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This essay will analyze historical examples of active-duty and retired military leaders that have been involved in partisan politics. Additionally, the primary concerns of those advocating for a retired military force removed from the political arena will be examined. The author determines that while active service members should remain politically neutral, retired military leaders have both the right and obligation to provide their unique and important perspective by speaking for themselves without negatively affecting the active-duty service.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**Generals and Admirals in the Political Arena:
Ethical Dilemma or Continuation of Service?**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Generals and Admirals in the Political Arena: Ethical Dilemma or Continuation of Service?

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Thesis: While active service members should remain politically neutral, retired military leaders have both the right and obligation to provide their unique and important perspective by speaking for themselves without negatively affecting the active-duty service.

Discussion:

The ethics of military leaders' involvement in politics has been the source of debate during many election cycles. Since the early history of the Republic, active and retired general and flag officers have supported partisan agendas, challenged current political leaders, and ran for political office themselves. At the same time, military and civilian leadership have developed mixed opinions on the ethics of the matter. Should military officers abstain from meddling in the political affairs of their civilian counterparts? Or is it more important that military leaders provide their unique standpoint to the political process?

This study will look at such historical examples as George McClellan, William T. Sherman, George Marshall, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower and more that have resulted in both success and failure. Additionally, Israel and Turkey will be considered due to their distinctive perspectives on civilian-military relations and how those relationships have affected their government and people. Finally, the primary concerns of those advocating for a retired military force removed from partisan politics will be examined.

Conclusion: Following retirement, military leadership involvement in politics provides critical insight to the voting populace and allows experienced leaders to continue to serve the Nation in a personal capacity, rather than as a representative of the Armed Forces.

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Preface

As an active-duty naval officer during multiple election cycles, I have had a front-row seat to current military leadership condemning retired general and flag officers that have expressed partisan viewpoints and supported candidates running for political office. The civilian-military relationship, however, requires an in-depth analysis of historical examples in order to understand how military involvement in politics effects the current active service. Likewise, it demands answering challenging questions from that of the opposing viewpoint with clear understanding and without bias.

For this analysis, and assistance in research, I would like to thank Dr. Bill Gordon. His ability to provide guidance and direction, while not injecting his personal opinions on the subject material, has been instrumental in assisting me throughout this essay.

INTRODUCTION

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, once wrote, “generals and admirals are generals and admirals for life” and “it is therefore nearly impossible for them to speak exclusively for themselves when speaking publicly.”¹ General Dempsey is not alone in this argument. Civilian-military (CIVMIL) relation scholars have debated the ethics of military leaders’ involvement in politics since the birth of the Nation, often concluding that military brass should remain out of the political spotlight even following retirement. In these politically-charged times, retired generals and admirals have come under increased scrutiny when they put forth policy views. However, throughout American history, retired general and flag officers have continued to support partisan agendas, challenge current political leaders, and even run for political office themselves. Clearly, there is a disconnect that deserves a closer look. This essay will analyze historical examples of former military leaders such as George McClellan, Winfield Scott Hancock, Dwight Eisenhower, and others, as well examples provided by other nations, in order to challenge the belief that officers should remain out of the political arena following their military career. While active service members should remain politically neutral, retired military leaders have both the right and obligation to provide their unique and important perspective by speaking for themselves without negatively affecting the active-duty service.

The study of this particular matter within civil-military relations is challenging because measuring the effects of a publicized, partisan retired military service on the active duty

¹ Martin Dempsey, “Keep Your Politics Private, My Fellow Generals and Admirals,” *Defense One*, August, 2016, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/08/keep-your-politics-private-my-fellow-generals-and-admirals/130404/?oref=d-topstory>.

component is often subjective. Many times, there simply is no decisive answer, only a matter of personal opinion. It is reasonable to state that a retired flag officer who publically displays staunch conservative or liberal viewpoints may result in an outside observer classifying the active military service among the same regard. It is also realistic to state that a retired military officer with a career of experience may offer a partisan perspective that could be extremely beneficial to the voting populace, and likewise not effect public opinion on the political preferences of the active-duty element. It is for this reason that this paper does not seek to prove that either of these examples are not credible. Rather, by seeing an individual's views as just that, an *individual's* opinion, one can gain valuable insight without tarnishing their interpretations of the larger group.

