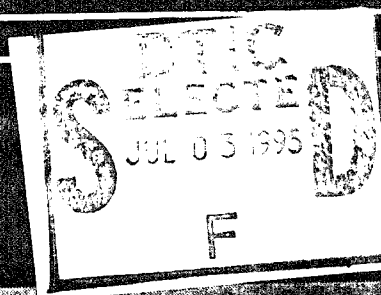




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AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS:

New Issues - Enduring Problems

Douglas V. Johnson II
Steven Metz

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**AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS:
NEW ISSUES, ENDURING PROBLEMS**

**Douglas V. Johnson II
and
Steven Metz**

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Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050. Comments also may be conveyed directly to the authors. Dr. Metz can be contacted at (717) 245-3822, DSN 242-3822, FAX (717) 245-3820, or at Internet address metzs@carlisle-emh2.army.mil. Dr. Johnson can be contacted at (717) 245-4057, DSN 242-4057, FAX (717) 245-3820, or at Internet address johnsond@carlisle-emh2.army.mil.

FOREWORD

The authors were invited to prepare a paper for a conference on Civil-Military Relations in the fall of 1994. That paper was translated into an article for the winter 1995 edition of *The Washington Quarterly*, under the title "Civil-Military Relations in the United States: The State of the Debate." Although the intensity of interest in this subject has fallen from the front pages of the newspapers, the authors have here suggested that the debate needs to continue and that it should start with identification of the right questions. The basic issues are inherent in the structure and beliefs of American political society, but the questions may be changing as the nature of that society and the manner in which it talks to itself and what it sees its responsibilities to be are also changing.

While the authors do not see a current crisis in civil-military relations, they attempt to explain many of the basic features of that relationship, providing some of its history along the way. They have pointed out several conditions which put civil-military relations under particular strain and suggest that the Secretary of Defense is, by virtue of several institutional peculiarities, at the nexus of the relationship. The authors' intent is that this study lead to sustained debate within the military and civilian policymaking communities.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this monograph to foster debate on this important subject.


WILLIAM W. ALLEN
Colonel, U.S. Army
Acting Director
Strategic Studies Institute

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SUMMARY

The debate over proper civil-military relations began while America was still a collection of British colonies. The relationship was the subject of intense and acrimonious debate during the framing of the Constitution and periodically the debate reemerges. The authors believe the relationship exists on two levels. The first is focused on specific issues and key individuals and is transitory in nature. The second level concerns the enduring questions with essential values. At the latter level individuals merely represent the issues. Two questions are addressed in this study: What is the appropriate level of involvement of the military in national security policymaking? Additionally, within that context, with what or whom does an officer's ultimate loyalty lie?

Most Americans agree that the objective is a competent, professional military able to contribute to national security policymaking but not to dominate it, but there is no consensus on the changes that the evolution of the global security environment will bring, or on the risks of too much military involvement in policymaking.

The issues that will shape the future such as the changing nature of armed conflict and alterations in U.S. national security strategy are clear, but their precise impact on civil-military relations is not. There is no crisis in American civil-military relations now, but what will happen in a decade or so when the psychological legacy of the Cold War fully fades and fundamental assumptions are again open to debate remains to be seen.

AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: NEW ISSUES, ENDURING PROBLEMS

Introduction.

For Americans, few tasks are more vexing than establishing the appropriate role of the military in the shaping of national policy. From the beginning of the Republic, this process has assumed transcendental importance, reflecting fundamental debates about the proper distribution of power in a democratic system and following deep fissures in the polity. Because armed forces are simultaneously seen as a bulwark of freedom and potential threat to it, as protector of national values and possible challenger to them, civil-military relations have been characterized by a series of precarious compromises, each with a limited lifespan. Today, the end of the Cold War is forcing another painful reassessment of the appropriate role of the military in national policymaking. This is a crucial process for the military: Decisions made now will affect its policymaking role well into the 21st century.

Major adjustments in civil-military relations are never easy. The heart of the problem is an enduring tension: To succeed at warfighting, the military must be *distinct* in values, attitudes, procedures, and organization but must, at the same time, *represent* American society.¹ "America's armed forces," Colin Powell writes, "are as much a part of the fabric of U.S. values—freedom, democracy, human dignity, and the rule of law—as any other institutional, cultural or religious thread."² The result of this tension is a mixed, even contradictory, attitude toward military involvement in policymaking. To the extent the military is different than the rest of society, there is a rationale for limiting its involvement in framing policy or even excluding it altogether. But to the extent the military reflects and represents society, it should be fully integrated into policymaking. The only solution is a fragile balance, shifting in response to changes in the strategic environment.

