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Turning from Tradition: Moving Civil-Military Relations Forward in the 21st Century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Turning from Tradition: Moving Civil-Military Relations Forward in the 21st Century

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Thesis: To meet the challenges of a more complicated security environment, civilian and military leaders should shift from their traditional reliance on Samuel Huntington's theory of objective control and adopt the rebargaining theory developed by Mackubin Owens to encourage civil-military cooperation and embrace a healthier role for the military in the development of US national policy and strategy.

Discussion: How can the military, those trained and equipped in the management and execution of force, remain obedient to a diverse civilian government that may be at odds with its best interests and ignore the advice it provides? In his book, *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel Huntington develops the theory of objective control to ensure civil control of the military. This theory draws a clear line delineating the responsibilities of the politician and military member, and it promotes an autonomous military to garner obedience. This theory of civil-military relations developed for survival during the Cold War, remains in practice by today's civil and military leaders. Objective control has proven an outdated mode of civil-military interaction in light of how much the United States' position in the world has changed since the theory was created in 1957. To meet the challenges of a more complicated security environment, civilian and military leaders must stop practicing objective control and adopt the rebargaining theory developed Mackubin Owens to encourage civil-military cooperation and develop a healthier relationship between civilian and military leaders.

Conclusion: Owens's theory of rebargaining should be part of the professional military education for all US officers. As global interaction become more complex and enemies more elusive, the US government and military owe it citizenry a capable relationship that demonstrates corporateness across the civil-military divide.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The state of civil-military relations in the United States has been a source of friction since the colonies declared their independence from England and raised an armed force to secure their liberty. The ratification of the Constitution in 1791 gave Congress the authority to declare war and fund the necessary military force, while it named the President as commander-in-chief of the armed services and charged him with waging war. Intentionally absent from the warfare decision and policy making process are the leaders of the military services. This civil-military dynamic created a dilemma for the US military. How can those trained and equipped in the management and execution of violence remain obedient to a diverse civilian government that may be at odds with its best interests and ignore the advice it provides?

In his book, *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel Huntington introduced a theory of civilian control known as objective control which provided an answer to that question. Huntington described the intent of objective control as “professionalizing the military, by rendering them politically sterile and neutral.” Huntington advocates for a clear line delineating the responsibilities of the politician from that of the military member and claims an autonomous military will ensure its obedience.¹ While this theory was developed in 1957 for Cold War survival, military and civilian leaders continue its practice to this day. Huntington’s work is taught in military colleges and private universities and is considered by many as the gold standard for managing contemporary civil-military relations. Unfortunately, objective control has proven an outdated mode of civil-military interaction as the United States’ position in the world and threats to its citizens have changed over the last 70 years. To meet the challenges of a more complicated security environment, civilian and military leaders should shift from their traditional reliance on Samuel Huntington’s theory of objective control and adopt the rebargaining theory

developed by Mackubin Owens to encourage civil-military cooperation and embrace a healthier role for the military in the development of US national policy and strategy.

II. HUNTINGTON'S LASTING LEGACY

Huntington endeavored to create a model of civil-military relations because he identified a void in Cold War era national security. His warning to American society regarding the growing Soviet threat, as noted by political scientist Peter Feaver, was change or die.² Huntington recommended a societal shift from traditional liberal idealism to conservative norms. A shift from selfishness based on the sanctity of individual needs to selfless service preserving the collective wellbeing. Huntington claimed that, “only an environment which is sympathetically conservative will permit its military leaders to combine the political power which society thrust upon them with the military professionalism without which society cannot endure”.³ He was also concerned that no model of professional military conduct had been formalized, and civilian control over the military was left largely to the impulses of those in office. Moreover, against its traditional liberal ideals, the United States now found itself supporting a large standing army as its post war influence increased and it faced the existential threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. He aimed to develop a civil-military theory balancing the traditional values of the military, with the less conservative values of the American citizenry.

While there are many theories defining civil-military relations, Huntington's theory remains a fixture in the minds of many professional military members and government leaders. His call for military officers to remain true to what he identified as the professional ideals - expertise, responsibility, and corporateness – is a standard for not just the modern officer corps, but the entire modern military profession. He stated that, “In practice, officership is strongest and most effective when it most closely approaches the professional ideal; it is weakest and most defective when it falls short of those ideals.”⁴ His theory requires civilian leaders to provide operational

and tactical autonomy to a professional officer corps and in return military senior leaders have no role developing policy or grand strategy. While this simple concept works well in theory, the reality of the human interaction and complexity of national security issues makes its practice problematic. As the military is called by civilians to intrude in the world of politics to support security operations, the walls of separation in Huntington's theory are torn down and the civil-military dialogue, still anchored by Huntington principles, becomes more confused. In Huntington's model, military leaders increasingly find themselves in situations that teeter on the line between dissent and disobedience with no guidance other than objective control to shape their actions.

