vanessa Guillén and her family.³⁶⁰ This touching imagery, coupled with quotations of the victim's sister Lupe Guillén in the *New York Times* that Vanessa had “dreamed of being in the military since childhood, kept chasing her dreams,” made clear that, above all else, this event represented a human tragedy.³⁶¹ As Mayra Guillén was quoted in *The Washington Post*, “[Vanessa] told her mother when she was a child that she wanted to enlist. She saw better opportunities in uniform...She wanted to serve and protect the country.”³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Morales, “‘You’re a Warrior’: Vanessa Guillén Is Memorialized.” Proclamations from the Guillén family to their now-deceased family member that “You’re a Warrior” underscored the tragedy of the affair.

³⁶⁰ Morales. Such messaging unavoidably conveyed emotion with imagery of Ms. Guillén's funeral, describing “Specialist Guillén's younger sister Lupe Guillén [sitting] at the front of the carriage, slumped as her grandmother wept.”

³⁶¹ Morales.

³⁶² Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier.”

These sentiments were portrayed as all too common in the service. The media portrayals framed this sentiment as particularly familiar to female service members, who saw the event as “A grim but predictable story has played out for many servicewomen and female veterans.”³⁶³ The notion that the gruesome murder of an innocent girl at the hands of a fellow soldier was “shocking and heartbreaking” but “not surprising” conveyed that those female service members operate in a destructive culture where their gender alone places them in constant danger.³⁶⁴ The media accounts explained that the suffering embodied by Vanessa Guillén is especially felt “among minority women in the military,” a population trapped in the unenviable position of having “a pain of loving your country and serving in uniform for a military which doesn’t love you back.”³⁶⁵

The story’s grisly details reiterated the sense of tragedy. Adding to the theme of victimhood in media depictions was the sheer violence and grotesque nature of the crime. The graphic details of the story completely disarm the reader and demand pity for the poor girl and all our other military members in similar vulnerable positions as her—lacking representation or any semblance of adequate leadership. Disarming descriptions of the crime invoke horror, revealing bloody details of how “Guillén, 20, was bludgeoned to death with a hammer in an arms room on the Texas installation by a fellow soldier, Spc. Aaron Robinson, on April 22, 2020. He dismembered and buried her remains with the help of a girlfriend.”³⁶⁶ Such shocking accounts—particularly when placed next to photos of the youthful, smiling, attractive Vanessa Guillén celebrating her high school graduation or happily donning her Army uniform—inevitably provoke an emotional response from the audience to pity the misfortune of this unfortunate girl. The story’s coverage showing

³⁶³ Horton, ““The Military’s #MeToo,”” July 7, 2020.

³⁶⁴ Horton. As the *Washington Post* described the situation, “For some women in uniform, the case is emblematic of a military culture that they say has downplayed or ignored allegations of sexual harassment and assault and created an atmosphere that pressures men and women to keep accusations quiet.”

³⁶⁵ Horton. The notion that Vanessa Guillén’s tragic case represents a common shared experience among female service members is displayed by the *Washington Post*’s description that “servicewomen and veterans have expressed sorrow and frustration by detailing their own harrowing moments of rape and harassment, unified by themes of indifference or hostility within their chain of command and frustrations with an entrenched culture.”

³⁶⁶ Horton, “Army Punishes More Fort Hood Leaders.”

photos of a smiling Vanessa Guillén juxtaposed with accounts of how “her likely remains were found in a shallow grave near the Army installation in Texas, possibly bringing a months-long search for her to a tragic end” bears a dejected sense of loss at the unnecessary murder of an innocent.³⁶⁷ Such a brutal death befalling a girl so full of optimism, passion, and kindness compels a reaction of disgust toward the military institution and pity for Vanessa Guillén and all junior female military members.³⁶⁸ The brutal death, dismemberment, and disrespect to the remains added to the coverage’s commiseration for Vanessa Guillén.³⁶⁹ Pity for the victim intensifies with the perceived dismissive attitude of Army leadership, who failed to promptly locate “The remains [which] were found a few feet from a pile of a burn mound that was searched June 20.”³⁷⁰ As one source quoted in *The Washington Post* explained the scene, “‘We were standing on top of her little body,’ Miller said. Concrete had been poured over the remains, and subsequent rainstorms allowed the grave to settle into natural-looking terrain.”³⁷¹

Next to these bloody images, the military’s shortcomings became more potent. Maddening details—such as how “Guillén felt she could not surface her allegations within her chain of command” before the crime or that “Agents unwittingly stood on top of her remains” during the investigation—mobilized widespread support and solidified the perception that the case represented a widespread victimization and neglect of female service members by a repugnant military culture.³⁷² Reports that “Witnesses [had] told investigators in May that they saw [the killer] struggle with a large plastic box on the day of Guillén’s disappearance” and that “Burned remains of a plastic box were found at the site” bewilder the readership, particularly when confronted with the fact that investigators

³⁶⁷ Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier.”

