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*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF AN IMBALANCE IN
CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS:
A CASE STUDY OF THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN**

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

TED JANIS

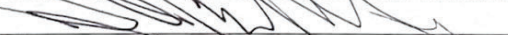
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MMS Mentor Team and Oral Defense Committee Member: Bradford A. Wineman, Ph.D.

Approved: 

Date: 18 Apr 23

MMS Mentor Team and Oral Defense Committee Member: Jonathan F. Phillips, Ph.D. \

Approved: 

Date: 18 April 2023

*United States Marine Corps
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Marine Corps University
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Approved: _____

Date: _____

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: The Strategic Implications of an Imbalance in Civil-Military Relations: A Case Study of the War in Afghanistan

Author: Edward (Ted) Janis, U.S. State Department

Thesis: Balanced civil-military relations, with a vigorous debate between military and civilians and civilian involvement in military planning, leads to effective strategic level decision-making on the use of force, with the interagency providing a broad range of options to the president. Without balanced civil-military relations, however, no amount of operational or tactical victory can guarantee strategic success.

Discussion: The decision to use force overseas is one of the most important choices a president will make. During the twenty-year war in Afghanistan, presidents repeatedly brought together their national security teams to search for options on how to achieve the nation's goals. Three decision points during the Bush, Obama, and Trump presidencies offer a case study on civil-military relations at the strategic level. These decision points demonstrate how military and civilian leaders interacted to provide options to the president, with varying models of discussion and decision-making. The differences reflect civil-military relations theory, in which there is a spectrum on the question of providing military options: on one end, Huntington prescribes full autonomy to the uniformed leadership, focusing on military aspects alone; on the other, Janowitz recommends that the military incorporate political considerations and take a more coordinated approach. These differing examples led to different results, where the teams that incorporated more political considerations and increased civilian interaction provided a broader range of options to the president, and those that focused on military autonomy provided limited options.

Conclusion: Based on these three decision points, this paper provides five takeaways/recommendations for how to better balance civil-military relations during strategic level decision-making. First, it is the responsibility of both civilian and military leadership to engage in a vigorous debate over options for the use of force, thus creating balanced civil-military relations. Second, the outcome of an imbalance in these relations, in which civilian leadership defers to the "best military advice" without engaging in vigorous debate and the military is not transparent on political issues, can lead to operational/tactical success but strategic failure. Third, when discussing the decision-making process for the use of force, civil-military relations studies should emphasize Janowitz alongside Huntington to encourage more inclusive policy debates. Fourth, military officers in "civilian" positions can be effective at balancing CMR. Fifth and finally, the State Department can, and usually should, act as the counterbalance to the military when considering strategic options.

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Preface

The fall of Kabul in August of 2021 marked the end of twenty years of war. For many veterans, it was a moment of dismay. Our years of service in Afghanistan were a kaleidoscope of differing experiences - some good, some bad, largely hard to define - yet all coming to the same conclusion. As I stewed over this outcome, my thinking eventually distilled down to two questions. They were questions that had been percolating during my professional experiences overseas, first as an Army officer and then as a Foreign Service Officer, but ones I had largely relegated to the background as the years between my service in Iraq and Afghanistan and the present grew. One, even if we were the best military and diplomats in the history of the world's superpowers (a judgement for which the jury is still out), could we have achieved a "successful" outcome in these wars? Two, can we as a nation do hard, yet worthwhile, things in the world, things that require long-term solutions, a sustained commitment, and continuous re-assessment? This paper is my limited, narrow attempt at starting to answer these questions.

I would first like to thank Dr. Bradford Wineman for all his support and mentorship throughout this process. His guidance and expertise on civil-military relations were instrumental in shaping this paper from the vaguest of thoughts to a rewarding study of theory and practice. I would also like to thank Dr. Matthew Flynn for his contributions to this paper, and his ever thought-provoking discussions on the vices and vicissitudes of American war policy throughout the centuries. (I apologize for my intellectual laziness in providing three decision points. Why not four? Or two?). Also, thank you to Dean Jonathan Phillips and Dr. Joel Christenson for their valuable inputs during the review and defense process.

And, of course, a big thank you to Colonel Chris Conner and Conference Group 9 for tolerating this wayward civilian and for modeling the ideal of thoughtful and open-minded military professionalism over the past year.

Lastly, and most importantly, thank you to my wife, Christine, and our children, Frank, Dawes, Hannah, and Tristan, for their love and support. I couldn't do any of this without you, and you make it all worthwhile. We're not here for a long time, we're here for a good time. Love you.

Introduction

Throughout its history, the United States has grappled with the decision on how to use military force to achieve strategic goals. It is often one of the most consequential decisions a president will make, and requires the best possible advice. Balanced civil-military relations (CMR) at the strategic level are critical for effective decision-making regarding the use of force, as the uniformed leaders generate military options while civilians provide political context and considerations to determine how best to accomplish the nation's goals. To assist these efforts, CMR scholars have defined the theoretical framework for how military officers should engage with civilians, ranging in degrees of separation: from relative autonomy regarding the generation of military advice to a dynamic interchange between uniformed and civilian leaders. The U.S. war in Afghanistan provided several instances of presidents engaging in the decision-making process for the use of force. In particular, three major decision points during the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations illustrate differing types of CMR. Differences in which civilians were involved, their level of involvement, and the role of military officers in "civilian" positions provide an opportunity to compare the effectiveness of these CMR types. These Afghanistan examples demonstrate that balanced CMR, with a vigorous debate between military and civilians and civilian involvement in military planning, leads to effective strategic level decision-making on the use of force, with the interagency providing more options to the president. Without balanced CMR, however, no amount of operational or tactical victory can guarantee strategic success. Of note, retired military officers often played a key role as "civilians" in these discussions, challenging conventional wisdom which argues military officers in civilian positions may be a threat to balanced CMR. As the country will inevitably be again confronted with the

decision to send troops into harm's way, balanced CMR will assist in effective strategic level decision-making, and this paper will provide several recommendations on how to best ensure this balanced CMR.

Civil-Military Relations Theory on Strategic Decision-Making: The Huntington-Janowitz Spectrum

Following the Second World War, the United States found itself grappling with new questions on the role of the military in a democracy, particularly given the demands on a nuclear-armed superpower with influence and interests throughout the world. In this context, the modern study of CMR arose, largely to define the role of the military professional in a democratic superpower and the ideal of relations between the military and civilian authority. While agreeing on the overall need for civilian control and oversight of the military, the two foundational texts of modern CMR have a differing view of how the military should interact with civilians during policy development. These views provide a spectrum of the military's role, ranging from autonomy over military aspects of policy, to an interdependence with the civilian realm that includes taking political considerations into account.

Samuel Huntington's 1957 Soldier and the State is the foundational text for modern American CMR, providing a framework for professional military officers operating in the 20th century democratic state. Within this framework, Huntington describes how the military should have relative autonomy when it comes to providing military advice, and refrain from incorporating political considerations in order to preserve its professionalism. Having defined politics as that which "deals with the goals of state policy," Huntington states that "politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics

undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional competence, dividing the profession against itself, and substituting extraneous values for professional values.”¹ When the military is forced to engage in deliberation over policy options, “the military man, of course, cannot judge which is most desirable” but can only say which options are militarily viable.² On the Huntingtonian side of the spectrum, politics and participating in debates over policy is a realm to be avoided by the military. With regards to civilians, Huntington prescribes that “the statesman must recognize the integrity of the (military) profession and its subject matter,” set the goal, allocate resources, and then allow the military to “do the best it can.”³ Huntington’s prescription, likely the most read CMR text in the United States, demands significant autonomy for the military professional vis-à-vis civilians.

In 1960, Morris Janowitz published The Professional Soldier, a study of American military officers, which provides a second framework for modern CMR. Janowitz takes a more nuanced position on the role of the military in policy discussions. He first highlights how military leaders “tend to place great emphasis on military factors in international politics” and “develop elaborate and specific plans” to reduce ambiguity. He compares this mindset with the diplomat and politician, who must “tolerate uncertainty” to achieve political success.⁴ Janowitz explains that, while that dynamic was well-suited in the “total war” of World War Two, the post-war situation required the military to take on an increased “role in the direction and administration of foreign policy.”⁵ The advent of nuclear weapons also forced the military to contend more with “limited wars,” in which leaders had to grapple with difficult questions on the allocation of resources, where “a range of alternatives pose the real problem,” more so than ideological differences.⁶ Using the example of the Korean War, Janowitz highlights that “the management of limited warfare for political democracy is a difficult task” as the tendency is to focus on the military

means at the expense of the political strategy.⁷ Countering Huntington's claim that the military should only act as "responsible specialists," Janowitz states that the nation should judge military leaders on "whether they are sensitive to these political consequences."⁸ To this end, Janowitz recommends that the military focus on a "pragmatic" approach, one that "is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory."⁹ The officer, Janowitz posits, should be sensitive to "the political and social consequences of military action" and therefore "must be given a candid and realistic education about political matters." This education would include a focus on "the relationship between military means and political objectives" so that the officer develops an "appreciation on the limits of violence" instead of overemphasizing the "potentials of force."¹⁰ Janowitz's prescription provides the other side of the spectrum from Huntington, one in which the military is expected to consider political matters in the course of creating "best military advice."

Despite these differences on the military's proper role, both authors recognize the dangers of an imbalance in CMR. Huntington states:

Nations which develop a properly balanced pattern of CMR have a great advantage in the search for security. They increase their likelihood of reaching right answers to the operating issues of military policy. Nations which fail to develop a balanced pattern of CMR squander their resources and run uncalculated risks.¹¹

Janowitz adds that the imbalance is generally not the military's fault, as civilian control is fundamentally accepted by the officer corps, but rather the fault of civilians: "any imbalance in military contributions to politico-military affairs – domestic or international – is therefore often the result of default by civilian political leadership."¹² For Janowitz, the responsibility should not be viewed as the military's alone "but rests on the vitality of civilian political leadership" who must "limit military goals to feasible and attainable objectives" and "assist in the

formulation of military doctrine, so that it becomes a more unified expression of national political objectives.”¹³ Particularly for limited war, military assistance, and irregular warfare, as compared to strategic deterrence or arms control, the military may “seek to perpetuate an exclusive professional jurisdiction” and exhibit “a low tolerance for the ambiguities of international politics,” leading to the construction of “definitive solutions.” To counter this effort to carve out autonomy, civilians must “be prepared to respond to the pressures generated by the military definition of international relations.”¹⁴ As Richard Betts explains, there are benefits to both sides of this Huntington-Janowitz spectrum and that, throughout the Cold War, most military leaders “floated in a limbo” between isolated autonomy and full political integration.¹⁵

More recent scholarship brings this discussion of the role of the military during strategic decision-making into the post-Cold War era. Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn describe how almost every administration in modern America has come into office concerned about unbalanced CMR due to the increasing influence of the military.¹⁶ Furthering Janowitz’s point, Marybeth Ulrich describes that civilians’ abdication of responsibility for policy “cedes democratic control.”¹⁷ Eliot Cohen argues that civilian leaders who take an active role in wartime decision-making, often perceived as “meddling” at the time, succeed because of it, stressing that Huntington’s ideal of CMR is “incompatible” with Carl von Clausewitz’s timeless dictum that war is a continuation of policy.¹⁸ As Suzanne Nielsen and Hugh Liebert explain, part of this difficulty lies in Huntington’s distinction between political and military issues, a distinction which “simply does not exist.”¹⁹ Janine Davidson, Emerson Brooking, and Benjamin Fernandes show how unbalanced CMR can create unfavorable outcomes by either creating too much friction in the interagency process, leading to a lack of decision, or too little, leading to groupthink, particularly when civilian leaders feel uncomfortable questioning “best military

advice.” They advocate that the military “cannot be the silent, detached professionals envisioned by Huntington” and should instead embrace “healthy friction.”²⁰ Feaver and Kohn propose the importance of an “iterative process that is responsive, candid, and flexible, eventually yielding assessments that might differ markedly from where either side in the dialogue began.”²¹ To achieve this iterative process, Mara Karlin puts the onus on civilian leadership to “facilitate consistent dialogue with their military counterparts.”²²

However, civilians have been at a disadvantage in the decision-making process due to the imbalance in funding and personnel between the Department of Defense (DoD) and civilian counterparts. Kori Schake describe the DoD as the “behemoth of the interagency,” giving it more speed and capacity for developing its positions and therefore “winning policy arguments.”²³ Risa Brooks, Jim Golby, and Heidi Urben highlight that “without a serious attempt at rebalancing, the military’s personnel and resource advantages will only further undermine civilian control, giving the military extra speed and capacity that it can leverage during bureaucratic fights to make and implement policy.”²⁴ Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates describes how empowering civilians and balancing CMR would be “cost-effective, and less risky” for the nation.²⁵ Other scholars also raise concerns that the military’s dominance in decision-making is the result of its insularity: what Urben and Golby describe as the “pitfalls” of hostility to criticism and a belief that civilians should stay out of the military’s affairs,²⁶ and Ulrich addresses as insisting on policy preferences different from civilian leadership’s.²⁷ Overall, concerns remain over the risk of military dominance over the decision-making process, a risk that could lead to the over-militarization of American foreign policy, particularly if civilians defer to the military and if military officers are not factoring political considerations into their recommendations.