Friction in the civil-military relationship - amplified by the contemporary military interpretation of Huntington's theory - occurs when military leaders are in situations where civilian elites do not heed the military advice provided. Thus, objective control's zero-sum relational paradigm adds friction and makes contemporary civil military relations more dysfunctional. Objective control leaves no room for the military to participate in a strategic dialogue with civilian leaders and promotes excluding military voices from influencing strategy and policy. If followed as Huntington prescribes, the military leader, "does not hesitate, he does not substitute his own views; he obeys instantly",⁵ even if the decision goes against the officer's professional and moral sensibilities. If followed to its logical conclusion, Huntington's theory counteracts the necessary dialogue linking strategy to operational art because military leaders should have no opportunity to voice his or her opinion.

While this result may be discomfoting, the military has not embraced new ideas on civil-military relations to extent it has Huntington, leaving officers to promote their own theories about the relationship. For instance, in a 2010 article in the *Joint Forces Quarterly*, LTC Andrew

Milburn attempted to justify disobedience on moral grounds claiming, “the military professional’s obligation to disobey is an important check and balance in the execution of policy.” He supported this claim by pointing to a survey he conducted of students attending the 2010 Marine Corps War College. The survey revealed that a majority of the senior military leaders attending the class agreed that disobedience was the only alternative course of action if asked to execute orders they viewed as immoral. Additionally, he points to defense of the Constitution as well as safeguarding the welfare of his subordinates as reasons to disobey.⁶

Fortunately, his short-sighted ideas on military dissent were criticized by peers versed in civil-military relations and experts in the field like COL (R) Paul Yingling⁷ and Richard Kohn⁸. Both Yingling and Kohn dismantled Milburn’s argument that defense of the Constitution supersedes orders given by civilian leaders, and they each clearly articulate that the Constitution subordinates the military to civilian leadership. What is most disturbing about Milburn’s article is the hopeless state of civil-military relations it depicts in the eyes of the military’s most promising members. Military leaders need to be experts at presenting differing options and masters of persuasion to support success, and they must be prepared to justify their positions when presented to civilian leaders. The military must train its officers throughout the entirety of their education, beginning at pre-commissioning, to understand the necessity of frank and candid discourse with civilian leadership on policy and strategic matters.

Providing frank and candid advice that helps build a strategic bridge linking policy to the operational and tactical levels of combat is the principle role for the military elite. It is the officer’s responsibility to understand that his advice will not always be followed. It is also his responsibility to understand that he is not always right, even when it comes to using the military aspect of national power. Once these concepts are internalized, a candid dialogue can take place.

Success in this strategic dialog requires the development of healthy trust with civilian leaders to create open communication. Unfortunately, this is an artform that is elusive to many military officers, and even though an officer may be an excellent war fighter it does not necessarily correlate to his success in this area. The officer must have the nuance and judgement to navigate a sea of inflated egos and strong opinions to develop consensus for sensitive national security concerns while remaining persuasive enough to voice the position of the military. Because these senior military positions are essential to a functional government, it is necessary to have the right officers, who are versed and educated in the dynamics of civil-military relations, to lead in these positions. An examination of events that occurred in two vastly different administrations during the war on terror - the revolt of the generals in 2006 and the revolt of a prominent general in 2009 - proves that when a dysfunctional approach to civil-military relations is practiced, the results will be bad for the country and those fighting the wars.

III. RESULTS OF OBJECTIVE CONTROL

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 changed the dynamics of the post-Cold War civil-military relations. The country was once again engaged in a hot war, and the militarization of American foreign policy quickly gained traction with politicians and civilians attempting to make sense of a shattered worldview that had created a false sense of security. Civil-military tension rose as the Bush administration conducted the calculus for war with Iraq. As early success turned into a long and deadly counterinsurgency operation, some military officers became disenchanted with the war and an administration they believed passed the blame for strategic failure to the military. This resentment led to what became known as the revolt of the generals.

Early cracks in the foundation of the Bush administration's civil-military relations became major fissures during the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, and many credit this to Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, handling of the planning and execution of operations. In his book, *US Civil-Military Relations after 9-11*, Dr. Mackubin Owens claims the genesis of the dysfunctional civil-military relations and animosity towards Secretary Rumsfeld is found in his plan to revise force structure based on the impacts of emerging technology including the advancement in information technology. This drew the ire of the service chiefs, most specifically the Army, as funding was shifted to support the Secretary's initiatives.⁹

Civil-military relations were strained during the buildup for the Iraq invasion in 2003, and they deteriorated further in 2004 as later phases of the Iraq War proved that poor planning and lack of foresight hampered stability and transition operations. The public, congressional leaders, and the media began questioning how the world's mightiest military had been stymied by a few

insurgents with AK-47s and improvised explosives. Owens continues, “the central charges in the case against him (Rumsfeld) include willfully ignoring military advice and initiating the war with a force that was too small; failing to adapt to new circumstances once things began to go wrong; failing to see the insurgency that had erupted after Saddam Husain was defeated; and failing to prepare for post conflict stability operations.”¹⁰ These “charges” or critiques were brought by military leaders who worked directly with the Secretary. They were unable to change his choices on the military conduct of operations. They also failed to bridge the policy goals with military operations after the conclusion of phase three operations – dominate the enemy.