Tensions, contradictions, and interludes of crisis and readjustment make American civil-military relations a tumultuous affair. In daily manifestations of this, officers involved in policymaking often become frustrated when dealing with civilian officials. The U.S. military, as Eliot Cohen points out, has a "persistent preference for excessively neat patterns of civilian-military relations."³ Reality seldom obliges. The tendency is to blame personality, to castigate the inability or unwillingness of civilian officials to fully grasp the needs and appropriate uses of the military. Such explanations are myopic. In reality, the basic structure of American civil-military relations is imbued with unsolvable problems, perplexing dilemmas, and deliberate inefficiencies, all reflecting the deeper intricacies of the American political system. The military's frustration is both intentional and necessary. Knowing this—and understanding its historic background—can help officers play a constructive role in the ongoing transformation to a post-Cold War national security policymaking process.

First Principle: Civilian Control.

The relationship of the uniformed military and civilian policymakers in the United States is complex and fluid, but is based on a single principle: civilian control. All other facets of the relationship reflect this or are designed to assure it. Like most first principles, this one has become sacrosanct and is seldom scrutinized, but as civil-military relations are adapted to the late 20th century, it would be useful to reexamine the notion of civilian control. Why is it the foundation on which all else is built?

Support for civilian control initially emerged from the American interpretation of European history. Most of the Founding Fathers accepted the Radical Whig notion that standing armed forces invariably became a tool of tyranny.⁴ Liberty and a powerful military were considered antithetical; only citizen soldiers could provide national defense without threatening political freedom. Richard H. Kohn explains:

Few political principles were more widely known or more universally accepted in America during the 1780s than the danger of standing

armies in peacetime. Because of its arms, its isolation from society, its discipline, and its loyalty and obedience to its commander, an army could not necessarily be controlled by law or constitution. An army represented the ultimate in power, capable, even when it did not attempt a coup on its own, of becoming the instrument by which others could terrorize a population, seize power, or perpetuate tyranny.⁵

This posed a dilemma for the Founding Fathers. Facing threats in every direction, whether Indians, British, French, Spanish, pirates, or internal rebellion, the United States needed military strength. On the other hand, memories were fresh of repression at the hands of Redcoats and Hessians. Amid intense debate and calls to ban a standing army altogether, the framers of the Constitution crafted a compromise between military effectiveness and political control. They trusted *balance*, *the diffusion of power*, and *shared responsibility*—all basic elements of the new political system—to control the military. Congress, with more direct ties to the people, was charged with raising and equipping an army. Appropriations for the Army were limited to 2 years. The President commissioned and promoted officers, but required Senate approval. And the Constitution mandated state militias that were to be the firebreaks of last resort to the power of the standing army.

In terms of assuring civilian control, these techniques worked. Kohn writes, "The unbroken record of subordination and loyalty by the American armed forces under the Constitution of the United States, has been a blessing of the American political system, and the envy of nations the world over."⁶ By sustaining democracy and avoiding military intervention in politics—whether direct or indirect—for more than 200 years, the principle of civilian control has become an intrinsic part of American political tradition. While this alone may not justify its preservation, it cannot be discounted. There is inherent value in tradition as a means of sharing values and expectations. It is not necessary to constantly re-prove the utility of time-tested principles, but simply to show the absence of adverse effects.

Professional officers—a group whose emergence the framers of the Constitution did not anticipate—sometimes forget that most Americans see a dichotomy between the military mindset and that of the wider public. As Samuel P. Huntington, the preeminent scholar of American civil-military relations, argues, “Military officers are overall far more conservative in their attitudes than other major groups in American society.”⁷ More to the point, the belief is widespread that the greater the role of military professionals in policymaking, the greater the reliance on the military instrument of national power. “One of the basic beliefs of American liberalism,” writes Stephen E. Ambrose, “is that professional military men are right-wing, anxious to extend America’s overseas bases, quick to urge the use of force to settle problems, eager to increase the size of the armed forces, and above all powerful enough to enforce their views on the government.”⁸ Despite the lack of empirical verification, this notion has a long tradition.⁹ Tocqueville contended that “of all armies those which long for war most ardently are the democratic ones.”¹⁰ Charges that American foreign policy had become over-militarized were common during the Cold War, reaching such a crescendo during Vietnam that even career military officers subscribed.¹¹ One purpose of civilian control was thus “to ensure that defense policy and the agencies of defense are subordinated to other national traditions, values, customs, governmental policies, and economic and social institutions.”¹²

Some years ago Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, when asked to justify the existence of the United States Marines, concluded that the Corps existed because the American people wanted it to.¹³ This same logic holds for civilian control of the military. It might be possible to show that there is no fundamental normative difference between the military and civilians, or that civilian leaders do not always reflect public opinion better than military professionals. It might be possible to prove military involvement in policymaking does not necessarily lead to a greater reliance on the military element of national power. But so long as most Americans believe these things and so long as the beliefs of the American public shape national policy, then civilian control of the military remains a vital national interest.