Finally, this essay does not seek to discredit Samuel Huntington's premise of "objective civilian control" of the military.² Huntington's concept, professionalizing the military by maintaining a politically neutral force, therefore prepared to carry out the orders of a legitimate civilian authority, is seen within Department of Defense (DOD) guidance (including DOD Directive 1344.10 explained below).³ However, this idea applies to the active duty component, and therefore does not contend against the article's thesis.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Central to the argument of military involvement in politics is legality. Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1344.10, Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces, is the

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1957, 83.

³ *Ibid*, 83-84.

principal document regarding the permissible and impermissible political activities of DOD personnel. The document includes provisions for both active duty and retired personnel. However, the active component is kept within strict guidelines regarding political activities. While active duty personnel are encouraged to “carry out the obligations of citizenship,” such as voting and attending political events while not in uniform, they are also prohibited from taking part in partisan political fundraising, speaking at partisan political gatherings, serving in an official capacity for a partisan club and displaying various political signs.⁴ Additional active duty regulations are defined in the directive, including a summarizing statement that “any activity that may be reasonably viewed as directly or indirectly associating the Department of Defense or the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or any component of these Departments with a partisan political activity or is otherwise contrary to the spirit and intention of this Directive shall be avoided.”⁵ The broad statement seeks to distance the DOD and its constituents from partisan political action.

In contrast, the retired force is not kept within the same boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable political actions. The relatively few limitations on retired members of the armed forces are when running for political office, and they are focused on allowing personnel to use their military rank, grade, and service affiliation provided that they indicate their retired standing.⁶ Additionally, retired military members are also required to provide a disclaimer that military data and photographs are not endorsed by the DOD.⁷ As such, the retired component of the armed forces is under no legal obligation to avoid partisan politics. They are treated in a

⁴ US Department of Defense, *Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces*, Directive 1344.10, February 19, 2008, 2-3.

⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid*.

similar manner as that of their civilian counterparts, carrying the same freedom of speech rights as set forth in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

The legal analysis of military leaders' involvement in politics shows a clear distinction in regulations between the active and retired force. Because of this disparity, and legal guidance set forth in DOD Directive 1344.10, it would be easy to avoid a historical analysis of active duty officers involving themselves in government policy, and instead focus on the retired component. However, despite the legal ramifications, analyzing examples of active duty members becoming involved in civil matters provides both positive and negative models that contribute to a more complete understanding of the CIVMIL dilemma. Additionally, they underline several of the concerns regarding retired military personnel becoming involved in partisan politics as well.

CIVMIL affairs, specifically military leaders' involvement in politics, is often discussed in terms of Pre-Civil War and Post-Civil War time frames.⁸ Prior to the Civil War, particularly preceding the writing of the Constitution, Samuel Huntington explained that CIVMIL relations were more of a subjective dynamic.⁹ Military professionalism was absent, and the clear line between civilian control and military subordination was muddled.¹⁰ The cause

⁸ Huntington, 193.

⁹ Dayne E. Nix, "American Civil-Military Relations," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2012), <http://search.ebscohost.com/>, 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

for this dilemma dates back to early militias. Citizen-soldiers became engaged in small conflicts, only to return to their civilian life once the engagement was complete.¹¹ Many of these same individuals were also involved in local politics, and therefore the military and political divide was blurred. The founders, recognizing the dilemma, drafted the Constitution with a separation of military control among the executive and legislative branches.¹² While this agreement prevents too much authority within one branch of government, it inadvertently results in the military having to provide counsel to both the President and Congress.¹³ The unintended consequence is military leadership being drawn in to political controversy. Huntington explains this dynamic as a “perpetual invitation, if not an irresistible force, drawing military leaders into political conflicts.”¹⁴ However, subjective control was less prominent following the Constitution because a standing military was established, and it was clearly defined as subordinate to the civilian authority.¹⁵

Despite the presence of a clear delineation between military and civilian control, political leaders prior to the Civil War often came from a military background. Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Zachary Taylor are all examples of Pre-Civil War Presidents having prior military service.¹⁶ Many other presidents of this era also had a military background in state militias. While these leaders removed themselves from their military affiliation prior to running for political office, others attempted to campaign while in uniform. Lieutenant General Winfield Scott famously made several unsuccessful bids for President while serving as

¹¹ Nix, 89-90.