In 2006, a group of six general officers who had recently retired, came out in opposition to the Bush administration’s handling of the war in Iraq. More specifically they criticized Donald Rumsfeld, a man who Major General (retired) Paul Eaton, referred to as "incompetent strategically, operationally and tactically." Eaton also described Rumsfeld as someone who "has put the Pentagon at the mercy of his ego, his Cold Warrior's view of the world, and his unrealistic confidence in technology to replace manpower.”¹¹ Additionally, Major General (retired) John Batiste described the Secretary of Defense’s visit to his Division Headquarter in 2004, “Every time I looked at him, I was thinking about ... that s----- war plan, I was thinking about Abu Ghraib, and I was thinking about the challenges I had every day trying to rebuild the Iraqi military that he disbanded.”¹² An even more scathing critique came from Lieutenant General (retired) Greg Newbold, the former director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who called for more radical dissent and insubordination to Rumsfeld’s leadership. In Time magazine Newbold stated, “With the encouragement of some still in positions of military leadership, I offer a challenge to those still in uniform: a leader's responsibility is to give voice to

those who can't - or don't have the opportunity to - speak... an officer swears an oath not to a person but to the Constitution. The distinction is important.”¹³

These six retired general officers believed it their duty to resign from the active force and voice their displeasure with civilian leadership; furthermore, they believed an appeal aimed directly at American citizens was their best chance to achieve their ends. It begs the questions, why did they have so little influence while on active service, and why, with no skin in the game, did they later feel it their obligation to influence the public’s opinion of the President and his Secretary of Defense? Their revolt failed. President Bush kept Secretary Rumsfeld in the administration through the 2006 campaign.

This occurrence of civil-military friction was not limited to the Bush administration. In 2009, President Obama faced a similar situation as some general officers, who had been at war for nearly a decade, grew impatient with the new administration’s approach to the war and relations with the military. Unlike the previous example, in which retired officers criticized a Cabinet official, the President and his policy were directly targeted by the top two military advisors in Afghanistan in an attempt to shape Afghanistan policy to their liking. CENTCOM Commander, GEN David Petraeus, and Commander of American and NATO Forces Afghanistan, GEN Stanley McChrystal, applied political pressure to the President in pursuit of their preferred course of action; a 40-60,000 troop increase to the 68,000 already in the country. A conflicted President Obama, who had campaigned on an antiwar platform, was forced into a public debate with two choices: 1) defer to his military advisors and cede policy making power to them, or 2) keep his campaign promise to his base constituents, and end the war started by the preceding administration. To understand how civil-military relations became so strained, requires review of

actions that occurred after President Obama named McChrystal commander of forces in Afghanistan.

Shortly after taking command in Afghanistan, McChrystal received approval from the Obama administration to conduct a strategic review of the environment and ongoing operations. The review's bleak outlook of the operating environment was the catalyst for the generals requested troop increase. The administration pushed back on the reviews findings. The Vice President - who had unusual influence on operations in Afghanistan - remained unimpressed. As Mark Moyer explains in his book, *Strategic Failure*, Vice President Biden opposed a large-scale counterinsurgency fight in favor of special operations mission and drone strikes which could be conducted from the country's two largest bases in Bagram and Kandahar.¹⁴ Just as it appeared that military advisors would not sway the President to their preferred course of action, McChrystal's secret review made its way into the hands of journalist Bob Woodward. This leak of classified information launched McChrystal's findings on operations in Afghanistan and the resistance he faced from the West Wing, into the public arena for debate by Congress and the media.

To make matters worse, in the fall of 2009 McChrystal went public with his dissent of the Vice President's plan for the strategic targeting of Al Qaeda leaders using unmanned system and special forces. In a televised speech he conducted in London, McChrystal bluntly rejected the vice President's plan and stated it would lead to, what he termed, "Chaos-istan." When directly asked by a reporter if he would support the Vice President's plan, McChrystal said "No".¹⁵ He then embarked on a media blitz promoting his strategy for success in Afghanistan and diminished alternative ideas favored by the White House which he believed to be halfhearted attempts to achieve victory. His growing contempt for the Obama administration was becoming

evident and he was summoned back to the White House to have a candid conversation with the President.

The tipping point for relations between the commander of Afghanistan and the President came in spring of 2010. McChrystal authorized Rolling Stones reporter Michael Hastings to accompany him and his staff on a European tour of the NATO countries that supported the Afghan war. During periods of off-the-record, alcohol fueled conversations that occurred at parties and pubs, member of the general's staff confided their personal feelings to Hastings. He in turn made public the derogatory comments the officers made about the President and administration officials. Rolling Stones was thrilled to publish an article about the "The Runaway General" to expose what they had suspected for a while; military leaders and the institution held contempt for their new civilian leaders.¹⁶ Once again McChrystal was summoned to meet the President, only this time he offered his resignation, which the President accepted. Shortly after McChrystal's resignation the President assigned Petraeus as commander in Afghanistan.