³⁶⁸ Kesling, “Army Disciplines 14 at Fort Hood.”

³⁶⁹ Diaz, Cramer, and Morales, “What to Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen.”

³⁷⁰ Horton, “Remains of Missing Soldier.”

³⁷¹ Horton. Graphic imagery of Vanessa Guillén’s dismembered remains coupled with statements from her family that military leadership “didn’t keep my sister safe” further evokes a spirit of tragic pity regarding the story.

³⁷² Alex Horton, “Vanessa Guillén May Have Faced Harassment before Her Disappearance and Death, Army Says,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 2020, ProQuest.

claimed, “it seemed of no value at the time.”³⁷³ Other graphic details in the media coverage depicted the killer and his accomplice transporting “Guillén’s body in the box before they dismembered, attempted to burn and buried her remains encased in concrete,” add to the shocking impression of the narrative.³⁷⁴ The media coverage makes clear that not only was Vanessa Guillén murdered, but she was mutilated, disrespected, and ignored—all of which was enabled by the military institution she and her family had trusted. Such graphic details arranged next to heartbreaking reports that Vanessa Guillén “had dreamed of being in the military since childhood” accentuated the emotional power of the story—eliciting pity for the poor girl and disgust towards anyone responsible for such a travesty.³⁷⁵ Imagery showing that “Only a decade ago, she was playing with her brother’s toy pistol and telling her mother she wanted to defend her homeland” compared to the graphic nature of her death—and the fact that it occurred on an Army base—communicated a judgment that the system failed Vanessa Guillén and undoubtedly fails others as well.³⁷⁶ Interspersed with emotional accounts of the suffering of the Guillén family “leaning on their Catholic faith and hope for change in the military,” “driving between Houston and Washington to demand justice for their daughter and sister,” and adorning their home with “photos, flowers and medals celebrating her honors, soccer tournaments and marathons;” the coverage portrays the human ramifications of the military’s victimization and neglect of innocent people.³⁷⁷ As a result, her family continues to protest for basic human dignity for other service members and not have future cases “swept under the rug.”³⁷⁸

E. CONCLUSION

The dominant themes throughout the media coverage of this case study were as follows: incompetence regarding a military mishandling of the case, disgust with the

³⁷³ Horton.

³⁷⁴ Horton.

³⁷⁵ Christina Morales, ““An Empty Presence in My Chest’: Vanessa Guillen’s Family Calls for Change in the Military,” *New York Times*, July 6, 2020, ProQuest.

³⁷⁶ Morales.

³⁷⁷ Morales.

³⁷⁸ Wagner and Horton, “Trump Pledges Case of Slain Army Soldier.”

perceived military indifference to the murder and the notion that military culture enabled the crime, and pity towards an innocent and helpless victim in Vanessa Guillén. All have implications for military professionalism and civil military relations and serve to erode the Huntingtonian characteristics of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.

First, incompetence. The military was consistently portrayed by the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* as unable to perform the essential duties expected of a professional armed service. The media portrayal of the investigation as chaotic, disorganized, and lacking urgency reiterated this notion of wholesale military incompetence. This Huntingtonian notion of military professionalism demands a class of skilled experts deserving of public trust and proficient with demanding duties. However, the consistent depictions throughout this case study showed the opposite, depicting a military institution blundering fundamental tasks. The impacts of such incompetence are obvious, but also materially revealed themselves within the story. Reporting that “The League of United Latin American Citizens, the oldest Latino civil rights organization in the country, has backed the family” and was actively “urging Latino families across the country to stop their children from enlisting in the military” reveals a concrete example on how ineptitude impacts the perception and trust of the public.³⁷⁹ Such examples show how repeated public failures by the military can erode public image and trust.

Relating to incompetence was disgust. This tone of disgust was palpable throughout the media coverage, with portrayals of Fort Hood leadership as unconcerned with Vanessa Guillén’s disappearance. Making this perception worse was the Army’s public response, which came off as solely concerned with addressing its public image and unconcerned with actually locating the whereabouts of the murdered girl. The media portrayal throughout this case study depicted the military as borderline criminal throughout the case, and indifferent to the graphic murder and the pattern of similar cases on and around Fort Hood. These kinds of media themes further promulgate the notion that the military is untrustworthy and, in many ways, not representative of the public. This depiction leaves

³⁷⁹ Hernández, “Foul Play Suspected.”

little room for the public to respect, let alone trust. In an era of low trust in government institutions, the military cannot afford such depictions portraying it as willfully mistreating innocent Americans like Vanessa Guillén.