¹² *Ibid*, 90.

¹³ *Ibid*, 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ Steve Corbett and Michael J. Davidson, "The Role of the Military in Presidential Politics," *Parameters* 39 (4), <http://search.proquest.com>, 59.

Commanding General of the Army.¹⁷ Scott's political aspirations were also in opposition to President James Polk, and therefore caused Polk reluctance when choosing between Scott and Zachary Taylor to lead efforts in the Mexican-American War.¹⁸ Though the President would eventually choose Scott, increasing the General's stature and future candidacy, the example still demonstrates that political ambition within the military can influence civilian policy.¹⁹

In contrast to current military leaders seeking public office, Pre-Civil War dilemmas also arose from military officers becoming involved in government policy. General George McClellan, Commanding General of the Army of the Potomac (AOP), once reached out to Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon Chase, in order to discuss funding for his war efforts, including laying out detailed plans for his campaign.²⁰ The notion of a war-time general discussing how and where he would be conducting operations with a civilian leader entrusted with financial obligations to the President and Congress was of concern to President Lincoln and his administration.²¹

Adding to the already fragile relationship between the President and his senior military commander were differences in terms of operational planning. McClellan had devised a plan to attack the Confederates at Urbanna, Virginia and move his army through the Tidewater region to Richmond.²² Lincoln, however, wanted to keep the AOP between Alexandria and the Rappahannock River in order to provide security for Washington D.C. and the lower

¹⁷ Corbett, 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁰ Ethan S. Rafuse, "General McClellan and the Politicians Revisited," *Parameters* 42, (Summer 2012),

<http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/2012summer/Rafuse.pdf>, 75.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 77.

Shenandoah Valley.²³ Lincoln would eventually yield to McClellan, but their contentious relationship continued during the Civil War. McClellan, having modified his Urbanna plan, was repeatedly met with President Lincoln's involvement in operational and tactical planning. From repositioning McClellan's forces, ordering specific communication lines, and directing McClellan to combine with General Irvin McDowell's command, President Lincoln became heavily involved in affairs normally left to the military commander.²⁴

General McClellan, in addition to communicating directly with cabinet members, also attempted to change President Lincoln's overall strategy. In a letter to Lincoln, McClellan advised the President to resist taking the war to the Confederate population, instead focusing on the Rebel armed forces and political groups.²⁵ McClellan, acknowledging that the content of the letter was outside the purview of the army and his role as Commanding General, faced increasing admonition when the letter became public.²⁶ McClellan and Lincoln's disparate viewpoints would continue through 1862 and the Maryland Campaign, ultimately resulting in McClellan's removal as commander of the AOP.²⁷ Fatefully, the two leaders would meet again in 1864 during McClellan's failed attempt to run for president and preclude Lincoln from a second term. The relationship between Lincoln and McClellan displays the complications that arise from blurring the line between civilian authority and military subordinates, and the effects that it can have across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war.

Despite McClellan's inability to ascend to the Presidency, there was a recognition following the Civil War that "successful generalship was a gateway to political influence – by

²³ Rafuse, 77.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 78.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 79.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 80.

way of elected office.”²⁸ From the conclusion of the Civil War until 1901, only one President (Grover Cleveland) did not previously hold the rank of general.²⁹ Ironically, the Post-Civil War era is also regarded as the “beginning of the American professional ethic of a nonpolitical military.”³⁰ The seemingly contradictory relationship of these two statements is acceptable because each of these Presidents took office following resignation from military service. Likewise, the active duty military was becoming increasingly nonpolitical under its new Commanding General of the Army, General William T. Sherman.³¹ During this period, Army officers often abstained from voting, avoided partisan events, and generally removed themselves from politics in general.³² Huntington brilliantly described Sherman as “earthy, direct, limited, he was the epitome of the virtues and vices of the professional officer...he glorified in the unadorned title of ‘soldier’ and wished to be nothing more or nothing less.”³³ Sherman was steadfast in his beliefs on removing the military from political influence, even going to such extremes as moving the Army headquarters from Washington D.C. to St. Louis, Missouri to achieve his desired separation.³⁴

An exception to this shift in military culture was General Winfield Scott Hancock. Despite serving beneath Sherman, Hancock ran for the Democratic presidential nomination three times while on active duty service.³⁵ General Hancock would succeed in his third attempt, only

²⁸ Nate Bethea, “Retired Generals Don’t Have Much Say in Politics Anymore,” *Task and Purpose*, July, 2016, <http://taskandpurpose.com/retired-generals-dont-much-say-politics-anymore/>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Corbett, 60.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Huntington, 231.