In contrast to the Generals Revolt during the Bush Administration, this example of an active military leader flexing his muscles to influence policy may have partially succeeded. Moyer notes that the President authorized an increase of 30,000 troops but set restrictive time lines.¹⁷ The surge would last only eighteen months, and a drawdown of initial forces of 68,000 would begin in three years. McChrystal's arguments and the public debate it sparked, are probably some of the factors that led Obama to approve the increase in military forces in Afghanistan.¹⁸

To regain confidence with his voting base disappointed by the increase in troop numbers, President Obama assured his constituents that he intended to stick to his time lines for handover to the Afghan government. He made true on this promise and a total counter insurgency

campaign in Afghanistan was not realized. Moyer's concluded that in the end, Petraeus inherited a war with a failed policy.¹⁹

Even though the relationship between the military and civilian leaders seems fractured, there has been growth in the military's influence on public opinion. Polling conducted by Gallup in 2017 shows that 72% of American have a "great deal of confidence" in the military, making it one of the most trusted institution in the United States. US citizens rated the military 60% and 40% higher than Congress and the President respectively.²⁰ It is obvious that some military officers believe the public support they receive combined with their own military expertise provides them the trump card of dissent. Unfortunately, their "calculus of dissent" is clouded by their ego and their actions permeate throughout the officer corps, reflecting poorly on their peers and negatively influencing subordinates. As the officers in the 2006's Revolt of the Generals displayed, they would rather retire in dissent of policy and voice their concerns to the public, which created undue civil-military friction for those still serving. Gen McChrystal's open dissent while on active duty influenced his subordinates to view the civil-military problem from a similar perspective, creating a culture of mistrust between his staff and civilian leaders. In each case, these generals believed the most effective way to influence civilian leaders was through a direct appeal to the public.

These contemporary examples of general officers going beyond Huntington's limits on policy and strategic influence challenge his concepts about the appropriate civil-military relationship. While objective control is Huntington's ideal state of civil-military affairs, its practice inhibits the military's role in policy and strategic decisions, which makes its application impracticable to current civil-military relationship. Global responsibilities and the nations reliance on its military requires the US civil-military relationship to move beyond, as noted by

Huntington, statesmen deciding on wars that will lead to catastrophe and the military making the best of a bad situation.²¹ As the country has experienced since the beginning of Global War on Terrorism, when the civil-military dialogue results in a “bad situation” the result will be a failure to achieve political goals. The country deserves a modern approach to civil-military relations that provides room for a reciprocal dialogue resulting in clear policy that is strategically and operationally linked to tactics.

IV. MOVING FORWARD

The vignettes above provide historical examples that military leaders will sometimes show disapproval of civilian decisions. But what is not clear is where their guidance or framework for dissent and strategic dialogue is derived. The military establishment holds Huntington's theory in high esteem. A look at the Army Chief of Staff's extensive professional reading list offers Army officer only one source of study for civil-military relations, Sam Huntington's, *The Soldier and the State*.²² Unfortunately for the country, the military profession continues to struggle with its role in cooperative strategy development and some of its leaders turn to tactics aimed at undermining the civil-military relationship, like coordinated leaks to the press, or airing grievances for public consumption to create leverage for their position in faltering internal negotiations. When this occurs, it puts at risk military credibility as well as that of the elected officials.

To prevent a loss of trust in the military institution by the public and civilian elites, officers must look to sources other than Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* for guidance on civil-military relations. The military must educate itself on evolving concepts of civilian control and the institution's role in the modern transformation. Through the study and acceptance of new concepts, military leaders will discover new ways to provide advice and develop different techniques to present dissenting opinions and engage in productive dialogue. This study will also help determine how to best interact with officials at the highest level of government and build cooperation. There is a wealth of ideas and literature written by contemporary political scientists and historians like Rebecca Schiff, Peter Feaver, and Mackubin Owens who see the growing dysfunction in US civil-military relations and provide competing theories on the application of

civilian control. While these experts focus their studies on the function of civil control in the post 9-11 timeframe, they are a rich source of knowledge to help military leaders understand the service's role in the strategy making process.

In her work *The Military and Domestic Politics: A Concordance Theory of Civil-Military Relations*, Rebecca Schiff developed a theory of civil-military relations based on institutional and cultural constructs. At the core of concordance theory is Schiff's idea that the military, the civilian elite, and the citizenry necessarily aim for cooperation in four areas: social composition of the officer corps, political decision-making process, recruitment methods, and military style. She developed concordance theory to help new and developing countries understand and advance a civil-military relation outside of the American model that is rooted in Huntington's principles.

Schiff's concordance theory provides a total break from Huntington's concept of objective control, but its fixation on preventing domestic military intervention is a weakness that cannot be overlooked. Unlike Huntington who urges the military to be obedient to overall civilian leadership and focus on defending the nation from enemies outside its borders, concordance theory is much more applicable to states where the military has a history and temptation to seize power. Because concordance theory has this shortcoming, US military leaders must explore other theories to aid their understanding of civil-military relations.

Another political scientist equally dissatisfied with Huntington's theory, but more in line with his binary concept of civilian control, is Peter Feaver. Feaver, a Duke University political science professor, spent time on staff for the National Security Council in the 1990s where he gained firsthand experience on the daily operations of the civil-military relationship at the highest levels. The complexity of the relationship and discord he observed during his tenure on

the National Security Council staff convinced him that Huntington's model was inadequate. Feaver believed that civilian control had diminished since the end of the Cold War and a new model of civil-military relations was required to reassert it. He set out to develop a model that determines how civil-military relations operate on a day-to-day basis in the United States.²³ The result of his work is agency theory, and it was developed because, in Feaver's view, objective control was not practiced by civilian leaders. For control to be understood and asserted by civilian elite there required development of a new theory base on a deeper understanding of the civil-military dynamic.²⁴ Feaver's theory is rooted in human agency, the social interaction of civil and military leader and the results of the choices they make in the application of their relationship.