The overwhelming theme of this case study, however, is a sense of pity and sadness at the loss of Vanessa Guillén. This pity was a natural reaction to the horrific circumstances of her death. However, this tone of pity spread from victim to eventually cover *all* juniors service members. In the same way the Army's response to the case became representative of the military institution, so too did Guillén. Particularly for female members, media characterizations of the story depicted the case as an example of what it is like to live as a junior service member in an organization that is supposedly indifferent to them.

Victimhood itself, however, has curious ramifications for military professionalism. Vanessa Guillén is a victim. What happened to this poor girl is horrible and was, at times, very difficult for the author to continue reading accounts of her graphic death while researching this case. Nevertheless, this does not take away from the reality that a victim status is inherently antithetical to military professionalism. Inevitably, as seen throughout the coverage of this case study, it is not only the individual victim like Vanessa Guillén portrayed as a victim. The narrative invariably creeps to the idea that *all* military members are similarly victimized—particularly those that are junior, female, or non-white.

Overwhelmingly, a professional military does not want pity. Generalizations of military members as victimized or pitiful are inherently antithetical to any warrior ethos or Huntington's notion of military professionalism. All-inclusive statements depicting military members as objects of pity for their victimized situation are not the public image the military should ideally possess. The double-edged sword of being viewed with pity is helplessness, and the military cannot afford to be viewed as helpless in the public's eyes. The institution with a monopoly on violence must not be labeled a victim. Furthermore, once a military institution entrusted to kill on behalf of the government becomes the subject of pity, the boundary of professionalism is crossed.

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VII. ANALYSIS: CORPORATE MEDIA IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ...We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.³⁸⁰

-Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*

A. HOW MAJOR PUBLICATIONS CHARACTERIZE THE MILITARY

Leading media publications hold power far beyond the recognition of the average person. Moreover, these publications very likely possess more influence than many government institutions themselves. As Edward Bernays' iconic observation illustrates, the opinions and views of a substantial portion of the population will reflect the information displayed on their screens. In many ways, popular attitudes will mirror the way issues are presented in the press, particularly when that information arises from "respectable" sources; i.e., those widely judged as credible. Even when readers disagree with the news, media coverage—especially prominent print media—nonetheless sets the terms of the conversation, framing crucial topics pertaining to military professionalism.

To address this, first, we must recognize what *is* rather than what *ought to be*. The purpose of this research is not to prescribe how the media should operate, but rather *to* describe the military's relationship to the media *as it is*. Civil-military relations are largely built on public perception, and all news stories relating to the armed services influence the public's understanding of the military institution and—as a result—influence the common views of military professionalism. This influence exists because the perception of military professionalism is not just an artifact of the actions and culture of military members—even perfect conduct on behalf of the armed service does not ensure an accurate perception by the public. Instead, much of the public understanding of the armed service is also shaped by narratives from media publications. One facet of military professionalism entails proper

³⁸⁰ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, 9.

behavior and integrity behind closed doors—habits and traits that service members can control. Be that as it may, another aspect is the need to project or convey professionalism to the populace, actively working to be regarded as professional. This act of projection is not for the sake of self-gratification, but as a means for inculcating confidence and trust in the military institution, thereby ensuring societal stability. However, the arena in which this projection is achieved is principally managed by leading media establishments. Moreover, when these publications are primarily motivated (like any other business) by a profit-driven business model which incentivizes provocative coverage to maximize *clicks*, the issue of skewed narratives arises. Thus, an examination to seek out patterns in leading media coverage is critically important for understanding American civil-military relations.

To accomplish this goal, this research combined the separate fields of civil-military relations and media communication. This approach uniquely frames the analysis in a way that examines American military professionalism from a perspective that was previously unstudied. Analysis of the cases—COVID-19 aboard the Roosevelt, the military presence at Lafayette Square and its aftermath, and the death of Vanessa Guillén at Fort Hood—provided a method for sampling how pre-eminent print media publications present the military to the public. The study of these three case studies consistently exhibited the themes of pity, reverence, disgust, incompetence, and partisanship. Moreover, each of these themes exists in tension with Samuel Huntington’s ideals of professionalism—warping public perceptions of military expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.