Lastly, both Huntington and Janowitz discuss the role of the retired military officer in government, an increasingly frequent occurrence in Washington today. Huntington discusses the phenomenon of World War Two generals taking on civilian roles in the post-war era, concluding that concerns of militarization of civilian roles were “unconvincing” and, in fact, the occurrence “civilianized” the officers.²⁸ However he also states that “military influence is increased if members of the officer corps assume positions of authority in nonmilitary power structures.”²⁹ Janowitz speculated that retired officers in federal employment were so diffuse that the impact is limited, highlighting a few senior-level exceptions. These exceptions, including George C. Marshall as Secretary of State, garnered significant criticism from Congress and the public, however Janowitz found these officers adhered to the policy and political objectives of the civilian administration.

Recent appointments of officers to key civilian positions have likewise produced criticism of the practice. James Joyner describes the concerns over this phenomenon, most critically that it would “shift the policy-making balance of power to the Pentagon, either because the retired officers shared the same worldview as serving officers or because they lacked a sufficient breadth of experience to appreciate nonmilitary instruments.”³⁰ Peter White explains the theoretical importance of a non-military secretary of defense, as it brings a more representative reflection of general American society, avoids service-biases, and serves as a vital link between the military, the president, and society. He highlights that, while the question of whether retired military in government leads to a more militarized foreign policy is not definitively answered, most analyses show that the phenomenon leads to poorer quality decision-making. White’s research also finds that retired officers serving as ministers of defense are less harmful to a democracy’s longevity than active duty officers, but more harmful than a civilian

without military experience.³¹ Further discussion of these concerns is included in the 2017 decision point below, for which Trump had many military officers in “civilian” positions.

Three Decision Points in the Afghanistan War

The twenty years of American combat operations in Afghanistan provide a range of CMR examples in which the military and civilian leaders discussed how to effectively use force to accomplish the nation’s goals. Three specific decision points from three different administrations are useful for comparison and developing recommendations for future strategic level CMR. While the context for each decision point clearly differed, with eight years of developments in the war changing the situation and problem at hand, each moment shows an administration first grappling with the question of military options in Afghanistan. This review will provide an opportunity to see the dynamics between military and civilian leaders at the strategic level, and analyze the relationships compared to the Huntington-Janowitz spectrum described above.

The Bush Decision Point - 2001

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, President George W. Bush gathered his national security team to develop a military response to the Taliban’s refusal to hand over Al Qaeda leadership. The first meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) was on the evening of the attacks, after Bush had returned from Florida and addressed the nation, followed by daily NSC and cabinet meetings on September 12-15. These early meetings had the president framing the problem at hand with Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet, and National Security Advisor (NSA) Condoleezza Rice. The group discussed that the coming

military action would be the opposite of the Gulf War, in that they had a short-time to plan for a long war, and would also include many fronts: intelligence, financial, and diplomatic, not just military. These discussions led to Bush's initial instructions on September 17, which approved the CIA's proposal, asked the DoD for more military options, and tasked State with delivering an ultimatum to the Taliban, while deciding to not attack Iraq at that point.³² Subsequent NSC meetings over the next two weeks shaped the plan through debates and coordination efforts within the interagency. Ultimately, Bush announced his final decision for the use of force in Afghanistan, named Operation Enduring Freedom, on October 7.

Role of Military

When Washington's focus zeroed in on Afghanistan immediately following the attacks, it was clear the military did not have any "off the shelf" plans as they had for the Gulf War in 1990. Under the Clinton administration, the military had been "astonishingly passive" regarding military operations against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.³³ Their initial offering, as presented to the interagency by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Hugh Shelton on September 15, was three options: one, cruise missile strikes on Al Qaeda training camps (albeit camps that were likely empty); two, cruise missiles with manned bomber attacks against Al Qaeda and Taliban targets; three, cruise missiles, bombers, and some element of "boots on the ground" using Special Operations.³⁴ The president rejected this offering and forced the military to develop new options based on his strategic guidance (further discussed below). The military was still developing plans as late as the September 24 NSC meeting, while "Rumsfeld was furious and beating on (Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Tommy) Frank's incessantly."³⁵

At various points, CJCS Shelton, and his successor Richard Myers, showed consideration of political elements during military planning.³⁶ Shelton pushed back on proposed plans to

include Iraq by arguing the allies and moderate Arab states would not be supportive, telling Powell he was trying to dissuade DoD civilians using this political lens.³⁷ During the September 23 NSC meeting, he also highlighted the importance of establishing Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) before operations commenced. This element was not just to ensure the safety of American pilots, but a recognition of the potential political impacts of hostages, particularly in the memory of the Iran hostage crisis and its impact on Carter's and Reagan's presidencies.³⁸ At a September 30 NSC meeting, despite Rumsfeld's reluctance to include coalition partners only for "cosmetic purposes," Deputy (and incoming) CJCS Myers said he understood that coalition inclusion was a "political issue" and so the military would come up with a plan and be "forward leaning."³⁹ While developing new plans for Afghanistan per the president's guidance, the two CJCS factored in political considerations to provide the most responsive options, not focused on military aspects alone.

Role of Secretary of Defense/DoD Civilians

As there was no "off the shelf" plan for Afghanistan, DoD civilians had a significant role in developing the ultimate plan. While Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld did believe that "policy makers should, as a rule, show considerable deference to the professional judgements of the combatant commander," he played a leading role in the development of the military plans. He often used a strong hand over the uniformed officers, leading to some criticism that he was too dismissive of his military subordinates. At the outset of the planning process, he told incoming CJCS Myers that he was disappointed with military planning during his tenure thus far, the military's plans having been "neither imaginative nor creative." Multiple times, Rumsfeld would tell Bush that the military's plans were "inadequate" and not yet at the standard he and other civilians were setting.⁴⁰ After CJCS Shelton presented initial military options, Rumsfeld again

criticized his uniformed subordinates, telling them to “lift out of (the) conventional mind-set” and calling the proposed plans outdated.⁴¹

Rumsfeld stressed the longer term picture to his military subordinates, telling Shelton that this operation would be “chess, not checkers.”⁴² He was particularly concerned that the plans would overemphasize military tools over other instruments of national power. He explicitly endorsed the need for civilian equities, and the process “should employ every tool of national power, not just the military but legal, financial, diplomatic and the CIA.”⁴³ This civilian involvement frustrated Franks at the time, however, “in the end, he told (Rumsfeld), he felt the results were worth it” as the plan he eventually developed was a “substantial improvement” over the initial offerings.⁴⁴ During this planning process, Rumsfeld used his position to challenge the military and forced it to adapt the plans to meet the president’s guidance.

Role of Civilian Departments/Agencies

The State Department and CIA played a leading role in shaping the way forward during the 2001 decision-making process. Secretary of State Powell was a key decision maker during the process. At the September 14 and 15 Camp David meetings, Powell took the floor first and laid out the strategic picture and political goals of the war, providing the initial recommendations for the way forward on Afghanistan.⁴⁵ This discussion also included civilian interagency leadership pushing back against DoD proposals, such as on the reliability of the Northern Alliance, the timeline for military plans, and the need for coalition partners.⁴⁶ The most notable example of civilian resistance was the question of expanding the use of force by attacking Iraq. Throughout the discussions, Powell and Tenet opposed Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz’s proposed Iraq plans, with Powell soliciting CJCS Shelton’s assistance (as noted above).⁴⁷

The CIA was also heavily involved in the planning. The agency was the first to propose options for the use of force, with CIA leadership quickly understanding Bush's intent of finding a new approach to combatting terrorism.⁴⁸ CIA Director Tenet proposed the initial plan on September 13 and 15, which featured covert action combined with military air power and Special Forces. The CIA also included political considerations on how to frame the war as "Afghans vs Arabs" instead of "Westerners vs Afghans," and therefore limited initial targeting of the Taliban, a move questioned by the DoD.⁴⁹ Despite this disagreement, DoD-CIA coordination continued as the military and covert operatives increased the transparency in planning to best accomplish the mission, particularly as the military was working to "catch up" in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ During a September 23 meeting, State Department, the CIA, and the military further debated the start of operations in order to coordinate their various equities.⁵¹ Again on September 28, the CIA and military principals coordinated the military operations in Afghanistan, with State Department assisting with country clearances for basing and the humanitarian plan in country. In preparation for the launch of the military operation, the CIA sent a "military strategy" to all their assets in Afghanistan, elucidating how they could support the plan. The CIA made sure CENTCOM received the document as well, to ensure transparency and prepare for "the future of CIA/DoD integrated counterterrorism warfare around the globe."⁵² Rumsfeld called this collaboration, using the CIA's authorities and operatives with DoD's military resources, and migrating control to the latter over time, "one of the most innovative elements" of the plan, in which he worked as closely with Tenet as he had ever worked with a counterpart.⁵³ For this first Afghanistan decision point, State Department and the CIA took leading roles in developing the plan, and participated in robust discussions, often pushing back on the DoD and the military.

Role of White House / National Security Council (NSC)

From the outset of planning, President Bush explicitly wanted to be in charge and closely involved in the process. Early on after the attacks, Bush made clear to his staff that he wanted to chart a new course, focusing on “the big picture” as compared to the previous administration.⁵⁴ On the evening of September 11, without yet consulting his principals, he had outlined his strategy: not just a retaliatory strike, but a commitment to target both terrorists and those who protect them.⁵⁵ On September 12, he rejected Cheney’s offer to have another principal run the NSC meetings, saying that it was a commander-in-chief function that “could not be delegated.” However, he conceded that he was not a “military tactician” and would have to “rely on the advice and counsel of Rumsfeld, Shelton, Myers, and Tenet.” To that end, Bush told White House Chief of Staff Andy Card that, while he was “not going to be a general” he still had to set the broad goals, and “so much hinged on the small issues.”⁵⁶ With Vietnam ever present in his mind, Bush saw his role as providing “strategic vision” to the developing military plan.⁵⁷ For his part, Cheney appears to have not played a significant role in the 2001 Afghanistan discussion, likely due to his close relationship with Rumsfeld, who was a major voice in the discussions and often shared the same perspective as the vice president.⁵⁸

Bush believed the military needed to be pushed, as “they had yet to be challenged” on how to fight the war in Afghanistan, adding that “they had come out from an era of strike from afar” referring to the cruise missile option.⁵⁹ He had previously stated a clear dislike for this option, as used by the Clinton administration after the 1998 terrorist attacks, seeing it as a “joke” coming from an “impotent America” that was “technologically competent but not very tough.” Therefore, Bush saw his role as to be “provocative” with his principals on the military plans, particularly to overcome the military’s caution: “It’s very important to realize how do you

balance the military's desire to cover all contingencies at least once, maybe sometimes twice- they're relatively risk-adverse...I am a product of the Vietnam world...there is a very fine line between micromanaging combat...(and) make sure there is a sense of, not urgency, but sense of purpose and forward movement.”⁶⁰

Bush was insistent that the planning process should not just focus on the military, but include all stakeholders in an honest, comprehensive debate, to include disagreements as needed.⁶¹ For example, during a break in the Camp David discussions, Bush approached a side conversation between Cheney, “Scooter” Libby, and Wolfowitz in which the three were criticizing CJCS Shelton's military options. Bush pressed the trio on why they had not raised these concerns with the whole group, emphasizing his desire for an open debate.⁶² Bush often honed in on the civilian, political aspect of the Afghanistan war, such as focusing on the “moral front” by asking Shelton if the military could assist with a humanitarian drop: “can we have the first bombs we drop be food?”⁶³ Throughout the process, the president provided his strategic guidance, pushed back on the military, and stressed the importance of civilian, political aspects in planning.⁶⁴

Military Officers in Civilian Positions

The 2001 decision point provides an example of the increasingly common phenomenon of former military officers serving in key “civilian” roles, in this case Powell, a former CJCS, serving as a crucial civilian voice in the debate. Powell's experience as CJCS during the Gulf War meant he understood the military's internal processes, and could question their decision-making.⁶⁵ He was concerned that the military's plan was “a response, an action, but not a strategy... Bomb and hope. Vietnam kept flooding back.”⁶⁶ At the contentious September 30 meeting, Powell was able to challenge Myers on specific questions, such as the need for CSAR

and the speed of aircraft carriers, showing the value of military experience in “civilian” positions.⁶⁷

For this decision point, concerns that retired officers may over-militarize foreign policy are dispelled by Powell’s focus on civilian, political concerns. For instance, at a September 27 meeting, Powell was the only principal focused on “the humanitarian assistance the president had emphasized” instead of the military operations.⁶⁸ He clearly showed no preference for the military. For example, when summarizing the overall plan for the principals on September 30, he focused on diplomacy and CIA operations and “denigrating the military, whether intentionally or not.”⁶⁹ Rumsfeld even took fault with how much Powell represented State Department concerns:

Some of Powell’s actions fostered an impression that he saw his service in the cabinet as a means of representing the State Department to the President as much as he saw it as representing the President at the State Department. On his first day as Secretary of State, Powell announced to the career diplomats of the Foreign Service that he would be their man and representative at the White House... journalists reported that Powell felt Bush was not sufficiently taking the State Department’s positions into account.⁷⁰

In fact, there were more former military officers in State Department than the senior civilian leadership of the DoD, while the latter were often the more hawkish of the cabinet.⁷¹ Powell also counseled restraint during the 2009 review, to avoid sending more troops without assurances on their success, and to push for more options from the military, after President Obama solicited him for advice.⁷² Powell’s military background made him a stronger “civilian” leading to a more balanced CMR in the 2001 decision point.