Agency theory approaches the civil-military relation as strategic interaction set in a hierarchical framework where civilians are the primary decision makers. The relationship is strategic because civilian decisions are subject to the military reaction and vice versa.²⁵ In this relationship, civilians have delegated authority to the military to act on behalf of the country to use force to achieve policy goals. Feaver frames the concept from a principle-agent perspective in which the civilians are the principle and the military are the agent.²⁶ With this framework established, he explains that "The civilians decide how to monitor the military, based on expectations of how the military might respond in the presence or absence of intrusive monitoring. Given the monitoring environment, the military decides whether to "work" or "shirk" based on its expectation that its behavior might be punished."²⁷ The significance of this theory is its rationalist approach to the civil-military relationship, civilians cannot be sure the military will do what they want; the military cannot be sure the civilians will catch and punish them if they disobey.

Feaver acknowledges this complexity and states agency theory, “treats civilian control not as a once and done choice... but rather as an ongoing decision about how to monitor the delegation of responsibility to the military. It reflects the fact that civilian leaders face problems of agency on a day-to-day basis.”²⁸ Feaver believes civilian leaders (the principle) have the responsibility and challenge to monitor the military’s (the agent) willingness to carry out orders they have been delegated. According to Feaver, the largest problem civilian leaders have, and must mitigate, is the danger associated with delegating the use force to the military in defense of civilian interests.²⁹

The weakness of agency theory lies in the complexity of its rational behavior models that Feaver uses throughout his work. The models muddled the day-to-day civilian and military activities and are used as formulaic way to assess complex human interaction. The utility of agency theory is that it provides civilian leaders the opportunity to determine the level of control they have over the military institution at any giving moment. Unfortunately, it works as a gage of military control rather than effectiveness, which proves useful to only one side of the equation. Because of this shortcoming, civilian and military leaders must look elsewhere for solutions to the contemporary civil-military problem.

Mackubin Owens offers a more useful perspective on civil military relations. Owens is a retired Marine Corps colonel who wrote, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11* to explore new ways for the military to convey dissenting opinions and form a dialog to support policy development. He believes that the civil-military relationship is based on a bargain among the American people, the government, and the military as an institution. He argues that when changes in policy, strategy, society, and technology cause a “disequilibrium” within the relationship it is reason for the civil-military bargain to be renegotiated to bring back balance.³⁰

Like Schiff's concordance theory, Owen's argues that there are five questions that must the principle parties must agree on to build a healthy civil-military relationship. The key questions to be answered are: who controls the military instrument, what level of military influence is acceptable in a liberal society, what is the military's appropriate role, what civil-military pattern best ensures military effectiveness, and who serves?³¹ In his book, Owens analyzes the dysfunctional relationships between civil and military elites following the September 11th terrorist attacks. He also examines how the Bush and Obama administration's handling of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan failed to develop a comprehensive military strategy to support political goals. Owens uses these occurrences as the catalyst for renegotiating the civil-military relationship and argues for a revised relationship which he explains in two parts.

First, he advocates that civilian elites understand the military's role in implementing policy and developing strategy. He argues that civilian elites should demand military leaders present their views, "frankly and forcefully throughout the strategy-making process."³² Doing this, he concludes, will ensure the proper military instrument is applied to support political goals. Second, and most important to the military elite, he urges the military to understand the political character of warfare and to "rediscover its voice" in the development of strategy that develops a complete military campaign to support policy³³. He also reminds the military that they must acknowledge the constitutional supremacy of civilian leadership and that "civilians have a say not only concerning the goals of the war but also how it is conducted."³⁴ This is in direct contrast with Huntington's theory of objective control which advocates for civilian leaders to delegate the conduct of war exclusively to military leaders.

In his work Owens places emphasis on the need to foster a trusting civilian-military relationship, which is the linchpin of his rebargaining concept. He suggests that the most

important lessons learned in the post 9-11 era are not about ensuring civilian control. They instead, “raise such issues as how informed civilian leaders are when they choose to commit the military, how well the civil-military pattern enables the integration of divergent and even contradictory views, and how this pattern ensures a practical-military strategy that properly serves the ends of national policy.”³⁵ His concern is not that there is a lack of collaboration, but a lack of successful collaboration. He is disturbed by the “tenor of the dialog” and the strategic results produced by the failed partnership.³⁶ He’s arguing that military professionals fail to develop plans that achieves political goals because they do not understand policy objectives.