Pity for the troops played prominently in each case study. Pitying media depictions of the military typically portrayed service members as the victims of their circumstances. Throughout the coverage, this victimization was typically at the hands of senior military officers, politicians, or anyone else holding a position of power. The junior sailors aboard the Roosevelt received the role of victim, senior leaders following Lafayette Square were pitifully portrayed as exploited by the President, Vanessa Guillén was—very literally—a victim, but also the entirety of junior female service members were assigned the role of victims in the coverage of Fort Hood. The reasoning for *why* these pitiful depictions take place does not matter, because the result is typically an impression of helpless service members needing charity—a notion wholly counter to the image of professionalism that

the military must strive to convey. Whether deserved or not, military professionalism and the warrior ethos mandate that service members are inherently *not* victims and take ownership and ultimate responsibility for their circumstances. This theme of pity acts in tension with Huntington's notion of corporateness (as well as a fundamental military ethos) and, as a result, undermines the appearance of professionalism that the military seeks to project.

Similarly, narratives of reverence appeared in every case. Reverential depictions presented military members as exceptionally brave, strong, and unique—giving them a heroic standing elevated from the rest of society. Captain Crozier became portrayed as a revered hero standing up for his helpless sailors, the top military brass boldly spoke “truth to power” following the Lafayette Square incident, and soldiers like Vanessa Guillén represented the best that America has to offer. These depictions glorify the military and its members and present them as automatic heroes meriting distinctive recognition and praise. This sentiment and the previous theme of pity are the opposite sides of the same coin, but reverential depictions glorify the military to the point of putting it on a pedestal and making it into something it is not. The armed service in a representative government must be *of the people*, not of a special, elite class superior to the citizenry. Reverential treatment of the armed service not only opposes any semblance of corporateness and defies the notion of professionalism, but it also makes the military much more useful as a rhetorical tool that can be leveraged for partisan purposes—making military politicization increasingly likely.

All the while, each case study revealed a distinct tone of disgust toward the armed service. Disgust in the media coverage often portrayed military members as shameful and the institution as corrupt—and in some ways irredeemable. When disgust appeared in each case study, it often included the notion that military leadership was indifferent to suffering and the loss of human life. Senior uniformed and civilian leaders were portrayed as indifferent to the suffering aboard the Roosevelt, top military leaders were—initially—presented as complicit in anti-Constitutional authoritarianism, and Army leadership was depicted as neglectful to the point of enabling murder and the repeated disappearance of junior service members. More than simply eroding the armed service's reputation, this

theme also chafes at the impression of professionalism. The whole point of the professional label is that it denotes responsibility and signifies trustworthiness. However, portrayals of the military as reckless with human life and careless to suffering undermine impressions of responsibility and trustworthiness. Disgust with the military institution directly opposes Huntington's idea of responsibility for a professional service. When the public is disgusted by the military institution—seeing it as an irresponsible organization—trust from the people quickly dissolves.

Images of incompetence pervaded each case. The theme of military incompetence typically incorporated illustrations of the armed service as unable to perform basic responsibilities. The Navy, DOD, and entire government were portrayed as bungling the response to COVID-19, General Milley was characterized as absent-mindedly walking into a civil-military crisis, and Fort Hood leadership was depicted as incompetently allowing the deaths of Vanessa Guillén and numerous other junior soldiers. This theme communicated explicit untrustworthiness of the military, not due in this case to a lack of ethics, but by suggesting that the military literally cannot do its job. Each case study carried substantial implications of military incompetence, repeatedly illustrating the sentiment that much of the military's efforts were disorganized and chaotic—a narrative that stands in contrast to Huntington's notion of professional expertise. When the armed service is presented as being incapable of doing its job, its image as a professional institution is damaged.

Finally, there is partisanship. Partisan media portrayals generally framed the military firmly on one side of the domestic political aisle. Military leadership was depicted as preferring one political faction over another, overtly favoring or detesting specific politicians, or taking distinct sides on issues in the domestic culture wars. In separate cases, both Captain Crozier and General Milley were depicted as the spearhead of a “resistance” against the President and, as a result, were fully embraced by his partisan critics. Partisan portrayals also presented the military organization valuing political beliefs over merit, hard work, and competence. Furthermore, these depictions frame the military as an entirely partisan organization—not representing the population at large, but instead serving a handful of elected officials who only represent a small portion of the population. This

theme has a particularly toxic effect on perceptions of military professionalism because it suggests that military members act based on partisan motivations and goals rather than serving the people and the Constitution—a thoroughly unprofessional implication. In addition to posing perhaps the greatest threat to civil-military relations, the appearance of partisanship destroys the perception of military corporateness. While it is widely accepted in academic circles that the military plays a *political* role, a healthy armed service must not allow itself to hold *partisan* affiliations under any circumstance. Military professionalism is thoroughly incompatible with any semblance of taking sides in domestic partisan affairs. Where the perception of partisan involvement begins, military professionalism dies.