³⁴ Corbett, 60.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 61.

to be defeated in the general election by retired General James Garfield.³⁶ Huntington, in explanation of Hancock's defeat, stated that "with the exception of military heroes straight from the field of victory, they [the American people] normally prefer a well-rounded candidate who has been a success in law, politics, business, or other civil activity to one whose talents have been exclusively military."³⁷ This premise fits the narrative immediately following the Civil War. Military leaders, now heroes on the field of battle, were in prime position to contend for political office. Yet, by 1880 this support had waned. Hancock's unsuccessful bid for President became noteworthy because in the 72 years following his defeat, no military officer was nominated for president until Dwight Eisenhower.³⁸

Eisenhower's transition from military leader to politician should not be held in the same regard as General Scott and General Hancock. President Eisenhower transferred to an inactive status during his initial candidacy.³⁹ He also offered his resignation once selected as the Republican Presidential candidate.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the more than seven decade long period of military absence from the Nation's highest civilian office was over.

Not surprisingly, following this period of minimal military influence in presidential politics, Eisenhower's run for civilian office was met with criticism. George Marshall, then Secretary of Defense, advised Eisenhower to abstain from pursuing political interests because of his career as a military professional.⁴¹ Marshall himself was notoriously apolitical, going so far

³⁶ Corbett, 61.

³⁷ Huntington, 159.

³⁸ Corbett, 61.

³⁹ Richard Swain, "Reflections on an Ethic of Officership," *Parameters* 37, (Spring 2007), <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/07spring/swain.htm>, 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Corbett, 62.

as avoiding voting altogether.⁴² His sentiments on CIVMIL affairs, though consistent, were likely exasperated during his tenure with General Douglas MacArthur.

General MacArthur is a common case study within CIVMIL affairs. Having achieved renowned success in the Pacific Campaign of World War II and the Korean War, he also held the unique position of military-governor in post-war Japan.⁴³ However, while on active duty, MacArthur repeatedly sent letters to Republican leaders that were in opposition to both President Franklin Roosevelt and President Harry S. Truman's policies.⁴⁴ The correspondence eventually reached the public and Truman subsequently fired the popular General.⁴⁵ Despite his abrupt and unexpected termination, MacArthur would continue on a brief run for the presidential nomination, but with minimal support he eventually pulled his name from consideration.⁴⁶ Despite MacArthur's success in battle and his tremendous popularity among the public, his political ambitions while donning the Army uniform ultimately ended his career.⁴⁷

Not all disagreements in civilian-military affairs, however, stemmed from a singular military leader challenging policy or attempting to gain office. Another method of gaining influence in civil matters was through a "strength in numbers" approach. Evidence of this practice took place in 1949, around the same time that MacArthur was completing his duties in Japan, when a group of Navy admirals challenged President Truman over his decision to halt

⁴² Nix, 96.

⁴³ Corbett, 62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Peter Mansoor, "Generals and Politics," *Hoover Institution*, August 2016, <http://www.hoover.org/research/generals-and-politics>.

⁴⁷ Bethea.

construction of an aircraft carrier in order to fund an innovative Air Force strategic bomber.⁴⁸ The disagreement, appropriately named the “revolt of the admirals,” stands as a prominent example of a failed attempt by military leadership to sway civil policy. In a similar approach, though in this case the dissenters were recently retired, a group of former generals in 2006 openly questioned U.S. strategy in Iraq, including the policies of Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld.⁴⁹ Having just served under the Secretary’s leadership, the protest raised questions regarding the ability of the military to execute orders when in opposition to civil authority.