This practical concept is useful for military elites who have an influential role in advising and implementing US foreign policy. It is obvious by the nature of high ranking military positions, such as the role of combatant commander, that some functional form of this relationship occurs, but the formalizing and acceptance of a new model of behavior has not been realized. The most recent literature providing military officers guidance on collaboration with civilian leaders appears in *The Armed Forces Officer* manual. The manual is rooted in Huntington’s theory of civil-military relations and recommends officers obey or retire if they are faced with civilian orders they believe are unwise. The manual’s “shut up or leave” approach is too limited because it only provides two options. It provides little helpful advice on the professional presentation of dissenting views. Therefore, the current manual does not provide a nuanced path for military officers to follow to promote consensus in strategic planning.

Owens’s ideas knock down the walls of separation built by years of Huntington influence. Owens suggests that the military needs to better understand the political nature of warfare and use that understanding to best advise leaders and frame dissenting opinions and build dialogue. The thesis of his work concludes that “the future security environment and the reality of

American politics suggest the need to shift from the outdated “normal” theory of civil-military relations to one more historically grounded, a model that accounts for the overlapping and reciprocal interrelationships of ends, ways and means necessary for strategic success. This requires establishing new norms that create a decision-making climate that encourages candid advice and the rigorous exchange of views and insights.”³⁷ It is important to note that, Owens does not completely dismiss Huntington’s model. He understands its institutional importance while recommending an approach for moving forward in today’s complex national security realm.

A dialogue of dissenting opinions, both military and civilian, is at the heart of Owens’ case for rebargaining the civil-military relation. Compromise is what the future must look like, “the best outcome for healthy civil-military relations is when neither party gets all of what it seeks.”³⁸ Tempering military ego coupled with a willingness to yield ground is essential to fostering dialogue and building consensus. This must be moderated with honest advice from the military without presenting initial courses of actions projecting over inflated costs and unacceptable man power requests. The military cannot underestimate the political and strategic considerations of its civilian leaders in military matters, just as the military would not want to be viewed as ignorant of political aims. Compromise will not work if initiated under false pretenses and it is the fastest way to prevent this theory from succeeding.

Owens acknowledges that the military profession must go beyond the simple notions of “salute and obey” or resignation in defiance of civilian orders to support collaboration. He views honest dissent as a positive interaction to build a compressive and successful strategy. This theory calls for the military to speak frankly and forcefully during collaboration and encourages dissent during the strategic planning and lead up to the decisions, but Owen reminds military

leaders that once the civilian makes a decision they are obligated by law to follow the orders.³⁹ Owens's renegotiation of civil-military relations is the most practical approach that breaks the Huntington mold and calls for calculated military intrusions into the political sphere to better argue positions and articulate dissent.

V. APPLYING THE REBARGAIN

The post 9-11 tension in US civil-military relation is a result of institutional adherence to Huntington's objective control. Although anxiety rose during this period, the foundation of the relationship was not broken. As Owens's notes, "The cornerstone of civil-military relations is simple and straight forward: the uniformed military is expected to provide its best advice to civil authorities, who alone are responsible for policy".⁴⁰ He continues, "While civilian control has prevailed, military subordination in since 9-11 has been uneven".⁴¹ Applying Owens's rebargaining theory, in the context of the five questions that he suggests defines the civil-military relationship, is the way forward for the civilian and military leaders, as well the military profession.

If an alternate civil-military relation had been studied and practiced during the post 9-11 years, a comprehensive way to combat the challenges facing the nation and the military may have been achieved. Justification for a rebargaining is evident by examining the case studies noted above – the Revolt of the Generals and McChrystal's Revolt - and applying the first four of Owens's five questions to these examples.

It is apparent that most contentious debate between civilian and military leaders arose regrading Owens's first question, determining who controls the military instrument. Immediately following the election of George H.W. Bush, the military and civilian leadership's focus should have been on building a trusting relationship and seeking compromise to move the country's national security concerns forward. Military leaders must be candid with their civilian leaders and explain what the military has to offer and the full range of operations that can be conducted to support policy. Instead, military leaders, when confronted with a bullish Secretary of Defense,

reverted to their old doctrine of slow-rolling and shirking duty because of resentment they harbored from the previous administrations handling of national security affairs.

Instead of fighting for control of the military, its leaders should have made it clear, as noted by Owens that, “The American military has carried out tasks that go far beyond battlefield activities. US officers have been and continue to be responsible for activities, e.g., diplomacy, stability operations, and nation building, that requires them to plan, coordinate, and execute “interagency” operations”.⁴² Providing an update to the Secretary of Defense on military readiness and its ability to participate in strategic planning would have been a step in a positive direction. The military had grown and matured since Rumsfeld’s previous stint as Secretary of Defense, and this type of approach could have possibly avoided the institutional military changes sought by the new secretary and paved a positive path forward. Instead of complaining about Rumsfeld in private, more effort should have been made to educate him on the changes in the military and help him make better informed decisions instead of relying on past assumptions.

Additionally, evenhandedness and compromise should have prevailed following the retirement of the generals who opposed the President’s policy and his Cabinet members. Instead these leaders contributed to the public acrimony, added to the politicization of the Iraq war in the public arena, and placed the military on one side of the political divide. Their actions compromised the civil-military relationship for those still on active service and made citizens question who had control of the military instrument as these retired generals encouraged disobedience within the active force.