Analysis of CMR in the 2001 Decision Point

The 2001 decision point was an open, often contentious, debate, with the military participating in an iterative planning process with civilian leadership, which created new options

for the use of force. Following the 9/11 attacks, Bush was searching for a new approach and saw his role as to provoke his subordinates, particularly to challenge the “risk-averse” military. The lack of an “off the shelf” military plan for invasion, and Bush’s and Rumsfeld’s rejection of all three initial strike options, meant that it was a more wide-ranging, open discussion, with State Department providing the strategic context and the CIA proposing the first plans for the use of force. The September 15 discussion in particular helped frame the problem for the whole interagency, as opposed to an autonomous military process, where “the various suggestions from those in attendance and others became the nucleus of an audacious military campaign.”⁷³ As Rumsfeld later described the development, there was no preordained plan, but rather it was “a time of discovery - of seeking elusive, imperfect solutions for new problems that would not be solved quickly.”⁷⁴

The military, as represented by CJCS Shelton and Myers, displayed Janowitzian tendencies when using political, as opposed to military, considerations during planning. Most critically, Shelton argued against Rumsfeld’s plans for Iraq using political rationale. Of note, the ultimate decision to invade Iraq, and the subsequent diversion of attention and resources from Afghanistan, is often cited as one of the key causes of the Afghanistan war’s failure, highlighting the importance of balanced interagency discussions in avoiding strategic errors.

The Obama Decision Point - 2009

After taking office in January 2009, President Barack Obama initiated a strategic review of Afghanistan lasting until November and resulting in two decisions to increase the use of military force. In February, the military presented a proposal for an increase of 30,000 troops, largely to support the Afghan elections in August. The president agreed to a reduced proposal of 17,000 troops, while also initiating an Afghanistan policy review which focused on returning the

nation's focus to the "good war" following the shift in attention to Iraq. To that end, Obama tasked regional expert Bruce Riedel to conduct a 60 day strategic analysis of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Subsequent NSC meetings debated the strategic review, a nine month process ending on November 23 and culminating with the president's December 1 announcement to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, with a withdrawal to begin 18 months later.⁷⁵

Development of Military Plan

Unlike in 2001, the uniformed military led the 2009 review, more than civilian DoD leadership or civilian departments/agencies. Throughout the process, the military limited the options available to the president, focusing on the military task at hand while limiting discussion of political considerations. The first decision for the new administration was whether it would approve the military's proposal for a troop increase to support the Afghan elections in August. This proposal, as discussed at a February 13 NSC, was of four options: do nothing until the Riedel review was complete, immediately send 17,000, split the 17,000, or send 27,000. Given the military and intelligence agencies' concerns over mounting violence prior to the elections, "the president had the appearance of a choice, when for practical and political purposes there really was none."⁷⁶

The next decision, tied to the strategic review ordered by the president but unexpected so quickly by civilian leadership, was another request for a troop increase from the military. These proposals to the president focused on the military task at hand, namely to "defeat" the Taliban, while failing to include political considerations which it recognized internally. Upon taking command in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal commissioned an internal report which was pessimistic for the chances of success, and included concerns over "weakness of state institutions, malign actions of power brokers, widespread corruption and abuse of power by

various officials, and (International Security Assistance Force's) own errors." On the last point, it highlighted the facts that the military "cannot succeed simply by trying harder," the difficulties of protecting the population and confronting the Taliban's shadow government, and the strategic failure inherent in civilian casualties.⁷⁷ However, the proposal the military gave to the president did not include these political considerations, instead translating the military's "can do" optimism into a second request for additional troops, thereby ignoring potentially insurmountable political obstacles. This paper in general lacked the "impressive candor from the assessment."⁷⁸ The 11 page proposal included three options for increasing troops: 10,000 for primarily training Afghan forces; 40,000 for counterinsurgency; or 85,000 for "more robust" counterinsurgency. Although foreshadowed by military leaders earlier in media and congressional appearances, it was formally presented to the president on October 9. Obama was not satisfied with the meetings thus far, and asked for further refinement.⁷⁹ At the November 11 NSC meeting, the military presented four options: 85,000 for robust counterinsurgency, a number even CJCS Michael Mullen called "impossible;" the military's preferred 40,000; 30,000-35,000 with an appeal to NATO for a fourth brigade to make up the difference; and 20,000 focused on counterterrorism. Mullen and CENTCOM Commander David Petraeus convinced Obama to discard the 20,000 option, by using the results of a wargame for which Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Dennis Blair had called, although Blair was not there to explain its deficiencies (see below). As even the military thought the 85,000 was not realistic, the military had essentially whittled the options back to two very similar, military-preferred plans, much to the chagrin of the president.⁸⁰ For the second time in 2009, it appeared that the military was proposing a set of options in which only one appeared feasible, while not presenting their full understanding of the problem.

CJCS Mullen in particular sought to limit the range of considerations presented to the president, instead adhering to the “best military advice” of McChrystal. When the Deputy CJCS, James Cartwright, prepared a “counterterrorism plus” proposal for Vice President Joseph Biden, Mullen “barred it from leaving the Pentagon.”⁸¹ Similarly at the October 14 NSC meeting, when Petraeus passed around a document on potential reconciliation with the Taliban, a key political issue, Mullen sent a note to Petraeus which caused the CENTCOM commander to withdraw the issue from consideration and asked for the return of all copies of the document. The memo described the factors which helped reconciliation succeed in Iraq, and how those factors were not present in Afghanistan.⁸² In another case of the military not presenting concerns over political issues, Obama discussed his plan to announce the troop increase together with a withdrawal date of July 2011 on a November 29 video call with McChrystal and Ambassador Karl Eikenberry. McChrystal had concerns that it was a mistake, but refrained from saying the withdrawal would be “fatal” partly due to recognizing “there were political realities outside (his) view.”⁸³ While this was a humble recognition of limitations, it also reflects a Huntingtonian perspective that the military should not consider political aspects, a perspective McChrystal himself recognized as flawed for the task at hand:

Like many soldiers of my generation, my ideal for how a military leader should advise and answer to civilian, democratic authority had been drawn from Samuel Huntington’s seminal treatise, *The Soldier and the State*. He argued a military commander should endeavor to operate as independently of political or even policy pressures as possible. And yet I found, as much as I wanted my role to be that described by Huntington, the demands of the job made this difficult. The process of formulating, negotiating, articulating, and then prosecuting even a largely military campaign involved politics at multiple levels that were impossible to ignore.⁸⁴

Observers were also surprised that Petraeus did not raise concerns about Obama’s 18 month withdrawal plan, given the long timeline required of counterinsurgency operations.

Petraeus told colleagues afterwards that he was under the impression he was “there to take orders, not discuss options... if you wanted to stay on the team, you would take it.”⁸⁵

Obama himself felt like his choices during 2009 were limited and controlled by the military leadership: “It was tough not to feel as if I’d been subjected to a bait and switch – that the Pentagon’s acquiescence to my more modest initial increase of seventeen thousand troops and four thousand military trainers had been merely a temporary, tactical retreat on the path to getting more... Mike Mullen, the Joint Chiefs, and David Petraeus all endorsed McChrystal’s (counterinsurgency) strategy in its entirety; anything less, they argued, was likely to fail and would signal a dangerous lack of American resolve to friends and foes alike.”⁸⁶

Throughout the 2009 review process, the administration was also concerned by public statements of the military that could unduly influence the process before the interagency had fully debated options. Petraeus gave an interview in September that pushed the view that without more military resources, Afghanistan would fail. After being chastised by White House civilians and the Pentagon spokesperson, Petraeus agreed to not give any more interviews, however, he kept back channels open to “pro-military senators.”⁸⁷ Soon after, CJSC Mullen told Congress that he supported a “counterinsurgency effort” which “probably means more forces.” Obama and his staff were furious at yet another leak, pressuring the president into the military’s proposed strategy.⁸⁸ Another leak occurred when McChrystal told an audience he would request an additional 40,000 troops, putting the proposal into the public forum before it had been presented at the NSC.⁸⁹ Despite repeated warnings, McChrystal again gave a speech in London in which he yet again pushed for the counterinsurgency strategy and troop increase, again to the anger of White House/NSC civilians.⁹⁰ On November 11, there was another leak detailing a new proposal for 30,000-35,000 troops, angering a White House still searching for an answer from

the interagency on the mission and objectives in Afghanistan.⁹¹ NSC Director for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes concluded that “the whole review had been shaped by leaks from the military designed to box Obama into sending more troops into Afghanistan.”⁹²

Role of Secretary of Defense/DoD Civilians

While Defense Secretary Robert Gates had hesitations about the military’s Afghanistan proposals, he limited his participation in the discussions, did not criticize the military’s plan, and focused more on defending the military’s recommendation to the president. By his own account, Gates was a skeptic about the need for a troop increase, and aware that the military would consistently ask for more, but was also defensive about political questions entering into the debate and protective of the uniformed officers below him. Gates said that he “was torn between my historical perspective, which screamed for caution, and what my commanders insisted was needed for accomplishing the mission they had been given by the president and by me.”⁹³ Yet revealingly, Gates said he felt this divide in the summer, before the president had completed his review and defined his goals for the war in November.⁹⁴ Therefore, Gates was defending the military’s plans for what it thought was its mission, and not providing the perspective the president sought (which would have been more cautious) in order to make a better assessment of what the mission should be. Gates was supporting the military in putting the operational cart before the strategic horse.

Compared to Rumsfeld, Gates took a limited role in the discussions over Afghanistan policy.⁹⁵ For instance, at a September 30 NSC meeting, Gates did not speak until an hour and 45 minutes, at which point Obama had to prompt him into contributing. His contribution supported the generals’ position, which had been presented by Petraeus at the beginning of the meeting.⁹⁶ During an October 26 meeting in which a frustrated Obama was looking for options, Gates did

express some disagreement with the military, particularly regarding the terms “defeat” and “fully resourced counterinsurgency.” However, he still supported the 40,000 troop proposal and did not provide other options for which the president was searching.⁹⁷

In an expression of his view of the civilian role in discussing military plans, Gates says that the final stages of the review from September to November got “further into the weeds—details beyond what was needed or appropriate.”⁹⁸ In another telling comment while discussing a possible hybrid option with Deputy CJCS Cartwright, Gates said he wanted a recommendation that “did ‘not break the internal coalition’ among the uniformed military.”⁹⁹ This perspective prioritized harmony over critical thinking. Obama also described the Defense Secretary’s overall deference to the military: “In private, Gates had expressed to me that he felt some ambivalence about such a significant increase to our Afghan footprint. But given his institutional role, I didn’t expect him to directly countermand a recommendation from the chiefs.”¹⁰⁰ This perspective, that the Defense Secretary is not expected to disagree with the JCS, stands in stark contrast to the Bush decision point, and to Janowitzian theory which would say that a back and forth is to be expected, as opposed to the military having autonomy over these types of decisions.