None of these themes project a positive vision of American military professionalism. The case studies revealed that any one event can be covered by media companies in a number of ways, but the end result tends to be a narrative in tension with military professionalism and, as a result, an erosion of civil-military relations. This analysis suggests that extensive coverage of *any* kind in the modern media landscape may injure the appearance of military professionalism. Further, any topic that receives sufficient coverage is likely to become politicized by this dynamic. This stark reality begs the question: If media publications are incentivized to communicate an unprofessional portrayal of the military, “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*”—or “Who will watch the watchmen?”³⁸¹

B. UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE: WE ARE WHAT THE PEOPLE PURCHASE

A free press serves a vital role within a functional democracy. The citizenry *must* be well-informed, and powerful institutions—such as the military or any other branch of government—*must* be held accountable by an outside actor like the media. But what is to be done when the leading media institutions, designed to provide accountability, exercise their position for the sake of advancing their own power and profit? Herein lies the problem.

³⁸¹ Humphries, *The Satires of Juvenal*, 78.

This media climate is epiphenomenal of its design. As outlined by Chomsky and Herman's model of the media and political economy, all media operates on a profit-driven model with a primary incentive to maximize monetary gain, just like any other business. Thus, while feigning the appearance as a professional body itself, pre-eminent media publications like those analyzed in this research set aside professional responsibility to instead present what is most advantageous for creating attention, controversy, and optimizing revenue. This profit-driven media design is not beholden to the professional ideals of the military institution. Moreover, as long as these leading media publications operate on such a business model, they will remain incentivized to cover the military in an especially provocative manner, as illustrated in these case studies. As a result, narratives that undermine the public perception of military professionalism and the resulting damage to civil-military relations are an inevitable by-product of this profit-driven media model. Prominent media publications already do—and will continue to—commodify the military profession's public perception as a means to an end to optimize their bottom line. The result is that the *overwhelming majority of coverage* coming from this profit-driven media model will negatively affect the public's perception of military professionalism and civil-military relations.

This challenge, however, is not the media's problem to fix. Identifying this reality is not a condemnation of capitalism or even a recommendation to change the nature of the media. Rather, the primary responsibility resides with the military. What must change is that military members and American citizens alike must *recognize* this profit-driven model as the media's fundamental nature. Resolving the media's harmful influence on civil-military relations can only occur if military leaders first *identify and accept* that there is a problem. Therefore, military members, and all American citizens, must become more media literate than ever before. Due to the rapid growth of the internet and social media, media literacy has become the new most crucial skill that must develop within the military and throughout society. Only with a media-literate, savvy population that understands how the media operates and how language manipulates judgement can we mitigate the issues confronted in this research. Military members and the population must become more aware of how the media functions to become resilient to its impact on military professionalism.

Through this view, media publications are not the “bad guy” or inherently opposed to the military. Instead, it is merely in their best commercial interest to continually favor provocative narratives harmful to civil-military relations—and Americans must become cognizant of this reality and learn to deal with it as responsible citizens. Only once this nature of the media is widely accepted as an axiomatic truth can we begin to effectively resolve these issues. **If nothing else, this impact of the profit-driven media model on civil-military relations is the principal lesson learned from this research.**

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VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH AND THE WAY FORWARD

The United States needs a professional military. As a representative government, the American experiment cannot afford to watch its professional armed service be utilized by outside actors (and sometime service members themselves) with no concern for the well-being of the military institution. If military leadership does not recognize how the armed service is employed and influenced by major media publications, it will likely experience further polarization and the continued erosion of perceived military professionalism. The American military stands the risk of growing continually politicized while media coverage favors narratives that damage its image as a professional institution. By definition, healthy civil-military relations require a vital component of professionalism from the military. As soon as the perception of military professionalism is gone, much of the credibility of representative government quickly evaporates. The media has done much to degrade the reputations of entire nations, other institutions, and even groups of people, and in its pursuit of profit and its willingness to commodify the armed service as a means to an end, it will not hesitate to do it again. The stakes are too high to watch it to happen to the American military.