Following World War II and the dissimilar examples of Eisenhower, Marshall, and MacArthur, civilian-military dilemmas at the highest levels of government have become less common. General Curtis Lemay, General Alexander Haig, Vice Admiral James Stockdale, and General Wesley Clark all attempted securing nominations for either president or vice-president, but each were following their retirement from active service.⁵⁰

Perhaps the most important takeaway from analyzing civilian-military relations throughout U.S. history is that, to a degree, military influence in civilian matters has always been present. The extent of influence varies, but the dividing line is sometimes crossed. Phillip Meilinger, a retired U.S. Air Force Colonel and Ph.D. in military history, explained this dynamic as a “‘permeable membrane’ between the military and political spheres that allowed men to pass back and forth between the two as it suited their purpose – and the purpose of the political parties

⁴⁸ James Joyner, “Generals and Political Interventions in American History,” *War on the Rocks*, August 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/08/generals-and-political-interventions-in-american-history/>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mansoor.

and even the nation.”⁵¹ Yet, despite these attempts, the civilian establishment has always maintained authority over the military.

Domestic CIVMIL case studies are the clear starting point in understanding the implications of active and retired military leaders becoming involved in partisan politics. They provide both positive and negative models across a variety of circumstances: peacetime, during war, and post-conflict reconstruction. However, foreign governments, and their own interpretations of CIVMIL relations, provide valuable lessons for the United States as well. Below, Turkey and Israel offer two contrasting models.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN TURKEY

Turkey provides a clear warning sign of the dangers of a government with extensive active-duty military influence. While it does not specifically address the influence of retired military members on the Turkish government, it displays a nation that has repeatedly faced its own military rising against the government, and the resulting instability within both domestic and foreign affairs.

Turkey is unique because its transfer from an authoritarian government to a democracy in 1960 came at the hands of military intervention.⁵² Historically, military coups have resulted in authoritarian rule and the subsequent oppression of the people, but in Turkey the

⁵¹ Phillip S. Meilenger, “Soldiers and Politics: Exposing Some Myths,” *Parameters* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 75.

⁵² Ozan O. Varol, “The Turkish ‘Model’ of Civil-Military Relations,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 11, Issue 3 (July 2013), <https://academic.oup.com/icon/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/icon/mot023>, 729.

rebellion ended in free elections. Still, between its establishment as a democracy and 2017, Turkish Armed Forces have conducted four military coups and have also had direct influence in removing government leadership on multiple occasions.⁵³ As a result, many CIVMIL experts rightfully use Turkey as an example of the concerns for too much civil power within the military establishment.

The Turkish military has traditionally exercised significant influence in government policy. Ozan Varool, a Professor at the Lewis and Clark Law School, explains military influence as a “fourth branch of the Turkish government.”⁵⁴ Due in large part to a 1961 Constitution that left military responsibility extremely vague within the National Security Council, the military began exerting influence in areas that were not conventionally security-centric.⁵⁵ Specifically, the language within the Constitution identified the National Security Council’s responsibility among matters of “national security and coordination,” a phrase that was ultimately extended to numerous areas across domestic and foreign policy.⁵⁶ This dynamic changed in 2001 as Turkey sought membership to the European Union (EU). The EU stipulated that civilian control of the military was a requirement, and appropriate changes to the National Security Council followed.⁵⁷

As evidence of the military’s entrenched view of itself as a check on authoritarian influence, the military attempted an additional coup in 2016.⁵⁸ On commencement of the failed attempt, the military released a statement of vindication, claiming “to restore the constitutional order, human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and public order, the Turkish armed forces

⁵³ Varol, 730.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 740.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 744.

⁵⁸ Ayaz Ahmed, "Turkey's Attempted Coup and its Possible Fallout," *Defence Journal* 19 (12), <http://search.proquest.com>, 22.

have taken complete control of the country.”⁵⁹ An assessment of the statement and the historical role of the Turkish military demonstrates that the group supports a democratic government, but at the same time stymies egalitarian progress through military intervention.⁶⁰

The United States Government, from the drafting of the Constitution through DOD Directive 1344.10, has protected itself from the dangers faced within Turkey by placing the military subordinate to civilian leadership, and ensuring that military members refrain from becoming involved in political affairs. However, the U.S. Government has never thought it necessary to place limitations on the involvement of retired military leaders in politics.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN ISRAEL

Israel, another nation with substantial military influence within civil affairs, differs from Turkey because it has maintained a democratic government. Regional conflict has been relatively common, but unlike Turkey, Israel has not experienced rebellion among its military ranks.