Allegiance to the normal theory of civil-military and its deference to civilian leadership in strategic matters encourages this behavior. These retired senior military leaders believed they had an obligation to speak out against a policy and strategy they believed to be wrong and

planned without their influence. More discouraging, they took actions to do so when they did not have to suffer the consequences of their actions. While, as noted by Owens, there is no law preventing recently retired officers from performing such acts, it must be understood that this type of behavior undermines healthy civil-military relationship.⁴³ Their actions alone display the need to renegotiate the civil-military relationship and clearly define what civil control of the military looks like in the 21st century.

Reexamining the actions of Stanley McChrystal in context with the powers granted to combatant and theater commanders by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 can assist in understanding Owen's second question: what level of military influence is acceptable in a liberal society. Owen notes that many political observers believe the act provided the military with too much influence in the shaping and crafting of US foreign policy and provided too much power to combatant commander while diminishing the role of regional diplomats.⁴⁴ While the Goldwater-Nichols Act may have been necessary and agreed to by civilian leadership, military leaders, and the nation writ large in 1986, the post 9-11 nation needs to reexamine whether the civil-military relationship resulting from this act of congress still meets an acceptable level military influence on US society.

It seems as if the nation and its leaders are confused about the current level of military influence on policy. The election of President Obama was a testament to this and the resulting failures in Afghanistan and Iraq are the legacy left by leaders attempting to apply the normal theory of civil-military relation to contemporary national security issues. As was seen from the outset of relations with the Obama Administration, a globally recognized and respected military leader was viewed as attempting to undermine the President's Afghanistan policy decisions and craft one that neither he nor the nation wished to apply. McChrystal was not acting in a malicious

manner, he was merely operating under the pretenses of the Goldwater-Nichols act, which made the general one of the most influential members of the US Government in shaping US policy for the Middle East and Afghanistan. After the President barred McChrystal from testifying about conditions in Afghanistan before congress, the general mistakenly believed he had the responsibility to make his opinion known to the press. His cavalier attitude and inability to read the national temper influenced his personal staff and resulted in his dismissal.

While Owens's first two questions can be addressed by examining the case studies individually, his third question - what is the role and purpose of the military - can be addressed by looking at the two case studies holistically. By posing this question Owens is not referring to the conduct of tanks, planes, and infantrymen on the battlefield. Instead, he is referring to contemporary military planners decoupling strategic objectives from the operational level of war. His concern is that, "the American concept of operational art and the operational level of war have perverted the original purpose of operational art – facilitating the dialog between tactics and strategy – while creating an independent layer of command that has usurped the role of strategy and undermined the role of civilian leadership in campaign planning".⁴⁵

Both case studies are textbook examples of this occurrence, and as noted by Owens, Iraq and Afghanistan are proof that we do not always get to fight the wars for which we trained and expected.⁴⁶ In the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the retired generals in question were not the combatant commander and had little influence on planning the operation. Their angst resulted from the realities that they observed in their areas of influence created by poor operational planning not aligned with a strategic political vision.

In the case of McChrystal, he created shared understanding, but was reluctant to accept the President's vision for the Afghan war. He missed the opportunity to link policy objectives to

operational planning. More disheartening, is that his behavior led to a faulty policy that resulted in military failure. Whether it is Rumsfeld's heavy-handedness or military commanders misinterpreting their roles in policy decisions, the inability of leaders to define the military's role in the strategic planning has endangered national security. This issue must be addressed and renegotiated among civilian and military leaders to meet the demands of a complex future.

To examine the case studies in the context of Owens's fourth question – what pattern of civil-military relations maximizes military effectiveness – a study of the civil-military relationship prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom is necessary. In the occurrence of the Generals Revolt, preexisting biases and attitudes held by Rumsfeld and the military loomed large in the dysfunctional relationship, which resulted in the military's inability to meet policy objectives in Iraq. According to Owens, Rumsfeld's insistence on transforming the military into a more rapid and lighter force, and the Army's reluctance to change its culture that found success in Desert Storm, lead to the serious friction between military commanders and the Secretary of Defense.⁴⁷

As Rumsfeld moved forward with his decisive transformative plan, he interfered with the promotion of two and three-star generals and called a general out of retirement to serve as the Army Chief of Staff. Senior military leaders not in Rumsfeld's inner circle became disaffected and felt marginalized according to Owens.⁴⁸ This pattern of civil-military relations resulted in a faulty operational plan in Iraq. The plan for and execution of major combat operations justified Rumsfeld's transformation but it lacked the detail and synchronization to deal with post war security. It was in this atmosphere that the generals voiced their disagreement to the public and disparaged Rumsfeld's competence.

Rumsfeld's approach was much different than the Secretary of Defense that followed him, Robert Gates. Gates dismissed the Rumsfeld transformation and understood the need for

conventional forces to combat hybrid threats. According to Owens, Gates, unlike Rumsfeld, held weekly meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and sought their advice for issues he had little knowledge about.⁴⁹ These efforts to compromise with the military establishment developed trust and created an environment where ideas like Petraeus's Iraq surge found fertile ground as dialog of strategic goals was taking place.