In a counterpoint to Rhodes’s quote on McChrystal driving the process, Gates felt that the debate “had been driven more by the White House staff and by domestic politics” than any other he had experienced, with “politics overriding the national interest.” However, Gates quickly contradicts himself by saying “to be fair, though, national interest *had* trumped politics, as the president made a tough decision that was contrary to the advice of all his political advisers. (Italics in original).” Furthermore, Gates says that “*all* of us at the senior-most level did not serve the president well in this process. (Italics in original).” Notably, Gates highlighted that there had been “inadequate attention to the civilian component.” The CMR disconnect that contributed to

this view seems one of personal grievance over professional disagreement, according to Gates: “The aggressive, suspicious, and sometimes condescending and insulting questioning of our military leaders – especially by (Deputy NSA Tom) Donilon, (Senior Advisor and Coordinator for Afghanistan-Pakistan Doug) Lute, and others at the White House – made them overly defensive, hardening their unwillingness to compromise... A more collegial process... would have had a more harmonious conclusion and done less damage to the relationship between the military and the commander in chief.” Gates puts the onus of creating such a collegial process on the NSA as an “honest broker” while saying that, in his role as secretary, he “could have done more.”¹⁰¹ This perspective ignores the lack of oversight and control over the uniformed leaders that reported to him, particularly given the persistence of the military’s leaks to the press, which seem more responsible for the toxic atmosphere than “insulting questioning” of military leaders.¹⁰² Gates’s reflections reveal a Huntingtonian view of CMR, with a secretary giving autonomy to the military regarding military plans, and represents a key difference between the 2001 and 2009 decision points. Crucially for the outcome, Obama saw Gates as the critical participant in the debate, and others thought Obama would do whatever Gates recommended.¹⁰³ According to aides involved in the process, had Gates sided with Vice President Biden, Obama may have decided on a less ambitious strategy involving fewer troops.¹⁰⁴

Role of Civilian Departments/Agencies

Similar to the Defense Secretary, the leaders of the two principal civilian institutions, the State Department and CIA, largely deferred to the military in 2009.¹⁰⁵ President Obama describes this deference by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and CIA Director Leon Panetta, which “didn’t surprise (him):... Their hawkish instincts and political backgrounds left them perpetually wary of opposing any recommendation that came from the Pentagon.”¹⁰⁶ Rhodes

confirms this tendency: “On the wars, (Clinton) often sided with the military- throughout 2009, she rarely took a position in an internal discussion about Iraq or Afghanistan that differed from Gates’s.”¹⁰⁷

Overall, Clinton took less of a prominent role in the discussions, as compared to Powell in the 2001 decision point. For instance, at the September 30 NSC meeting, in which Vice President Biden, Petraeus, and McChrystal took the lead presenting their views on the situation, Clinton’s contribution came at the end of the meeting, and consisted of questions on the types of troops requested and lessons learned from Iraq, as opposed to providing strategic direction.¹⁰⁸ At the October 9 NSC meeting, which Obama opened by asking for everyone’s opinion on what should be done in the war, Clinton briefed after Biden, McChrystal, Gates, and Petraeus; a difference from the Bush NSC meetings in which Powell led the strategic discussion. At this time, Clinton raised the political questions of governance and corruption, but nevertheless gave full support to the military’s proposal for the troop increase.¹⁰⁹ On October 26, a frustrated Obama called together Clinton and Gates without the military leadership, to highlight that he still did not have a true second option, nine months into the review. While Gates discussed some disagreements he had with the military’s plan, Clinton supported it and “seemed closer to the original McChrystal request than Gates’s.” Again, the Secretary of State “was joining forces with the uniformed military” and Gates, limiting the president’s range of options. Additionally, the president also did not like the lack of an international element in the military’s plan, another reflection of the lack of political and diplomatic considerations.¹¹⁰ While these instances do show civilian involvement in planning for the use of force, Clinton’s input largely focused at the operational level and did not address the overall strategic question of the nation’s goals in Afghanistan, or reflect the concerns of her State Department subordinates.

This latter issue reflected the imbalance in CMR and its strategic implications, as State Department's political concerns regarding the military's proposal were not adequately represented in the discussion. The State Department's concerns most notably came from three key subordinates: Richard Holbrooke, the Special Advisor for Afghanistan and Pakistan; Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, a retired three star Army general; and Deputy Secretary Jim Steinberg. Holbrooke was particularly adamant about the imbalance in CMR and the perils of the military's recommendation, but the Secretary did not support his conclusions. For instance, Holbrooke told Bob Woodward that he did not want to be involved in public debates (possibly an indirect critique of the military's leaks) and he would support Clinton's ultimate decision, but said he had misgivings on the war, and that the military was too dominant in the process. He relayed these concerns to Clinton, saying that the troops would be "spread too thin" and it would be "a resource-mission mismatch."¹¹¹ Holbrooke pushed for reconciliation talks between Kabul and the Taliban, to which the military was opposed.¹¹²

Most importantly, Holbrooke wanted to ensure civilians would be in control of the Afghanistan policy: "I told David Axelrod that we had been dominated for far too long by pure military thinking and military domination, while I have great respect for the military... they should not dictate political strategy which is what's happening now."¹¹³ Holbrooke raised many of his concerns in the October 9 NSC meeting, yet participants noted Holbrooke was not connecting with the president and his points were not being supported by Clinton.¹¹⁴ In the final days of his life, Holbrooke sent several confidential memos to Clinton to underline that the proposed strategy was unsustainable and would not succeed. He was increasingly pessimistic over the imbalance in CMR: "While the military leaders had the ear of the president again and again every day, Secretary Clinton had one hour with the president each week to cover all the

topics in the world. In some ways it was a practical critique of a system he saw swinging away from the civilian side and towards power being in the hands of the military sides.”¹¹⁵ After the September 13 principals’ meeting, Holbrooke was dismayed at the lack of a “no-holds-barred debate” despite the president’s expressed desire that no one “bite their tongues,” reflecting the downsides of Clinton and Gates’ united front.¹¹⁶ Deputy Secretary Steinberg raised similar concerns, telling Clinton in October that he was worried that the military’s requests would continue, and that they “were on the path to another Vietnam.”¹¹⁷ While she listened to Holbrooke’s and Steinberg’s concerns, Clinton still supported the military’s position and did not counter their proposal for a troop increase during interagency discussions.¹¹⁸

Ambassador Eikenberry was another crucial voice laying out the political pitfalls inherent in Afghanistan, particularly the lack of a reliable partner in the Karzai government. He raised these concerns at the October 9 NSC meeting. Biden seconded these concerns but the military did not address them, instead focusing on the security situation and giving no answer for how increased troops could overcome these political hurdles (despite McChrystal’s own internal assessment recognizing the same challenges).¹¹⁹ On November 6, Eikenberry sent a series of cables detailing the embassy’s concerns with the military’s plan, primarily that increasing troop levels would increase Afghan dependency on the U.S. The cable, requested by the NSC, drew ire from Mullen and Petraeus, and caused a rift in Kabul.¹²⁰ These cables were subsequently leaked to the press, further toxifying the civilian-military discord. Ultimately it was again Biden, not Clinton, who raised the points from Eikenberry’s cable at the November 11 NSC meeting.¹²¹ At the final November 23 NSC meeting, Eikenberry underscored the political points, that the “risk comes from the governance side, not the security side.” He also answered the president’s question on what would happen if the 40,000 troops were not sent, with an ad hoc proposal

focusing on training Afghan National Security Forces and speeding up reintegration, thereby supplying the alternative option that the military had refused to provide throughout the review process.¹²² Unfortunately for the strategic review process, this counterproposal was never formally presented and could not compete with the military's polished plans for the surge.

DoD counterparts also recognized the State Department's weakness in the 2009 decision point. Gates discusses how "vastly more attention was focused on every aspect of the military effort than – despite Donilon's and Holbrooke's best efforts – on the broad challenge of getting the political and civilian part of the equation right."¹²³ McChrystal regretted the fact that the State Department was not conducting a similar review of political considerations to accompany his review of the military situation, which would have benefited the decision-making process.¹²⁴ A McChrystal advisor said that Clinton's deferral to the military, and "reflexive support" of the generals, led to the "over-militarizing" of the discussion.¹²⁵

Similar to State Department, the civilian intelligence leadership was less involved in 2009 compared to its active role in developing the 2001 plan. While DNI Dennis Blair, CIA Director Panetta, and CIA Deputy Director John Brennan shared concerns at the October 9 NSC meeting, they briefed towards the end, and were largely uninvolved during the other key decision-making discussions throughout the review process.¹²⁶ Panetta's deference to the military contributed to the lack of a rigorous debate, as his opinion was that "no Democratic president can go against military advice, especially if he asked for it." Unsurprisingly, his recommendation was: "So just do it. Do what they say."¹²⁷ In contrast, DNI Blair, a retired admiral, did attempt to participate in the debate. He advocated for a wargame exercise to analyze the impact of different troop levels, to help develop other options for the president. However he found the resulting event "didn't go beyond a normal staff analysis" and hoped the

military would run a follow-up wargame. The military did not do a deeper study, but instead used the one wargame to shelve the proposal for 20,000 troops at the November 11 meeting discussed above.¹²⁸ Ultimately, both Blair and Panetta were excluded from the November review sessions where the final decision was being made, excluding key civilian voices from the process.¹²⁹

Role of White House / National Security Council (NSC)

President Obama began his term with a clear desire to balance CMR in the strategic review: “I told Gates that my first priority was to make sure our agencies, both civilian and military, were aligned around a clearly defined mission and a coordinated strategy.”¹³⁰ He particularly did not want to discuss troop numbers until the group had defined interests and goals.¹³¹ Despite this intent, the Afghanistan review was dominated by the military, with the proposed troop increase overshadowing all other aspects.¹³² This focus on numbers of troops was present in the very first NSC meeting on January 23, which Obama initiated by saying that increasing troops in Afghanistan was a campaign promise, yet the increase needed to be in the context of a broader strategy.”¹³³ At the September 30 meeting, Obama led with his strategic goals for Afghanistan, foremost being the protection of the U.S. homeland and allies. However, the discussion quickly focused on the question of counterinsurgency against the Taliban, and McChrystal’s upcoming request for 40,000 more troops had already leaked to the press, ensuring that troop numbers were on the principals’ minds.¹³⁴ As the military pushed the 40,000 troop increase in the public forum, Obama searched for more options, trying to coax opinions from any and all sources. He pressed Clinton and Gates for more options, and brought together the Joint Chiefs to try to elicit more military recommendations. After the November 11 NSC meeting, in which the military presented four options, which essentially boiled down to two very similar

options (see above), Obama expressed his frustration that the military's plan would have 100,000 troops in Afghanistan for years, a result that limited what the country could do domestically and internationally. On the domestic side, Obama expressed frustration that the military did not appreciate his political constraints, and how much easier it would be for him to go with the smallest option of 10,000 trainers.¹³⁵

Among the principals, Vice President Biden was the strongest, and often sole, voice of dissent against the military's proposals and for the need for a broader strategic, political context.¹³⁶ Biden feared the CMR imbalance, and thought that the military "could roll an inexperienced president" but could not "push (Biden) around" thanks to his 35 years in the senate.¹³⁷ For instance, at the January 23 NSC, Biden pushed back on the military's initial request for 30,000 troops by stating "we have not thought through our strategic goals."¹³⁸ During the later debates, Biden developed a "counterterrorism plus" proposal to counter the "unrestrained" military's counterinsurgency plan, and pushed it as a viable, sustainable alternative.¹³⁹ At the September 30 meeting, Biden led the debate on the civilian side, questioning Petraeus and McChrystal's assessment and the need to "defeat" the Taliban.¹⁴⁰ After McChrystal presented his troop options to the president on October 8, Biden honed in on the political question: how will a troop increase help if corruption and governance issues are not resolved? The military had no answer.¹⁴¹ On the goal for Afghan security forces, Biden was also critical in exposing insufficient thinking behind the military's proposal of 40,000 troops, from which it would not budge. White House Coordinator for Afghanistan-Pakistan Lute highlighted this issue for Obama, who pushed back on the military as hard as he had in the entire review.¹⁴² Throughout the process, the president and vice president searched for broader options, yet the military, with the backing of the two secretaries, limited the proposals for consideration.

Military Officers in Civilian Positions

The Obama decision point had several senior military officers in significant “civilian” positions: former Marine Corps Commandant Jim Jones as National Security Advisor, active duty three star general Doug Lute serving as Senior Advisor and Coordinator for Afghanistan-Pakistan, retired admiral Dennis Blair as DNI, and retired three star general Karl Eikenberry as Ambassador to Afghanistan. Jones, Lute, and Eikenberry were some of the only “civilian” leaders opposed to the military’s proposed plan, and were willing to question the proposals in detail.¹⁴³ Obama recognized the benefit of these military officers in the debate, while not distinguishing between those still in military roles and those acting as “civilians”: “In fact, during my eight years as president, it was often the generals, rather than civilians, who counseled restraint when it came to the use of force. Still, men like Mullen were creatures of the system to which they’d [*sic*] devoted their entire adult lives – a U.S. military that prided itself on accomplishing a mission once started, without regard to cost, duration, or whether the mission was the right one to begin with.”¹⁴⁴ Regarding the president’s criticism in the latter sentence, it is worthy to note that Mullen was of course a key military voice as CJCS, whereas the military in “civilian” roles were thinking about the cost, duration, and suitability of the mission.