A similarity between Turkey and Israel is their adherence to a conscription service. Apart from exclusions based upon sex and religious preference, both nations require citizens to serve in the armed forces. In Israel, Jewish men serve for three years before having the option to join the permanent military or become a member of the reserve forces.⁶¹ Reserve personnel typically serve one month of full-time duty per year, and therefore maintain an affiliation with

⁵⁹ Ahmed, 24.

⁶⁰ Varol, 750.

⁶¹ Jonathan Kaplan, “The Role of the Military in Israel,” *The Jewish Agency for Israel*, April, 2015, <http://www.jewishagency.org/society-and-politics/content/36591>.

the active force that is renewed annually.⁶² Because of this dynamic, the frequently labeled “people’s army” represents all economic classes and political parties within Israeli society.⁶³ Military leaders are encouraged to provide their viewpoints while maintaining a position subordinate to civilian authority.⁶⁴

It is reasonable to expect that Turkey’s conscripted military service would yield similar results in terms of representing all classes and political parties like that of Israel. While the dynamic is similar, the outcome varies. The difference lies in the clarity of military subordination to civilian government in the Basic Laws of Israel, and the ambiguity that has plagued the Turk Constitution and its National Security Council in the past, blurring the line between military and civilian leaders.⁶⁵

The Israeli CIVMIL model is not without fault. With a significant portion of society maintaining a military background and the ensuing popularity of the armed forces, it is common for retired general and flag officers to leverage military success in to political positions.⁶⁶ The same could be said for the American retired military service, though, as described by Huntington, this occurs more often following a period of conflict.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, despite military influence in Israeli security and foreign affairs, active duty military leadership has

⁶² Kaplan.

⁶³ Isabel Kershner, “Debate Over the Role of ‘People’s Army’ in Israel Reflects Wider Fissures,” *The New York Times*, May, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/30/world/middleeast/israel-idf-netanyahu-lieberman-yaalon.html?_r=0.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Kaplan; Varol, 740.

⁶⁶ Kershner.

⁶⁷ Huntington, 159.

remained out of social policy and domestic politics.⁶⁸ The military remains subordinate to civilian authority, and continues to be an “army of the people.”⁶⁹

Turkey and Israel each demonstrate the dangers and benefits of military influence in government. Likewise, an analysis of former American military leaders in the political arena also displayed both failure and success. Beyond these historical examples, a third means of analyzing the problem is by addressing the primary concerns of those advocating for an apolitical retired military, and determining whether those concerns are confirmed in historical examples.

CONCERNS FOR MILITARY LEADERS IN POLITICS

There are four primary arguments that continue to surface in the debate of retired military officers becoming involved in partisan politics. The first, highlighted by retired General Martin Dempsey in an article for *Defense One*, is that retired flag officers forever speak for the military institution rather than themselves.⁷⁰ This principal argument is at the root of the debate, because if retired officers continuously speak for the military institution, then they should be treated similar to the active service, and likewise be expected to follow the same rules set forth in DOD Directive 1344.10. General Dempsey asserts, as mentioned earlier in this essay, that “generals and admirals are generals and admirals for life” and that “it is therefore nearly impossible for them to speak exclusively for themselves when speaking publicly.”⁷¹ The implication of this statement is that, if a retired general or flag officer advocates for a partisan

⁶⁸ Kaplan.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Dempsey.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

cause, then the public and its civilian government will conclude that the active duty force must also hold these same opinions.

Admittedly, there are forums where retired military officers speak regarding their profession, and many times they will speak for their collective service or former position, but in these circumstances the purpose is clearly stated and it is not politically-charged. More importantly, this does not take place at political rallies. When speaking for a partisan cause, flag officers' opinions are their own. To demonstrate this point, 2016 democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, carried endorsements from 110 former military leaders.⁷² Her opponent, then republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, announced 88 retired military leaders in his corner.⁷³ Clearly, these 198 retired military officers, speaking from different sides of the political aisle, do not each speak for the larger armed forces. If these close to 200 persons did carry that weight, they would only indicate that the military contains members from across the political spectrum. Furthermore, as indicated by journalist and former infantry officer, Nate Bethea, "whatever the greybeard retired generals say or do in their own capacities as private citizens, the current active-duty generals (and all the forces that they command) obey civilian leadership and policy."⁷⁴ Simply put, the active military continues to do its job regardless of the political preferences of the retired force.