While the last four years of the Bush administration saw this increase in civil-military collaboration and improvement in the military effectiveness, it was driven by the personality of the new Secretary of Defense and his alternative style of leadership. The broader civil-military issue and task for the United States is adopting a theory that transcends multiple personalities and administrations. Determining what this relationship looks like must be part of the rebargaining of the civil-military relationship.

These case studies prove that a rebargaining of the civil-military is necessary and essential to contemporary national security concerns. Both military and civilian leaders must come to the table and decide who controls the military, how much influence it will have on national policy, the military's proper role in planning operations, and determine what type of relationship makes it most effective. Without addressing these problems prior to the start of the nation's next large-scale combat operations, there is a very slim probability for success.

VI. CONCLUSION

The state of civil-military relations has been a source of friction in American society since the founders designed it in the Constitution 241 years ago. While Huntington's theory of objective control laid a blueprint for civil-military relations during the Cold War, its persistent influence is stifling the candid discourse required to achieve success in the complex security operations undertaken by the United States in the post-9/11 world. At a time when a general officer's decisions can influence multiple countries within their combatant commands, it is unwise to continue the practice of a civil-military theory that excludes the military from policy influence and limits its role in strategy development. The essence of Huntington's concepts is not found in the practice of objective control, but in its charge of military reverence to the civilian decision makers.

To meet the challenges of contemporary threats, civilian and military leaders must stop practicing objective control and adopt the rebargaining theory developed Mackubin Owens to encourage civil-military cooperation and embrace the military's influence on national policy and strategy development. Owens's theory of rebargaining should be part of the professional military education for all US officers. As global interaction become more complex and enemies more elusive, the US government and military owe its citizenry a capable relationship that demonstrates corporateness across the civil-military divide.

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1957), 83-84.

² Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.), 20.

³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1957), 464.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1957), 11.

⁵ *Ibid*, 73.

⁶ Andrew R. Milburn, "BREAKING RANKS: Dissent and the Military Professional." *Joint*

Force Quarterly: JFQ no. 59 (Fourth, 2010): 101-107. <https://search.proquestcom.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/762437368?accountid=14746>.

⁷ Pauk Yingling, "Breaking Ranks?" *Small Wars Journal*, 2010. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/breaking-ranks>

⁸ Thomas Ricks, "Richard Kohn Fires Warning Flare About a Joint Force Quarterly Article." *Foreign Policy*, September 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/29/richard-kohn-fires-a-warning-flare-about-a-joint-force-quarterly-article/>.

⁹ Mackubin Thomas Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 53.

¹⁰ Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain*, 53-54.

¹¹ Katrina Heuval, The Generals Revolt, *The Nation*, last modified April 25, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/generals-revolt-2>.

¹² Katrina Heuval, The Generals Revolt, *The Nation*, <https://www.thenation.com/article/generals-revolt-2>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mark Moyar, *Strategic Failure: How President Obama's Drone Warfare, Defense Cuts, and Military Amateurism Have Imperiled America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2015), 39-40.

¹⁵ Alex Spillius, *White House Angry at General McChrystal's Speech on Afghanistan*, The Telegraph, last modified 25 April 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/6259582/White-House-angry-at-General-Stanley-McChrystal-speech-on-Afghanistan.html>

¹⁶ Michael Hastings, The Runaway General: The Profile That Brought Down McChrystal, *Rolling Stone*, Last Modified May 09, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622>

¹⁷ Mark Moyar. *Strategic Failure: How President Obama's Drone Warfare, Defense Cuts, and Military Amateurism Have Imperiled America*, 43-44.

¹⁸ Ibid, 43-44.

¹⁹ Ibid, 43-44.

²⁰ Gallup, Confidence in Institutions, last modified April 25, 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>.

²¹ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, 76.

²² US Army Center of Military History, The US Army Chief of Staffs Professional Reading List, Last Modified, April 25, 2018, <https://history.army.mil/html/books/105/105-1-1/index.html>.

²³ Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations*, 3.

²⁴ Ibid, 37.

²⁵ Ibid, 54.

²⁶ Ibid, 54-55.

²⁷ Feaver, Peter D. "Crisis as Shrinking: An Agency Theory Explanation of the Souring of American Civil-Military Relations." *Armed Forces and Society* 24, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/236546277?accountid=14746>, 407-434.

²⁸ Ibid, 114.

²⁹ Ibid, 56-57.

³⁰ Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain*, 1.

³¹ Ibid, 1.

³² Ibid, 1.

³³ Ibid, 1.

³⁴ Ibid, 8-9

³⁵ Mackubin Owens, Civil Military Relations After 9-11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Last Modified 25 April, 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2011/01/u-s-civil-military-relations-after-911-renegotiating-the-civil-military-bargain>

³⁶ Mackubin Owens, Civil Military Relations After 9-11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2011/01/u-s-civil-military-relations-after-911-renegotiating-the-civil-military-bargain>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain*, 189.

³⁹ Kori Schake and Jim Mattis ed, *Warrior & Citizens: American View of Our Military* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2016), 80.

⁴⁰ Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil Military Bargain*, 79.

⁴¹ Ibid, 79.

⁴² Ibid, 23.

⁴³ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 74-75.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 97.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 97.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 108-109.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 110-111.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 119.

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