NSA Jones frequently pushed back on the military, acting as one of the strongest civilian critics despite his uniformed experience. For instance, after McChrystal questioned whether the initial troop request was sufficient during a June 2 congressional hearing, Jones recognized the military leadership was launching a public campaign for more troops. He confronted Gates and Mullen on going behind the president’s back, and told them to hold off for at least two months. At the heart of the issue, Jones understood the military’s eternal desire for more troops, and was concerned that there was a growing “over-militarization of the war.”¹⁴⁵ Jones also thought Gates

was not taking a strong enough position as Defense Secretary against his military subordinates, a reflection of a more Janowitzian CMR perspective.¹⁴⁶ Notably, Jones focused on the strategic questions, for instance, arranging a meeting with Clinton and Gates on October 7 in order to define U.S. interests in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ After McChrystal's London speech, Jones called Gates, urging him to restrain his generals, and Mullen, in order to criticize McChrystal and stress Mullen's responsibility as a conduit between the military and the president.¹⁴⁸ Again, Jones reflected civilian, political concerns, rather than deferring to his former colleagues in uniform. When McChrystal finally briefed his troop options to the NSC on October 8, Jones was the one to push back, saying that it was premature to talk troop levels as "there were essential questions that had not yet been answered" related to the goals in country, as well as what the troops could actually achieve.¹⁴⁹ Jones also compared the troop requests under the Bush administration with those of 2009, and so was "offended" by the military's inflexibility on the 40,000 while under Obama.¹⁵⁰ During the October 26 small group, in which Obama was looking for more options, Jones, not Clinton or Gates, said that "he did not think the military had proven its case for the troops" and expressly disagreed with the 40,000 proposal. He followed up by sending a tasking memo to DoD, recognizing that "a president had to have precision on military matters of this consequence" otherwise "the military would tend to do what they wanted to do."¹⁵¹ Jones's understanding of the military allowed him to provide a strong countering opinion to the military leadership.

As an active duty soldier in an NSC position, Lute also brought his military expertise to the civilian side of the table. For instance, he was able to question the initial 30,000 troop request, noting that the numbers were "soft" and failed to consider key enablers such as lift assets and counter-IED teams. His insight allowed Deputy NSA Donilon to push back on

Mullen, and saved the White House from having to publicly change the numbers after the president's approval, which would have made the administration look "foolish."¹⁵² Thanks to his military knowledge, Lute also understood that this initial request was based on when troops "were available from Iraq, instead of based on mission requirements."¹⁵³ Lute spearheaded the push to develop the "counterterrorism plus" option, despite Mullen's opposition and McChrystal rejecting it out of hand.¹⁵⁴ It was Lute, not Clinton, who was the impetus asking for Ambassador Eikenberry's cable which criticized the military's proposal.¹⁵⁵ On November 28, Lute gave a candid assessment of the downsides of the military's plans, concluding that success was not a given. He essentially thought his military colleagues were "rolling the president" and that Mullen was not sufficiently presenting other options. He also viewed Gates as too deferential to the military, not giving his own advice, and "did not assert civilian control" as befits the president's representative at DoD, leaving it to the president himself to push back.¹⁵⁶ As evidence that military "civilians" will not necessarily take the military's side, Mullen found that Lute had not been "always helpful in the course of the review" to achieving the military's goals.¹⁵⁷ Despite being active duty, Lute used his position as a "civilian" to demand more rigorous planning from the military and to look at the bigger picture.

Ambassador Eikenberry was another critical voice on the political considerations, providing a counterpoint to the military's assessment (see "Role of Civilian Department/Agencies" section above). Lastly, as noted earlier, DNI Blair attempted to provide more critical thinking around the various troop numbers, by advocating for a series of wargames. Overall, the strongest critics of the military in the 2009 process were these flag officers, providing weight to political considerations, but not fully rectifying the imbalance created by the deference of the secretaries and CIA director.

Analysis of CMR in the 2009 Decision Point

The 2009 decision point, while often involving contentious debate, saw key civilian principals defer to the military and thereby failed to present significantly different options for the use of force beyond the military's initial offering. Similar to the Bush decision point, the process began with Obama laying out his vision for what he hoped to achieve in Afghanistan, as an extension of his campaign promises. However, this example differed in that the military was well prepared to provide their plan for the use of force, while the civilian counterparts were less inclined to robust debate and were deferential to the military. According to NSC Director Rhodes: "The man who did the most to frame Obama's Afghanistan decision in 2009 was (Afghanistan Commander) General Stanley McChrystal."¹⁵⁸ While there were debates between military and civilian, too often the concerns were not raised to the highest level. For instance, McChrystal's initial internal review was much more thorough and pessimistic than the proposal he presented to the president. Another example is from October 5, when NSA Jones brought together the principals, but without the president. The group discussed the key question of whether the U.S. needed to defeat the Taliban, with Steinberg and Lute pushing back against Petraeus and Mullen. However, the day ended with Gates and Clinton seeming "to agree on what should be done with Afghanistan and troop levels," essentially creating a united front and ending the debate before the president could hear both sides sufficiently.¹⁵⁹ Compared to the other two decision points, the Defense Secretary was much less willing to confront the military, and focused on maintaining harmony within the uniformed ranks instead of providing critical thinking on the problem of Afghanistan. The Secretary of State was also much less critical of the DoD and military, creating a less vigorous debate. The intelligence leadership was largely absent from the critical discussions, depriving the civilians of another voice.

At the final November 23 NSC meeting, both Clinton and Gates gave unconditional support to the military's plan.¹⁶⁰ The president was clearly looking for alternatives, but the military and key principals were not presenting him one, not even answering the question of the implications of a smaller troop footprint.¹⁶¹ According to Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell, with Clinton, Gates, Mullen, and Petraeus united, Obama was left with little choice.¹⁶² At a last moment alone with Rhodes, Obama was reduced to asking his 32 year old speechwriter what he should do, Rhodes having "watched him get pushed into a corner that fall and stay there."¹⁶³

The Obama decision point is the most Huntingtonian of the three examples, with the military providing advice that is largely autonomous and unchallenged by civilian leadership. In particular, State Department concerns over the military's proposed plan did not reach the strategic level discussions. DNI Blair also recalled "a fault line" between Obama and his political advisers on one side, and the military officers, both active and retired, on the other.¹⁶⁴ Gates attributes that Obama had "an unfamiliarity" with the military and his White House had "distrust of the nation's military leadership."¹⁶⁵ This perceived divide likely limited the collaborative, iterative process which CMR scholarship recommends.

One factor contributing to the military's desire for autonomy was CJCS Mullen's perception that his two predecessors had been "emasculated" in the previous administration, particularly under Rumsfeld, and wanted to strengthen the role of the CJCS. This strengthening entailed more public appearances, in which he gave his "best military advice" that Afghanistan would require more troops.¹⁶⁶ In addition, the perceived success of the Iraqi surge in 2007-2008 may have contributed to an imbalance in CMR. The surge increased overall confidence in the military's plans and civilians' willingness to defer to military recommendations. The added

pressure of the military's public statements supporting their proposal may have added to the CMR imbalance, as this intrusion by active duty military officers into the domestic political debate made it difficult for the president to refuse the military's preferred option.

Another issue with the military leading the process was a disconnect in terminology. McChrystal explains that at one point there was a question during a video conference from a NSC civilian on the military's plan to "defeat" the Taliban. Military doctrine describes "defeat" as to stop the enemy's ability to accomplish its mission. However, to a civilian ear, "defeat" was perceived as "destruction or eradication," a much harder mission to accomplish. McChrystal acknowledged that this latter mission would not be possible, but it is not clear if he briefed that to his civilian counterparts. (To note, Lute, explained the issue for the Washington side of the meeting, again showing the value of military officers in "civilian" positions).¹⁶⁷ This type of disconnect is a downside of military-led strategic reviews, where the military's scripted and polished "off the shelf" plan can lead to confusion in the interagency.

The Trump Decision Point - 2017

Upon taking office, and having vowed to withdraw troops from Afghanistan during his campaign, Donald Trump convened his national security team in 2017 to develop his administration's approach to the war. The process began with NSC meetings in March and concluded with the president's approval of a conditions-based plan on August 18. Compared to the previous two decision points, there is considerably fewer first person accounts of the discussion, however, the main elements of the 2017 process are known and make the example worthy of comparison.

Development of Military Plan

NSA H.R. McMaster, an active duty Army three star general, took the lead on developing and lobbying for a new course of action in Afghanistan. McMaster poses a challenge for a CMR study – as an active duty officer in a “civilian” position who apparently took the lead in proposing the new policy, to include military options (as well as having written his dissertation on CMR during Vietnam, which criticized the military for failing to provide an honest assessment of the war).¹⁶⁸ While wearing both military and civilian hats, his goal was a more sustainable, long-term approach, an approach that would better reflect the political realities of the Afghanistan, but one he recognized would be counter to the president’s campaign promises.¹⁶⁹ McMaster saw developing a new strategy for Afghanistan as a priority, having felt that the country was “at war with no strategy.” He believed that the previous administrations micromanaged the process, relied on “wishful thinking,” and applied an arbitrary, unrealistic timeline for the withdrawal of troops.¹⁷⁰

The first discussions took place at middle-level NSC meetings on March 1 and 10, in which McMaster laid out four goals for the interagency participants to discuss: political stability including a settlement with the Taliban; a push for institutional actions by the Afghan government; increased pressure on Pakistan; and maintaining international support. As part of these discussions, the question of troop levels was raised, with McMaster initially proposing a 3,000-5,000 increase and another staffer offering an option in the tens of thousands.¹⁷¹ These smaller numbers represented a decrease from 50,000-60,000, apparently proposed at the outset of 2017.¹⁷² After civilians pushed back on any talk of troop increases until goals were defined (see below), McMaster proposed on March 28 a strategy centered around four R’s: reinforce, realign, reconcile, and regionalize. As the strategy came into focus in May, the interagency proposed a formal plan with a 3,000-5,000 troop increase focused on counterterrorism.¹⁷³ This plan, which

Trump ultimately approved on August 18, focused on political aspects of civilian assistance, political outreach, diplomatic efforts, and working with regional actors. In the memo presenting the plan, McMaster also conceded that the stalemate would continue, the Taliban would “continue to gain ground,” and the conventional military concept of winning was “unattainable.”¹⁷⁴ This memo reflected political considerations, and thereby proposed a much smaller, sustainable troop increase as compared to the 2009 surge.

Role of Secretary of Defense/DoD Civilians

Retired four star general Jim Mattis’s appointment as Defense Secretary was controversial as he had left active service only four years prior and therefore required a Senate waiver, the first in 68 years.¹⁷⁵ Mattis initially worked closely with McMaster and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to pitch the NSC’s proposal to the president. Later, Mattis joined Tillerson in opposing McMaster’s plan during the July review (see below).¹⁷⁶ Mattis had also worked to change the rules of engagement, lifting Obama-era restrictions to allow the troops to be “more aggressive and lethal.”¹⁷⁷ Despite having been recently in uniform, Mattis maintained separation from the military’s plan and provided pushback when he felt that it was insufficiently meeting the president’s intent.

Role of Civilian Departments/Agencies

The initial March meetings had State Department taking the lead on defining the key questions on the goals in Afghanistan, focusing on issues of governance, the possibility of a political settlement, and economic struggles. The intelligence agencies were also active in these meetings, proposing options in a manner reminiscent of 2001, contrary to their backseat role in 2009.¹⁷⁸

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson actively participated in the decision, debating with both the military and the president. At most NSC meetings, Tillerson spoke first, and often presented for the majority of the meeting. His aim was to have all participants define the problem collectively, and then “rework the strategy.” Tillerson’s general arguments (not specific to Afghanistan) focused on economic integration, development assistance, and the motivators of violence, largely political and economic considerations.¹⁷⁹ At first, Tillerson, alongside Mattis, disagreed with the military’s proposal, saying “I’m not selling this (plan) to the president” and criticizing McMaster for insufficiently considering the political concerns of the White House.¹⁸⁰ By the July 19 meeting, Tillerson had worked with Mattis to better frame the overall regional context in the plan, and tried to convince Trump of McMaster’s updated proposal.¹⁸¹ In a recognition of the challenges of Afghanistan, Tillerson told the press on August 21 that the Taliban “will not win a battlefield victory” but the U.S. may not win one either.¹⁸²

However, despite Tillerson’s role in the discussions, there were significant concerns in 2017 for the insufficient resourcing of the civilian agencies and departments. Most notably was the lack of State Department personnel focused on Afghanistan, without a Special Representative for Afghanistan-Pakistan or an ambassador in Kabul until September, after the president’s August announcement.¹⁸³ While the target of much criticism, Tillerson led much of the interagency debate and pushed back on the military plans, while publicly recognizing the political challenges of Afghanistan.