A second argument regarding retired military leaders in politics is that, by publicizing partisan views, retired officers are creating adverse effects on the active service. Author, academic and prominent CIVMIL relations professional, Eliot Cohen, of Johns Hopkins

⁷² Dan Merica, "Clinton to Trump: My Military Endorsements Are Bigger Than Yours," *CNN*, September, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/09/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-military-endorsements/>.

⁷³ Merica.

⁷⁴ Bethea.

University, explains that when junior ranks in the military witness former leaders endorsing political candidates, they determine that there is no harm in expressing their own partisan viewpoints.⁷⁵ In this example, a trickle-down effect occurs that results in junior military personnel emulating their former commanders despite current policy.

Not only does DOD instruction prohibit the active duty component from this action, but it is also common for active duty military leadership to reiterate DOD policy and to conduct training on the topic when the situation requires, notably during election cycles. During the 2016 presidential race, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, reminded the entire Armed Forces of a “duty to protect the integrity and political neutrality of our military profession.”⁷⁶ Moreover, General Dunford advocated for upholding the civic duties of the military, to include debating policy issues that will affect the election.⁷⁷ Clearly, partisan comments made by retired military officers do not result in rebellion among the junior ranks.

This same argument can be taken a step further. Professor Cohen explains that “from there [articulating partisan views] the leap is not so long to obstructing policies with which one disagrees.”⁷⁸ To say that it is not a long leap from active-duty military expressing partisan viewpoints as a result of the retired force doing the same (despite DOD guidance), and then taking action regarding those views in order to undermine government policy, displays a lack of confidence in the American military profession. There will likely always be a few dissenters among the active service, but silencing retired officers will not impede the actions of this

⁷⁵ Eliot A. Cohen, “General Malaise,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August, 2004, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB109157496351782215>.

⁷⁶ Joseph Dunford, “Upholding Our Oath,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 82, (July 1, 2016): 2-3, http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-82/jfq-82_2-3_Dunford.pdf.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Cohen.

minority group. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John M. Shalikashvili, explained that “when, on very rare occasion, a senior military leader exhibited a lapse of judgment on that score, the military has been very swift in sanctioning that individual.”⁷⁹ One only has to look at the example set forth by General MacArthur. Despite tremendous success and considerable public support across multiple wars, MacArthur was swiftly removed from command after taking measures that challenged civilian authority.

A third argument in the debate is that civilian leaders, in recognition of the partisan viewpoints of retired flag officers, will begin seeking military leaders that are more likely to agree with them, consequently diluting the often required opposing, and unbiased, viewpoint of the military.⁸⁰ An illustration of this argument was suggested by retired Vice Admiral Doug Crowder, who once overheard a staff member on the Joint Chiefs of Staff make the comment “maybe it’s time we got some Clinton generals in here” after anticipating opposition from the Chairman on a particular matter.⁸¹ This argument makes the false assumption that active-duty officers openly provide their partisan opinions, and therefore civilian leadership can pick and choose whom they place in charge. Also, retired officers contributing in partisan forums does not equate to speaking for the active service. As previously mentioned, retired officers have shown a representation across the entire political spectrum. And as long as the active service maintains its political neutrality, as it has done with few exceptions for centuries, civilian leaders will continue to receive unbiased and apolitical advice from their subordinate military leaders.

⁷⁹ John M. Shalikashvili, “Old Soldiers Don’t Have to Fade Away,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 2004, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB109270495423893159>.

⁸⁰ Dempsey.

⁸¹ Joyner.

This argument also raises the element of trust between civil and military leaders. General Dempsey, in expectation of future leaders pursuing like-minded generals for personal gain, explained that “In the political world, trust is generally derived from party loyalty. In the interchange between civil and military, trust is derived from party neutrality.”⁸² The second part of this statement, while accurate, applies to the relationship between the active service and civil government. Active duty officers serve civilian leadership effectively by remaining politically neutral, thereby detaching personal beliefs on partisan issues and ensuring officers *execute* civilian policy rather than *question* it. However, retired officers are treated as civilians, and therefore trust in a political forum, though not required, does not come from impartiality.