Moreover, there is much more to be learned. This research's employment of two seemingly separate domains—civil-military relations and media communications—creates a wealth of opportunity for future analysis to further address these issues. Possible future research topics include: the use of framing to manipulate narrative, omission of key details to shape a story, manipulative language and its impact on public opinion of the military, the role of the Public Affairs Officers (PAO) and the military's relationship with the media, historical case studies and the evolution of media coverage of the military, the of measurement military politicization (how politicized is the military?), how to keep current and former service members from contributing to the harmful media coverage outlined in this research, and whether mandatory military service could bridge a civil-military gap.

**A. FRAMING: EVERY NARRATIVE ALLOWS PASSIONATE DEBATE
WITHIN A CONFINED AND ACCEPTABLE WINDOW**

Every media narrative begins with its framing. One topic for future research is to analyze how and why media narratives are framed the way they are. The case studies in this research repeatedly illustrate how the media frames each story to fit a relatively small window of acceptable discussion. For instance, in the Captain Crozier case study, a significant focus of the media discussion revolved around the sailors' views of the President and his cabinet. Although that was certainly *one* aspect of the story, the media coverage framed the narrative around a political hook, giving it disproportionate attention. Similarly, the other case studies saw the same effect in which the narrative was confined to create a limited window of dialogue in the story's public conversation. This framing focuses each media account on limited aspects of the story. Visible in each case study, this phenomenon—known as the Overton Window—corners the public discussion within a range which sets the terms of the story and limits public discourse.³⁸²

For example, throughout the Lafayette Square case, a notable amount of media coverage focused on the incident's Constitutional ramifications. This mass of coverage cornered the public discussion into the matter of whether a civil-military disaster had occurred. Several months later, this framing turned out to be an inaccurate depiction of the reality on the ground. Nonetheless, a major impact on civil-military relations still occurred, not because of the events on the ground but due to the perception created by the media coverage. The civil-military disaster transpired because the population was certain that it had, and the actual events of that evening meant little to that perception. Research on the framing of military-related stories could help explain how and why stories get framed and possibly discern a pattern for this framing with cases relating to the military.

B. OMISSION: IF A TREE FELL IN THE WOODS...

The other side of the same coin as framing is the tool of omission. Future research could also analyze the tendency of media coverage to omit or downplay important details

³⁸² George-Daniel Bobric, "The Overton Window: A Tool for Information Warfare" (ICCWS 2021 16th International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security, Academic Conferences Limited, 2021), 20.

from a story. Notable throughout this research was the use of omission to frame the narrative of a story. A significant feature of every news article is not just what it says, but also what goes unsaid. Inevitably, all journalists must pick and choose which information is most appropriate to include in a story. However, this selection can seriously influence the reader's perception. For instance, depending on which details are included or omitted in the timeline of events at Lafayette Square, one can come up with entirely separate accounts of what took place. This tool of omission is significant because, in its employment, the coverage avoids *technically* lying while also effectively altering the essence and character of an entire story. Moreover, news coverage consistently chooses which facts to exclude to concoct the most compelling narrative, attract readers, and project the desirable version of the story. Additional research could reveal when, why, and what kind of details are omitted in the coverage of stories pertaining to the military.

C. LANGUAGE AS A TOOL: WORDS ARE USED TO EVOKE FEELINGS, NOT TO COMMUNICATE IDEAS

Perfectly true words can sometimes be misleading. Additional analysis is needed to explain the selective use of emotional language and how it is applied to military cases in the media. Even when media coverage does not overtly reveal a bias within the narrative, emotional language often manipulates the reader toward specific conclusions about the story. For example, much of the language throughout each case study was expressly emotionally loaded and likely to coerce the reader toward certain conclusions about the story. This emotional manipulation using evocative language occurs under the guise of offering objective facts while using emotionally loaded prose, which has the effect of influencing the reader. This use of language illustrates how the media uses words as a *tool*, but not to communicate ideas *literally*. For example, when reporting on Lafayette Square included imagery of “frightened teenagers...sobbing two blocks away,” the result was not to describe the scene literally, but to induce an emotional response from the reader and convey a certain attitude about the story.³⁸³ If this illustration of sobbing children did not fit the story's objective, it would readily be omitted for something more beneficial. This

³⁸³ Cooper, Schmitt, and Gibbons-Neff, “Milley, America's Top General.”

conception of language as a tool means that the information presented in reputable media coverage can simultaneously be *factual* and *misleading*. Moreover, the media regularly portrays *facts* without significant concern for the *truth*. Additional analysis into this topic could further illuminate how the intelligent use of language is utilized to shape the perception of the armed service.