The 2017 decision point included the CIA reengaging in the Afghanistan conversation, with the pendulum having swung back from being largely excluded in 2009. Initially, the CIA staff told Director Mike Pompeo that Afghanistan was a “graveyard not just of empires but of careers” and that the problem should be left to the Army, with the agency steering clear.

Pompeo nevertheless agreed to go to Afghanistan in August in order to find a middle solution between McMaster and Trump.¹⁸⁴ Pompeo presented this “middle way,” an option which would focus on counter-terrorism but have less troops than the military’s plan, but included a pessimistic assessment of the timeline for implementation. Like other principals, Pompeo recognized the challenges in Afghanistan and said the war was not winnable.¹⁸⁵

Role of White House / National Security Council (NSC)

Despite the inclusion of many military officers in his cabinet, Trump had been a critic of the Afghanistan war since 2011, frequently calling for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the country.¹⁸⁶ In terms of CMR, Trump created the conditions for a rigorous debate, criticizing the military leadership and searching for options from civilian sources. However in comparison with Bush’s and Obama’s search for overarching strategic goals, Trump counter-proposed options based on “one-sentence clichés” like “running an insurgency against the insurgency of the Taliban,” increasing the frustration of McMaster, Mattis, and Tillerson.¹⁸⁷ He also denigrated the military’s positions of authority, soliciting input from junior enlisted troops and telling the generals: “I don’t care about you guys.” Trump would often seek diverse opinions on Afghanistan, even as most interlocutors would defer to McMaster as the “expert.”¹⁸⁸ Trump had an increasingly negative view of McMaster and often would consider firing him, particularly as he viewed the options presented as similar to those the military planned for Bush and Obama.¹⁸⁹

Regarding the military’s plans, Trump frequently pushed back on McMaster, Mattis, and CJCS Joseph Dunford, saying that he had heard the “this nonsense about Afghanistan for 17 years with no success” and that the U.S. was “losing big.” At the July 19 meeting at the Pentagon, Trump expressed his frustration on Afghanistan, asking when the United States would “start winning” and casting doubt on General John Nicholson, the commander in Afghanistan.

Dunford defended Nicholson, saying “there’s not a mandate to win. That’s not his order.”¹⁹⁰ At this meeting, Trump rejected the military’s proposal and sent it back for further refinement.¹⁹¹ A month later at the August 18 NSC meeting, Trump again confronted the military, saying they “created this situation” and were “part of the problem,” as Afghanistan was a “disaster.” However, after Mattis advocated that a withdrawal could lead to a vacuum for al Qaeda to fill and thus more terrorist attacks, Trump conceded “you all are telling me that I have to do this... and I guess that’s fine and we’ll do it, but I still think you’re wrong.” Ultimately, Trump approved the refined plan and, on August 21, gave a speech in which he said “we will not talk about numbers of troops or plans for further military” although the nation would still “win.” He said he was convinced by his advisors to keep troops in Afghanistan despite his initial impulse to withdraw them, outlining a more “realistic, sustainable” approach that included all instruments of national power.¹⁹² In a sense, the military got “just enough.”¹⁹³

Several other White House civilians were involved in the debate over Afghanistan policy in 2017. White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon was a voice opposed to the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan, viewing the situation as the “failure of establishment thinking... (and) inability to confront failure.” Bannon also supported a proposal from Blackwater-founder Erik Prince to replace the current force with contractors and Special Operations, an idea quickly dismissed by most participants.¹⁹⁴ Deputy NSA Dina Powell assisted the planning process by searching for a “middle ground” option that would serve both the political and military ends. This proposal was for an increase of 4,000-7,000 troops, and was eventually supported by most principals, as it was seen as “just the right balance between the military’s unacceptable scenarios: retreat and dishonor or many more troops.”¹⁹⁵ At a principals’ meeting in March, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Chief of Staff Reince Priebus pushed back on any discussion of troop

numbers until there was “fundamental understanding and agreement” on the issues of the goal in Afghanistan and the reason “for risking American lives.” Priebus made clear the military was ahead of itself discussing troop numbers before these questions were answered, and before it was clear how an increase in troops could prevent a terrorist attack.¹⁹⁶ Overall, a wide array of civilians participated in the often contentious 2017 debate, likely a result of the president openly searching for diverse options other than the military’s initial proposal.

Military Officers in Civilian Positions

The 2017 decision point had several military officers in “civilian” positions, with retired four star general James Mattis as Defense Secretary, active duty three star general H.R. McMaster as National Security Advisor, retired three star general Keith Kellogg as NSC Chief of Staff, and former Army captain Mike Pompeo as CIA Director (as well as retired four star general John Kelly initially as DHS Secretary and Chief of Staff from July 31, however, sources do not mention his participation in the Afghanistan discussion). Trump’s focus on military appointees, referring to them as “my generals,” caused significant concern at the beginning of the administration, particularly that it would overly militarize foreign policy and prioritize military options over civilian.¹⁹⁷ Another concern would be that their military background would make them too deferential or “go easy on the Pentagon.”¹⁹⁸ However, this analysis shows that the process focused more on civilian considerations and less on applying military tools, creating a more sustainable proposal than in 2009.

As an active duty officer in a “civilian” position, yet a key proponent of the military’s plan, McMaster played a unique role in the 2017 decision-making process. Given that he was still a member of the military, yet actively considering political considerations and engaging in the back and forth, McMaster represents a Janowitzian type. From the outset, McMaster knew

he would clash with the president on Afghanistan and so had to develop a plan that recognized Trump's longstanding stance that the United States should withdraw all forces from Afghanistan. McMaster's ultimate plan, while still advocating a (small) troop increase, recognized the political difficulties of Afghanistan first and foremost, and admitted that the concept of winning was "unattainable," representing a clear difference from the military's 2009 plan.

Mattis appears to have, at the very least, not overly favored the military or fixated on operational/tactical concerns, and at times was a strong advocate for political thinking. As noted above, he disagreed with the proposed plan in July, pushing for a better proposal. In an instance not related to Afghanistan but with similar considerations, Mattis was concerned that the president wanted a counter-ISIS plan before it had developed a Middle East policy, which was putting operations before strategy.¹⁹⁹ Of interest, as CENTCOM commander under Obama, Mattis had taken a more Huntingtonian perspective regarding a disagreement with civilians over Iran: "I get paid to give my best military advice... They make the policy decisions. I'm not going to change what I think to placate them."²⁰⁰ In another example of balancing CMR, Mattis had been supportive of coordinating with the CIA for the potential "middle solution," ceding ground from the military's autonomy in planning.²⁰¹ In a Janowitzian understanding of the limits of the use of force, Mattis was opposed to any public statements saying the United States could "win" in Afghanistan.²⁰²

Two other former military officers, NSC Chief of Staff Kellogg and CIA Director Pompeo, actively participated in the discussion, yet both disagreed with the military's plan, as Kellogg advocated for the complete withdrawal of forces and Pompeo searched for a "middle solution."²⁰³ Overall, despite the volume of military officers involved in the 2017 decision point,

it did not overly militarize the policy formulation, with former officers in every different camp in the debate.

Analysis of CMR in the 2017 Decision Point

The sources show that the 2017 discussion included significant diversity of opinion, at times with contentious relations between principal actors. While the process was unconventional and often confrontational, it did display Janowitzian tendencies, in that there was no sense of military autonomy over planning, and it forced the military to adjust from its preferred plans. There was a wide diversity of opinion during the discussions, countering McMaster's proposal of 4,000 troops: NSC Chief of Staff Keith Kellogg and Attorney General Sessions pushed for withdrawing from Afghanistan and CIA Director Pompeo proposed increased CIA paramilitary operations instead of a troop increase.²⁰⁴ Juxtaposed to the Obama decision point, civilians in this process insisted on defining goals in Afghanistan before any discussion about military plans and troop increases would be considered.

The 2017 decision point was also more Janowitzian from the military side, as the proponents of the military's plan were more aware of political considerations. These considerations included Trump's campaign promises and the inherent difficulties of the Afghan political situation, and not solely focused on security issues and troop numbers.²⁰⁵ The principals, including McMaster, Mattis, Tillerson, and Pompeo, also recognized that Afghanistan was not conventionally "winnable" and factored that into their recommendations. As Janowitz proscribes, this plan focused on the minimum use of force and a viable way forward, rather than achieving some sense of "victory." The more contentious nature of the discussion resulted in a more sustainable, defensible policy prescription than the 2009 decision point (albeit one that

was reversed later in the Trump administration, leading to the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and the Taliban's victory in 2021).

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

These three decision points share one constant factor: a president, confronted with the problem of war in Afghanistan for the first time in their administration, searches for options on how to achieve strategic aims. The variables for each have been how the civilian principals and military leadership have interacted in order to present options to the president and how the military has taken into consideration political factors, with differing results. From these three examples, one can draw several conclusions.

1. *It is the responsibility of both civilian and military leadership to engage in a vigorous debate over options for the use of force, thus creating balanced CMR.* Many scholars have placed the responsibility for balanced CMR on civilian leadership. To an extent, this emphasis is correct. It is imperative that civilians take the lead in developing strategic aims and push the military to develop options that can meet those aims within acceptable political parameters. Much of this balance depends on who is driving the debate. In 2001, it was the civilian secretaries starting at the strategic question of war aims; in 2009, it was the military focused on the troop numbers required for counterinsurgency; in 2017, it was an active duty military officer as the NSA searching for a politically sustainable, “good enough” solution. One can also see the difference between defense secretaries pushing back against uniformed leadership in 2001 and 2017, resulting in new military options being developed, and one deferring to and defending his uniformed subordinates in 2009, resulting in a lack of new options. However, it is also important for the military to be transparent and present differences in opinion. For instance, in 2009 CJCS Mullen kept tight control of alternative options generated

by his subordinates, failing to give Obama the options for which he was searching. The military also bears a responsibility to be open to debate, and not fall back on the imagined autonomy of “best military advice.” To assist this effort, the study of CMR theory should expand its focus (discussed further in recommendation #3 below).

2. *The outcome of an imbalance in CMR, in which civilian leadership defers to the “best military advice” without engaging in vigorous debate and the military is not transparent on political issues, can lead to operational success but strategic failure.* As presidents focus on their strategic goals and seek options to achieve them, the dominance of the military in the interagency process can put the proverbial “cart before the horse,” as operational plans override political considerations. In other words, by deferring to the military and failing to provide alternative options, civilians limit the possibilities for strategic success. Comparing the Bush decision point, where there was no “off the shelf” military plan and the military had to adapt to civilian pushback, and the Obama decision point, where the military had developed an in-depth solution based on recent counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, reveals that the military’s operational plans can drive the strategic level discussion. The development of an operational/tactical solution before the strategic problem is framed can direct the planning process to the preferred operational solution with insufficient consideration of the strategic goals. In particular, the Army’s increased focus on counter-insurgency precluded other options and led to a strategic mismatch between means and ends.²⁰⁶ The military’s risk aversion, often represented in comprehensive “off the shelf” plans, can also limit the creative process, what Rumsfeld called the “process of discovery” in 2001. This problem, with both sides talking past each other as the search for options continues, can result in missed opportunities.