The fourth argument regarding retired military officers becoming involved in partisan politics is that presidents may see their military leadership as potential rivals in future elections.⁸³ Steve Corbett and Michael Davidson explained an example of this dilemma in the Army War College journal, *Parameters*, recounting that former President Lyndon B. Johnson may have postponed General William Westmoreland’s return from the Vietnam War because of a concern for his presidential aspirations.⁸⁴ The scenario contains similarities to the aforementioned Lieutenant General Winfield Scott and President James Polk’s experience during the Mexican-American War. While this example raises multiple concerns, chiefly that wartime policy and decisions would be influenced by political ambition, it again only highlights the importance of a politically neutral active service. President Johnson should have had no indication of General Westmoreland’s political goals, nor of his plans for candidacy while he was still in uniform.

⁸² Dempsey.

⁸³ Corbett, 67.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 68.

Furthermore, regardless of whether military leaders become involved in partisan politics, they will continue to be an option for political office upon retirement. History has proven through Washington, Jackson, Grant, Eisenhower, and others that military leaders will remain viable candidates for public service following their active duty career. It should not surprise civilian leaders that generals and admirals retain the same rights as every citizen once they retire from service.

So why should retired officers express their partisan political beliefs? Retired Lieutenant General John Castellaw, a former Marine officer that ascribed to an apolitical stance during his active service, in retirement felt a responsibility to provide the knowledge that he gained in uniform.⁸⁵ In an article for *Voice of America*, he described the “analytical and methodical” nature of the military, as well as an ability to remain “moderate and measured” as being a strong contributor to political discourse.⁸⁶ In addition to the general temperaments of many military officers, the experiences that they provide are unique to their profession and therefore sought among the population. Retired military officers comprise a career of service to their government, imbued with national security and foreign policy involvement.

Simply put, in an area as important as national security, why silence those that have the most experience working in the profession that defends it? A more useful approach would be to provide the population with as much accurate information as possible, to include the qualified opinions of former military officers, thereby ensuring that the most informed decisions can be made.

⁸⁵ William Gallo, “Should Retired Military Officers Endorse Presidential Candidates?” *Voice of America*, September, 2016, <http://www.voanews.com/a/should-retired-military-officers-endorse-presidential-candidates/3499409.html>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Following retirement, military leadership involvement in the political arena provides critical insight to the voting populace and allows experienced leaders to continue to serve the Nation in a personal capacity, rather than as a representative of the Armed Forces. United States history, and its long list of former military presidents and key decision makers, have provided examples of the importance of retired military leaders' continuation of service, as well as the responsibility for active duty officers to remain politically neutral.

Those that have expressed their concerns regarding retired generals and admirals in politics are some of the most influential and respected military leaders and CIVMIL experts of their time. From General William T. Sherman to General George Marshall, Samuel Huntington to Eliot Cohen, and recently General Martin Dempsey, their insights and, in some cases, astute warnings, should be taken carefully. However, despite their cautions, the discussion of retired officers supporting partisan agendas, challenging current political leaders, and running for political office continues. And what has changed as a result? In a 2016 Pew Research Poll, public confidence in the military ranked number one among professions polled while elected officials was last.⁸⁷ The divide between civilian and military circles is not in jeopardy. Civilian control of the military has been a hallmark of the Constitution since 1789, and the respect for the U.S. military among the population has endured war, conflict, and scandals.

⁸⁷ Cary Funk and Brian Kennedy, "The Politics of Climate," *Pew Research Center*, October, 2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/04/the-politics-of-climate/>.

General Shalikashvili, in response to Professor Cohen's belief that generals never completely retire, emphasized that "Generals do retire. When they do, they share the same responsibility as Mr. Cohen and the rest of America to participate responsibly in the political process...a responsibility to our nation that is both honorable and consistent with their military service."⁸⁸ Flag officers do not lose their individual rights when they take off their Nation's uniform. On the contrary, they should stand tall, speak proudly, and continue to provide their unique and important perspectives to the American public.

⁸⁸ Shalikashvili.

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