D. THE ROLE OF THE PAO: WHAT SHOULD THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND MEDIA LOOK LIKE?

This research naturally relates to military PAO. Possible topics for PAOs following this research could be to question the relationship between the military and leading media companies. The previously described tendencies in media coverage seem not to have a left or right-wing inclination. On the contrary, by all accounts—and by definition—all political sides reveal some tendency for bias in their coverage. What is essential here is that, regardless of political leaning, the manner in which the media misrepresents the military also inevitably harms its perception of professionalism. The nature of modern media is that anything covered extensively in the news will likely become a part of the partisan debate, eventually seeping into the “culture war.” This divisiveness appears in athletics, entertainment, popular culture, a global pandemic, and also the military. Every story that enters the news cycle inevitably becomes politicized and plays a part in the constant state of media engagement. This amplified media engagement ultimately derives from the profit-driven model of corporate news and social media and the need to capture public attention. It is not that these institutions *wish* to degrade military professionalism; it is that they do not have any convictions *keeping* them from doing so in their pursuit of profit. All news publications are profit-seeking businesses, and it is in their interest to produce salacious stories to attract readers and clicks. As a result, future research reassessing the role of the PAO and how the military should communicate with pre-eminent media publications warrants research.

E. FOREIGN POLICY, MEDIA, AND THEIR HISTORY

Another source for future research is to investigate the past. Historical case studies showing how media messaging has impacted foreign policy and military operations would

be beneficial. Also adding to this theme would be an inquiry into how media coverage of the military has changed over time. Moreover, the concept of an unreliable news media is not new; rather, it has only become more apparent and prolific in the “electronic age.” In fact, this state of media coverage manipulating public perception has likely always existed.³⁸⁴ For instance, in the early days of the United States, the first political parties had their own newspaper publications communicating directly to the public while feigning objectivity.³⁸⁵ Every human being with a cell phone now has 24-hour access to media messaging, making the dynamics of “Yellow Journalism”—sensationalism and crude exaggeration—more potent than ever before.³⁸⁶

A modern version of “Yellow Journalism” may be alive and well today. Adding to this dynamic is the notion of the “noble lie” in journalism, the idea that it is acceptable to purposely mislead the reader as long as it is for the “right” reason. For instance, a 2016 editorial by Jim Rutenberg in the *New York Times* titled “Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism” outlines a perspective claiming that it is no longer the duty of journalists to concern themselves with presenting objective truth.³⁸⁷ The rationale for this attitude in the piece is that journalists must see themselves as in a position to be eventually judged by history. Therefore, according to this perspective, the news media’s responsibility is to ensure they are on the “right” side of history by expressing the “right” ideas and communicating the “correct” version of a story. The intent of this method is to guide readers into also possessing the “correct” ideas. This moralistic outlook on the role of the news media is nothing more than a pronouncement for why journalists must take sides and skew the information they present as objective. The author does not claim that all journalists currently see themselves this way. However, it is worth noting that since 2016,

³⁸⁴ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*; Bernays, *Propaganda*; Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*.

³⁸⁵ University of Illinois Library, “American Newspapers, 1800–1860: An Introduction,” Illinois Library, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/tutorials/antebellum-newspapers-introduction/>.

³⁸⁶ Richard L. Kaplan, “Yellow Journalism,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2008).

³⁸⁷ Jim Rutenberg, “Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism,” *New York Times*, 2016.

when this editorial reached publication, there has been a trend toward this sort of behavior in the news media. The author also does not claim this evolution in the media is a direct result of a single editorial. However, there is undoubtedly a trend of partisanship and politicization in media coverage. Further investigation into distant as well as recent history could reveal if this problem is unique to modern times or if there is something to be learned from the past.

F. HOW TO MEASURE POLITICIZATION: HAVE THINGS *REALLY* GOTTEN WORSE?

Another topic for research is how to *actually measure* the military's degree of politicization. Within a representative government, the ability to maintain an apolitical military is crucial. Meanwhile, common discussions of military polarization often occur as if it is solely up to the military and perhaps a few politicians to manage. However, media coverage skews the public perception of a politicized armed service much more than the military's actual operations. Thus, the greatest threat to this apolitical status is media representation depicting the military unprofessionally. Even if it is not the intent of the media to harm the military's professional standing, the reality is that the use of the military's image for outside purposes is counter to Huntington's idea of corporateness and inherently unprofessional. Throughout the case studies, anytime the media quoted a military member to prove a point within the story's narrative, it further skewed or politicized the perception of the military. When this occurs on a massive scale—especially by influential media publications—it has a transformative effect on the perception of the armed service and further erodes military professionalism.