3. When discussing the decision-making process for the use of force, CMR studies should emphasize Janowitz's *The Professional Soldier* as a foundational text alongside Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* in order to provide the full spectrum of "ideal" CMR and encourage more inclusive policy debates. While Huntington's prescriptions on military professionalism are the *sine qua non* of CMR in a democratic state, it is critical to include Janowitz's view that the military should take into account political considerations and engage in a vigorous debate with civilians during decision-making for the use of force. As most military officers study CMR at several stages in their careers, the current reliance on Huntington can give a one-sided view of how policy debates should occur.²⁰⁷ In particular, Janowitz shows how officers must have a greater education in the political and social consequences of military action, and thus will better appreciate the limits of the use of force when proposing options to senior civilian leadership. For example in 2009, a more Janowitzian military could have given more attention to the challenges in governance and corruption, instead of brushing that aside to focus solely on the security situation. As a case in point, General McChrystal describes how his military education had been deficient by focusing only on Huntington, when serving at the highest levels requires a more political perspective.²⁰⁸ This broadening of the theoretical framework of CMR will also alleviate what Feaver and Kohn describe as the military's perception of "the wrong civilian" and its defensiveness when plans are criticized by those other than the president or secretary of defense.²⁰⁹ On the civilian side, this expansion will increase understanding that advice from uniformed leaders should not be sacrosanct and thus encourage healthy debate. For example, statements such as Obama's and Gates's on the role of the secretary of defense reflect a one-sided view of CMR, in that the role of DoD civilian leadership is to defer to, and protect, the military. This adherence to a sense of loyalty can lead to

groupthink, sacrificing critical thinking on national policy for the sake of group harmony.²¹⁰

Broadening the foundations of CMR theory on decision-making for the use of force can discourage the belief that civilians should leave military planning solely to the military and increase the occurrence of what scholars call “healthy friction” between civilian and military.²¹¹ However, this emphasis should still include the warning that, while the military should think about political considerations, it is critical for uniformed leadership to not become involved in domestic politics. The generals’ public speeches and comments to the press during the 2009 review, for instance, were a troubling sign of the military becoming involved in a public debate, outside the constitutionally-approved venue of congressional hearings.

4. *Military officers in “civilian” positions can be effective at balancing CMR.* The phenomenon of military officers serving in “civilian” positions in these Afghanistan examples leads to a conclusion somewhat contrary to the conventional wisdom. Many CMR scholars raise concerns that the selection of civilian principals with prior military experience may increase the militarization of foreign policy, as they are more familiar with the military instruments of power and therefore more likely to overemphasize the use of force. Yet in these situations, military “civilians” were often the most critical of the military, focused on the strategic picture, and willing to create vigorous debate. In each decision point, with presidents looking for alternatives to the initial proposal, military officers in “civilian” positions provided critical thinking and pushed for new options. Officers’ knowledge of military matters gave them increased leverage to push back, creating a more balanced dynamic between civilian and military leaders. These examples reinforce Peter Feaver and Christopher Gelpi’s conclusion that civilian leaders without military experience tend to be more supportive of military intervention, with statistics showing specifically that a nonveteran serving as Secretary of State is historically more bellicose than a

veteran.²¹² And as Cohen illustrates, successful civilian leaders often have a “military interpreter:” a flag officer without a traditional military command, whose only constituency is the president, for whom the general serves as an essential independent liaison.²¹³ In these Afghanistan examples, flag officers were among the most persistent advocates looking for more options in 2009, against the military’s wishes, and Powell and Mattis were key principals bringing diversity of opinion to the 2001 and 2017 debates. However, it is important to note the many potential negative consequences of an increase of military officers in “civilian” leadership positions, to include the politicization of the active duty military, an increase in the divide between those who have served and those who have not, and a further deferral of responsibility by civilians without military experience (yet with other valuable perspectives worthy of inclusion). As we see this phenomenon continue with President Biden’s choice of Lloyd Austin for Secretary of Defense, requiring yet another Senate approval vote, policy makers should be conscious of the positive implications of military officers occupying “civilian” positions alongside the potential pitfalls.

5. *The State Department can, and usually should, act as the counterbalance to the military when considering strategic options.* While less well-resourced and staffed than the military, the State Department is best positioned to provide critical thinking to decision-making for the use of force.²¹⁴ As the primary government agency responsible for foreign policy, it is often well placed to ensure the military’s recommendations are put into the political, strategic context. Per Janowitz’s recommendation above, balanced CMR requires aggressive civilian leadership, who are prepared to limit the military to “feasible and attainable objectives,” which is entirely in the purview of State Department’s expertise. At the very least, the president deserves a variety of perspectives when searching for options, rather than the dubious benefits of harmony

within the NSC and cabinet.²¹⁵ As the 2009 example demonstrates, when the Secretary of State agrees to support the military's recommendation, despite the concerns of subordinates, it reduces the president's options and limits strategic thinking.

This short survey of Afghanistan decision points raises several questions for future consideration by CMR scholars. One question is whether an imbalance in CMR during strategic level decision-making is a contributing factor to the United States' tendency in the 20th and 21st centuries to "win" at the tactical and operational level, yet fail to secure success at the strategic level.²¹⁶ A second question stems from the oft-cited comparison between the post-9/11 wars and the 1991 Gulf War. As the latter is often viewed as a "success" compared to the former, how did CMR in that war fit into the Huntington-Janowitz spectrum, particularly given the role of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine? Given a clear disagreement in several of the memoirs of the post-9/11 leadership (especially that of Powell and Rumsfeld), what lessons should CMR scholars derive from the Gulf War as compared to Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003?

Lastly the legacy of Vietnam for modern CMR is worthy of consideration, particularly Bush's explicit recognition that he is a member of the "Vietnam generation" and openly discussing the lessons of that war, and various principals explicitly citing the Vietnam example, whereas Obama did not want to hear references to Vietnam during Afghanistan discussions and recognized he had less of a connection to that war.²¹⁷ As other CMR studies have shown, the planning for Vietnam was plagued by the same issues of a lack of transparency by the military, a focus on means rather than ends, and the inadequate presentation of political considerations for strategic objectives.²¹⁸ The shadow of Vietnam, in particular the contradictory accusations of political micromanagement of the war versus political failure to define the goals of the war, casts shade over all American CMR.

Conclusion

Studies of American policy failure have reached the conclusion that groupthink, an insufficient search for alternatives, and a lack of critical thinking have hindered the nation's ability to achieve strategic objectives in the world.²¹⁹ More balanced CMR, with a clearer understanding of what civilians need to be part of the conversation and how that dialogue should play out, can help address these shortcomings. Ultimately, the onus of responsibility for balanced CMR is on the civilians. The U.S. military is well resourced, prepared, and planning for every contingency. Its inherent risk aversion and "can do" attitude will continue to generate proposals that respond to the security situation in the most comprehensive manner. It is on the civilians – within DoD, at State and the CIA, and in the White House – to recognize this facet of military culture and respond accordingly, in order to provide the president the fullest picture of the problem to be solved and the possible solutions at hand. This review of Afghanistan shows that having former military in those "civilian" positions can help rectify this imbalance in CMR, as officers are able to push back on the active duty military given their experience, education, and secure reputation (i.e. not having to defend against any charges of disrespecting or not understanding the military, which are frequently leveled at civilians without military experience).

No matter what the future holds, at some point the United States will again be confronted with decisions on how and why to use force to accomplish strategic goals. Both military and civilian leadership needs a clearer picture of how CMR should ideally function, and the benefits and drawbacks of different models of CMR, in order to ensure our nation effectively uses its military to achieve the nation's mission.

End Notes

¹ Samuel Huntington, *Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Belknap Press, 1957), 71.

² Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 72-73. Huntington however does recognize that military leaders “inevitably operate in this intermingled world of strategy and policy” and therefore should be responsive to political considerations and the ultimate decisions of civilians.

³ Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 72.

⁴ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), 275-276.

⁵ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 303-304.

⁶ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 309-311.

⁷ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 331..

⁸ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 342-343.

⁹ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 418.

¹⁰ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 426-429.

¹¹ Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 2.

¹² Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, lvii.

¹³ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 435.

¹⁴ Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 420-421.

¹⁵ Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 49-51.

¹⁶ Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, “Civil-Military Relations in the United States: What Senior Leaders Need to Know (and Usually Don’t),” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2021, 2-3.

¹⁷ Marybeth Ulrich, “Civil Military Relations Norms and Democracy” in *Reconsidering American Civil Military Relations: The Military, Society, Politics and Modern War*, ed. Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, Daniel Mauer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 51, 53.

¹⁸ Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 4-8.

¹⁹ Suzanne C. Nielsen and Hugh Liebert, “The Continuing Relevance of Morris Janowitz’s The Professional Soldier for the Education of Officers,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol 47(4), 2021, 733-734.

²⁰ Janine A. Davidson, Emerson Brooking, and Benjamin Fernandes. *Mending the Broken Dialogue: Civil-Military Relations and Presidential Decision-Making* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, December 2016), 41.

²¹ Feaver and Kohn, “Civil-Military Relations in the United States: What Senior Leaders Need to Know (and Usually Don’t),” 6.

²² Mara E Karlin, “Civilian Oversight Inside the Pentagon: Who Does It and How?” in *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations: The Military, Society, Politics, and Modern War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 92.

²³ Kori Schake, “The National Security Process,” *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. National Security* Edited by Derek S. Reveron, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and John A. Cloud, (July 2018), 7.

²⁴ Risa Brooks, Jim Golby, and Heidi Urben, “Crisis of Command: America’s Broken Civil-Military Relationship Imperils National Security,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2021.

²⁵ Robert Gates, “The Overmilitarization of American Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020.

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- ²⁶ Heidi Urben and Jim Golby, “A Matter of Trust,” in *Reconsidering American Civil Military Relations: The Military, Society, Politics and Modern War*, ed. Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, Daniel Mauer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 140-143.
- ²⁷ Ulrich, “Civil Military Relations Norms and Democracy,” 52.
- ²⁸ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 353-361.
- ²⁹ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 89.
- ³⁰ James Joyner, “Trump’s Generals: A Natural Experiment in Civil-Military Relations.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 15, 2021, 121-122.
- ³¹ Peter White, “Militarized Ministries of Defense? Placing the Military Experience of Secretaries of Defense in a Comparative Context,” In: *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations*, edited by: Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, and Daniel Maurer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 116-117, 124-125.
- ³² George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 191; Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 31.
- ³³ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 578-579.
- ³⁴ Bush, *Decision Points*, 188-191; Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 358-359; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 79-80.
- ³⁵ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 128-129.
- ³⁶ To note, CJCS Shelton had embraced McMaster’s 2001 book *Dereliction of Duty*, a critique of the JCS’s failure to express disagreements and provide honest assessments during Vietnam. Shelton even ordered all his service chiefs and commanders to read it and heed its lessons. Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 168-169.
- ³⁷ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 61.
- ³⁸ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 152.
- ³⁹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 179-180.
- ⁴⁰ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 358-359, 368-371.
- ⁴¹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 88.
- ⁴² Woodward, *Bush at War*, 99.
- ⁴³ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 353; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 25, 33.
- ⁴⁴ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 368-371, 372-374.
- ⁴⁵ Peter Baker, *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House* (New York: Doubleday, 2013), 144-145. The question of the Taliban and the future of Afghan governance loomed large throughout the debates. While initially the ultimatum gave the Taliban the option to remain in control, by October 3 the principals were discussing the future of Kabul once military operations commenced. This principals’ meeting featured Powell pushing the question of the future government, Tenet was successful in pushing for regime change, and the entire group realized the tasks of reconstruction and nation-building would be a key component of the upcoming operation. Woodward, *Bush at War*, 191-193.
- ⁴⁶ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 376; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 178-182. Of note, State Department coordinated closely with DoD on rallying and coordinating coalition partners. Bush, *Decision Points*, 187-188; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 374.
- ⁴⁷ Bush, *Decision Points*, 189; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 49, 83-85.
- ⁴⁸ Bush, *Decision Points*, page 186; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 50-51.
- ⁴⁹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 114, 121-124, 127-128.

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- ⁵⁰ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 134-135.
- ⁵¹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 150-152.
- ⁵² Woodward, *Bush at War*, 201-202.
- ⁵³ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 375.
- ⁵⁴ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 38-41.
- ⁵⁵ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 30.
- ⁵⁶ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 175-176.
- ⁵⁷ Bush, *Decision Points*, 194-195.
- ⁵⁸ Peter W. Rodman, *Presidential Command: Power, Leadership, and the Making of Foreign Policy from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 245-247.
- ⁵⁹ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 158-159; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 44.
- ⁶⁰ Bush, *Decision Points*, 192; Woodward, *Bush at War*, 144-145.
- ⁶¹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 72-73.
- ⁶² Woodward, *Bush at War*, 83-84.
- ⁶³ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 130-131.
- ⁶⁴ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 95. This criticism was not just leveled at the military. On September 23, he chastised his White House staff for poorly messaging an Executive Order freezing terrorist assets, calling it the “first strike. It’s not with guys in uniform. It’s guys in pinstripes. This will hone in on the fact that this is a completely different kind of war.” Woodward, *Bush at War*, 120.
- ⁶⁵ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 150-151.
- ⁶⁶ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 175.
- ⁶⁷ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 178-182.
- ⁶⁸ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 160.
- ⁶⁹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 178-182.
- ⁷⁰ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 322-323.
- ⁷¹ Dan Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict: U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 195.
- ⁷² Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 174-175, 311.
- ⁷³ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 360.
- ⁷⁴ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 352.
- ⁷⁵ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” Speech. United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, December 1, 2009; Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 307.
- ⁷⁶ Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 96.
- ⁷⁷ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 305-307; Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 176-178.
- ⁷⁸ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 192.
- ⁷⁹ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 216-218.
- ⁸⁰ Woodward, *Obama’s War*, 268-279. Even after Obama gave his decision for 30,000 troops, the military pushed back, asking for how many enablers it could add to the total, when they could transition, and questioning whether they could bring all the troops in by the summer of 2010 (a proposition that originated with the military). At a November 27 meeting, Obama clarified exactly what he was asking of the military, making sure to get into the details and understand the implications of the decision, with many participants mindful of the mistakes of Vietnam.