G. THE VOCAL FEW IMPACT THE SILENT MAJORITY: WHAT CAN MILITARY MEMBERS DO?

Additionally, what steps must be taken to avoid further politicization or erosion of professionalism? Because media messaging tends to harm perceptions of military professionalism, the armed service must be aggressively protective of its own professional standing. This position opposes the current status quo of allowing the media to control the military's public perception. Aggressively preserving the military ethos means that current

and retired military members *must* step away from political punditry and understand that—whether they like it or not—being a veteran makes someone a representative of the *entire* armed service. Thus, the editorializing and vocal political opinions from retired flag officers must cease due to its destructive consequences upon the American military.

Retired senior military leaders providing public input on domestic politics is especially damaging to military professionalism. The frequent appearance of op-eds or contributions to reporting by retired officers repeatedly framed the *entire* military on one specific side of a partisan debate. Moreover, at no point did the participation of retired flag officers avoid having the impact of eroding military professionalism. On the one hand, such senior figures are incredibly experienced and genuine subject matter experts with a wealth of knowledge. However, on the other hand, by speaking through the media, they are very explicitly contributing to a partisan discussion on behalf of the military. It is entirely possible that such figures can pursue careers after the military and may even find ways to express themselves as *individuals* speaking their own opinion, but editorializing or contributing to the media coverage with the title of “General,” “Admiral,” or any other military title creates the impression that they are speaking *as a military figure*. There is indeed a legacy of retired American servicemen holding office or expressing their opinions on domestic matters. However, the nature of the internet, social media, and the corporate press have made this dynamic much more delicate in the modern era, with information spreading faster than ever due to technology. As a result, public remarks by military members are more consequential and damaging now because they are employed to speak on behalf of the entire institution, regardless of their intention.

The military must not play into narratives in which its prestige is commodified. Worth noting among the themes discerned from the analysis are the common notions of pity and reverence. The other themes are damaging to military professionalism for more obvious reasons, but pity and reverence are unique because they appear favorable at face value but have the same detrimental impact nonetheless. These themes of reference and pity occurred throughout the case studies by utilizing the military’s high public approval and prestige as rhetorical tools for partisan or domestic matters. In doing so, the media effectively commodifies the military’s prestige using reverential and pitiful depictions to

piggyback off its favorable public image. This use of the military image by politicians, private citizens, entertainment, and the news media works by co-opting the military's positive reputation to add authority and credibility to their message. Such hijacking of the military image is inherently dangerous because it takes advantage of the public trust that the military has earned. Expressions of reverence and pity were used in each case study to attach the narrative to the military's credibility to better communicate a specific message to the audience. This co-opting occurred through favorable depictions of military leaders whenever they appeared to side against the President or in favor of the media's narrative. This tool of utilizing the military's prestige for unrelated narratives bastardizes the reputation of the armed service and improperly applies it for self-serving purposes.

Perhaps, all press is bad press. These factors lead to the possibility that it is in the best interest of the military to minimize its overall news exposure. The armed service gains little and stands to suffer a severe erosion of military professionalism by participating with the media. As a result, military members are in their best interest to denounce current and former service members who include themselves in the media coverage.

H. CLOSING THE GAP: A MILITARY *OF THE PEOPLE*

One vital topic worth further analysis is the idea of mandatory service. Outside of strictly media-related solutions, the military as an institution might also adapt to improve civil-military relations through direct engagement with civilians. While the military's public approval remains high, this does not necessarily equate to a high degree of perceived military professionalism. Instead, this high public approval may reflect that the United States employs an all-volunteer force where most American citizens never face the possibility of military service. Therefore, another possible solution to this media-driven erosion of perceptions of military professionalism would be to reinstate limited mandatory service in the United States. While there are, of course, downsides to mandatory service, it could also reinvigorate a sense of ownership and identity within the American public. Increased service will undoubtedly bolster the population's sense of identity with and ownership of the military and their citizenship.

Moreover, reinstating even short intervals of mandatory service could help close the divide between the professional military and the citizenry, mitigating the tendency for the American public and media to “otherize” military members. This change could lessen the perception that the armed service and foreign policy are entirely unrelated to the public and will allow citizens to be more critical of media accounts based on their own experiences. This action could also mitigate the current separation between the American public and foreign policy, instituting extreme ownership and investment in foreign policy decisions. With reinstated conscription, the population will take military matters much more seriously than they do now. Currently, the distance and lack of familiarity that most American citizens have from the armed service are significant factors enabling how media coverage utilizes the military as a rhetorical tool. As soon as Americans became more familiar with the military it would weaken the media’s ability to utilize the armed service as a means to an end to serve media and political narratives while also strengthening the public’s ability to confidently criticize foreign policy, military operations, and military conduct.

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