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- ⁸¹ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 312; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 235-236. The other chiefs also were willing to provide more options when given the chance. For instance, at the October 30 meeting, the Marine and Army Chiefs provided some nuance, showing some disagreement with Mullen and McChrystal's plan. Woodward, *Obama's War*, 257-260
- ⁸² Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 242-243.
- ⁸³ Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task* (New York: Penguin), 2013, 357.
- ⁸⁴ McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 351.
- ⁸⁵ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 317-318.
- ⁸⁶ Barack Obama, *Promised Land*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2020, 432-433.
- ⁸⁷ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 157-159.
- ⁸⁸ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 172-173.
- ⁸⁹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 185-186.
- ⁹⁰ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 193-195.
- ⁹¹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 268-269.
- ⁹² Ben Rhodes, *The World As It Is* (New York: Random House, 2018), 74. To note, Gates also complains of leaks from the White House against the military, however this concern does not appear in other accounts (Gates, *Duty*, 370).
- ⁹³ Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Random House, 2014), 359. Obama also discusses this change in mindset: "Gates, who'd previously expressed concern over the wisdom of expanding our military footprint in a country famously resistant to foreign occupation was more circumspect but told me he'd been persuaded by McChrystal that a smaller U.S. force wouldn't work."
- ⁹⁴ Also in the summer of 2009, McChrystal was already issuing directives to his forces in Afghanistan on conducting counterinsurgency, before the president had decided whether to pursue counterinsurgency as part of his Afghanistan strategy. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 324-327.
- ⁹⁵ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 299.
- ⁹⁶ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 188-189.
- ⁹⁷ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 250-253.
- ⁹⁸ Gates, *Duty*, 371.
- ⁹⁹ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 300.
- ¹⁰⁰ Obama Page 318
- ¹⁰¹ Gates's prioritization of harmony in the national security process may stem from experiences in the Reagan and George W. Bush administrations. This desire for harmony extended into his decision not to highlight inadequacies of the State Department in order to maintain good relations with Clinton. Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle Over American Power* (New York: Random House, 2016), 72-73.
- ¹⁰² Gates, *Duty*, 384. Of note, one instance of balanced CMR in 2009 was the relief of General David McKiernan, passing command of Afghanistan to McChrystal. Gates saw this decision as returning to a Second World War practice and repudiation of Vietnam, which he hoped "will contribute to reestablishing accountability for senior officers for wartime performance." Gates, *Duty*, 346.
- ¹⁰³ Gates, *Duty*, 373; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 289-290, 304.
- ¹⁰⁴ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 310.
- ¹⁰⁵ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 96-97.
- ¹⁰⁶ Obama, *A Promised Land*, 318.
- ¹⁰⁷ Rhodes, *The World As It Is*, 65

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- ¹⁰⁸ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 191.
- ¹⁰⁹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 322-323.
- ¹¹⁰ Gates, *Duty*, 375-376; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 250-254.
- ¹¹¹ *The Diplomat*, directed by David Holbrooke (New York, NY: HBO, 2015), 1:15; Woodward, *Obama's War*, 250.
- ¹¹² "I am supporting direct talks to Taliban... Petraeus is strongly opposing all this, saying he only wants to do it when the time is right...next year, with military success. Frankly, I just don't believe him." *The Diplomat*, 1:19.
- ¹¹³ *The Diplomat*, 1:21.
- ¹¹⁴ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 225-227.
- ¹¹⁵ *The Diplomat*, 1:33.
- ¹¹⁶ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 170.
- ¹¹⁷ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 250.
- ¹¹⁸ Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 138-141, 147. Of note, Holbrooke also "echoed (Clinton's) sentiment" during the final November 23 NSC meeting in which Clinton supported the 40,000 troop increase. However, Holbrooke had made clear he would support whatever decision Clinton made, despite his concerns.
- ¹¹⁹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 217-221.
- ¹²⁰ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 313-315; McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 355.
- ¹²¹ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 271-272.
- ¹²² Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 296-298.
- ¹²³ Gates, *Duty*, 370. Gates also highlighted the mistrust between Eikenberry and McChrystal as contributing to this shortfall.
- ¹²⁴ McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir*, 305.
- ¹²⁵ Landler, *Alter Egos*, 67-71.
- ¹²⁶ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 224-228.
- ¹²⁷ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 247. For better or worse, Obama never asked for the CIA director's advice on Afghanistan.
- ¹²⁸ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 244-245.
- ¹²⁹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 265.
- ¹³⁰ Obama, *A Promised Land*, 316.
- ¹³¹ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 169.
- ¹³² Rhodes, *The World As It Is*, 72-73.
- ¹³³ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 79-80.
- ¹³⁴ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 186-188.
- ¹³⁵ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 304.
- ¹³⁶ Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 138; Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 297-298; Obama, *A Promised Land*, 318.
- ¹³⁷ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 160.
- ¹³⁸ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 80-81.
- ¹³⁹ Obama, *A Promised Land*, 432-433.
- ¹⁴⁰ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 188-190.
- ¹⁴¹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 214-221.
- ¹⁴² Woodward, *Obama's War*, 262-264.
- ¹⁴³ Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 138.

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- ¹⁴⁴ Obama, *A Promised Land*, Page 319.
- ¹⁴⁵ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 123-7, 132-134.
- ¹⁴⁶ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 138, 156.
- ¹⁴⁷ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 207.
- ¹⁴⁸ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 196-197.
- ¹⁴⁹ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 212-213.
- ¹⁵⁰ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 249.
- ¹⁵¹ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 252-254.
- ¹⁵² Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 95-96.
- ¹⁵³ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 114.
- ¹⁵⁴ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 234-235.
- ¹⁵⁵ Landler, *Alter Egos*, 70.
- ¹⁵⁶ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 320-323.
- ¹⁵⁷ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 339.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ben Rhodes, *The World As It Is*, 66.
- ¹⁵⁹ Gates, *Duty*, 385; Woodward, *Obama's War*, 202-204.
- ¹⁶⁰ Obama, *A Promised Land*, 432-433; Rhodes, *The World As It Is*, 77; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 292.
- ¹⁶¹ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 311-313.
- ¹⁶² Landler, *Alter Egos*, 68.
- ¹⁶³ Rhodes, *The World As It Is*, 77-79.
- ¹⁶⁴ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 122.
- ¹⁶⁵ Gates, *Duty*, 383.
- ¹⁶⁶ Woodward, *Obama's War*, 173-174.
- ¹⁶⁷ McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 352-353; Woodward, *Obama's War*, 213.
- ¹⁶⁸ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 330-333.
- ¹⁶⁹ H.R. McMaster, *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), 193.
- ¹⁷⁰ Susan Glasser, "The Trump's White House War Within," *Politico Magazine*, July 24, 2017; McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 212-213.
- ¹⁷¹ Bob Woodward, *Fear* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 115-119.
- ¹⁷² Michael Wolff, *Fire and Fury* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018), 265-266.
- ¹⁷³ Woodward, *Fear*, 115-119.
- ¹⁷⁴ Woodward, *Fear*, 258-259.
- ¹⁷⁵ Joyner, "Trump's Generals: A Natural Experiment in Civil-Military Relations," 122-126.
- ¹⁷⁶ Susan Glasser, "The Trump's White House War Within," *Politico Magazine*, July 24, 2017.
- ¹⁷⁷ Woodward, *Fear*, 222.
- ¹⁷⁸ Woodward, *Fear*, 117-118.
- ¹⁷⁹ Woodward, *Fear*, 228-229.
- ¹⁸⁰ Susan Glasser, "The Trump's White House War Within," Missy Ryan and Greg Jaffe, "Growing Military Clout Could Shift Foreign Policy," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2017.
- ¹⁸¹ Wolff, *Fire and Fury*, 267; Woodward, *Fear*, 125. After this meeting, Tillerson considered resigning due to the president's disrespect of the military and transactional view of U.S. military power. Woodward, *Fear*, 224-228.
- ¹⁸² Woodward, *Fear*, 260.

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- ¹⁸³ Woodward, *Fear*, 127.
- ¹⁸⁴ Woodward, *Fear*, 123.
- ¹⁸⁵ Wolff, *Fire and Fury*, 267; Woodward, *Fear*, 255-258.
- ¹⁸⁶ Woodward, *Fear*, 115.
- ¹⁸⁷ Wolff, *Fire and Fury*, 267-268; Woodward, *Fear*, 123-127, 229-230.
- ¹⁸⁸ Woodward, *Fear*, 231.
- ¹⁸⁹ Wolff, *Fire and Fury*, 263-266.
- ¹⁹⁰ Woodward, *Fear*, 222.
- ¹⁹¹ Susan Glasser, "The Trump's White House War Within," *Politico Magazine*, July 24, 2017.
- ¹⁹² Donald J. Trump, "Address to the Nation on Afghanistan Policy." Speech. Fort Myer, Arlington, VA, August 21, 2017; McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 214.
- ¹⁹³ Woodward, *Fear*, 256-260.
- ¹⁹⁴ Wolff, *Fire and Fury*, 263-264.
- ¹⁹⁵ Wolff, *Fire and Fury*, 265-266. While the NSC process worked "at times," there was often unclear goals and frequent delays due to the lack of plans "assigning responsibility and accountability." Woodward, *Fear*, 228-229.
- ¹⁹⁶ Woodward, *Fear*, 119-120.
- ¹⁹⁷ Joyner, "Trump's Generals: A Natural Experiment in Civil-Military Relations," 121-126; Kohn and Feaver, 13.
- ¹⁹⁸ Missy Ryan and Greg Jaffe, "Growing Military Clout Could Shift Foreign Policy," Washington Post, May 29, 2017.
- ¹⁹⁹ Woodward, *Fear*, 83.
- ²⁰⁰ Woodward, *Fear*, 53.
- ²⁰¹ Woodward, *Fear*, 123.
- ²⁰² Woodward, *Fear*, 313.
- ²⁰³ It is worth noting that Rumsfeld and Gates also had experience as junior military officers, a small group compared to the many flag officers who make up the bulk of this case study. Rumsfeld and Gates served two to three years on active duty, in the 1950s and 1960s respectively.
- ²⁰⁴ Woodward, *Fear*, 255.
- ²⁰⁵ Woodward, *Fear*, 116. "Under Presidents Bush and Obama, debates and discussions of troop numbers had dominated internal NSC and public discussion and generated expectations of progress or resolution. Media coverage focused on the troop number and timetable story lines. The number of U.S. troops engaged in the war had become a proxy for progress... Internally the experts knew it was futile."
- ²⁰⁶ Gian P. Gentile, "A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army," *Parameters* 39, no. 3 (2009), 12, 15.
- ²⁰⁷ Nielsen and Liebert, "The Continuing Relevance of Morris Janowitz's The Professional Soldier for the Education of Officers," 744.
- ²⁰⁸ McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 351. Of note, many of the counterinsurgency proponents in the military, such as Petraeus, were connected to West Point's Social Science department ("Sosh") which was founded in the Janowitzian view that post-war officers needed more knowledge of political and economic matters. However, while close to Petraeus and supporting a counter-insurgency approach, McChrystal was not considered a member of this group of proponents. Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 5-9, 303.

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- ²⁰⁹ Feaver and Kohn, “Civil-Military Relations in the United States: What Senior Leaders Need to Know (and Usually Don’t),” 4.
- ²¹⁰ Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 11-13.
- ²¹¹ Davidson, Brooking, and Fernandes. *Mending the Broken Dialogue*, 41, 50.
- ²¹² Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 184, 206-207.
- ²¹³ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 214-215.
- ²¹⁴ It is worth recalling that the key voice against the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine, which sought to prescribe when and how civilian leaders could resort to the use of force, was Secretary of State George Shultz, himself a veteran of World War Two. Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 188.
- ²¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that a lack of coordination within the interagency once the policy has been decided can be debilitating to the implementation of war plans. Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict*, 257-258.
- ²¹⁶ Nielsen and Liebert, “The Continuing Relevance of Morris Janowitz’s The Professional Soldier for the Education of Officers,” 743-744; Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 86.
- ²¹⁷ *The Diplomat*, 1:13; McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 351, 355-356; Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 129-130, 377.
- ²¹⁸ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 175-184; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 330-333.
- ²¹⁹ Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, 174-176.

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