Dilemmas and Problems.

While diffusion of power and shared responsibility have led to effective civilian control of the military, they have also contributed to persistent dilemmas and problems. These cause much of the daily tension and frustration felt by officers in the policymaking world. One problem, for instance, is that the specific functions of the military and civilians in the policymaking process change over time. Civil-military relations tend to be placid when both sides understand and accept the distribution of responsibility for specific issues and functions. Three things can upset this: a perception by one side that the other is unable or unwilling to fulfill its responsibilities; deliberate encroachment by one party on an issue or function considered the prerogative of the other; or, the emergence of new issues or functions not yet allocated to one party or the other. Of these, the first is most common. For instance, the 1783 Newburgh Conspiracy was a veiled threat of an officers' revolt over military pay.¹⁴ Pay was erratic during the Revolution and the conspirators considered Congress unwilling or unable to make arrears. Other crises such as Andrew Jackson's 1817 invasion of Spanish Florida or Douglas MacArthur's conflict with President Truman arose from the belief by military leaders that civilian authorities did not understand the strategic situation and could not provide cogent policy. During the late 1950s, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) frequently testified before Congress that President Eisenhower's defense budgets reflected a misunderstanding of the extent of the Soviet military threat.¹⁵ In 1978, Major General John Singlaub publicly denounced President Jimmy Carter's proposal to cut forces in Korea as strategically dangerous and irresponsible. More recently, JCS Chairman Colin Powell assumed an active role in the formulation of post-Cold War American strategy—and provoked charges of a crisis in civil-military relations—largely because the National Security Council, Department of State, and Department of Defense were "so devoid of a vision of the future international system."¹⁶

Yet perceptions of inadequacy work both ways. Truman fired MacArthur because he considered the General "without any real appreciation of the larger political implications of the

war that he was fighting.”¹⁷ In fact, “all of the post-World War II presidents have accused the JCS of failing to fulfill its responsibilities in the policy process.”¹⁸ President Kennedy was so dissatisfied with the military advice he received during the Bay of Pigs operation that he called General Maxwell Taylor—who had earlier impressed the young Senator from Massachusetts with his intellect and forthrightness—out of retirement to be his personal advisor (and later named him Chairman of the JCS).¹⁹ Lyndon Johnson was even more dismayed by what he considered a lack of creativity on the part of the Chiefs during Vietnam.²⁰ It was possible for presidents to limit military involvement in policymaking during the Cold War because the rise of a community of civilian defense experts provided a real alternative to military advice.²¹ As Mark Perry points out when discussing NSC (National Security Council) 68, one of the seminal documents establishing U.S. strategy during the first decade of the Cold War, “that the NSC would be assigned a leading role in writing what was then considered a purely military assessment was a clear signal that the opinion of the JCS was not as valued in 1950 as it had been in 1940.”²² In addition to the NSC, civilian strategists in universities, think tanks like the RAND Corporation, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense had no qualms about offering guidance to policymakers on topics previously the purview of the military. While civilians offering strategic guidance was nothing new, what was unique was the rigorous education and training of the Cold War generation of strategic thinkers. This stood in contrast to the politicians-cum-strategists of earlier periods.

Ironically, perceptions of inadequacy by civilians and the military often mirror each other. The military occasionally feels that civilian policymakers do not fully understand military affairs or are “too political,” while civilian leaders see the military as parochial and insensitive to political considerations. Problems can easily occur when officers believe civilian officials are basing military decisions on electoral politics rather than strategic necessity or the national interest. In 1861, Major General John C. Fremont, commanding the Western Department, declared martial law and announced the freeing of the slaves throughout the territory despite the fact that

Lincoln, who was concerned with the support of the border states, was opposed.²³ Throughout Reconstruction, Ulysses Grant frequently defied Andrew Johnson when he felt the President's policies were mostly intended to affect party politics.²⁴ Grant also rebuked the President before the Cabinet when Johnson attempted to use the general's prestige to improve his prospects of reelection.²⁵ The JCS nearly resigned in response to Secretary of Defense McNamara's politically-inspired "defense of a clearly discredited strategy" during congressional hearings on Vietnam.²⁶ Jimmy Carter's fulfillment of a campaign pledge to cancel the B-1 bomber was "by far the most controversial defense decision he made as president" and alienated officers who considered the aircraft vital for preserving nuclear deterrence.²⁷ And the same process continues: in March 1995, senior military leaders accused the Clinton administration of "manufacturing" a military crisis with Iran.²⁸ The implication was that this was for political purposes. Yet the politicization of national security is certainly not limited to presidents. The increased role of Congress in national security can, according to David Hendrickson, "encourage the intrusion of narrow political consideration into the determination of matters that ought ideally to be resolved by professional experts."²⁹

Civil-military relations have also been tense when presidents used the armed forces as a tool of social change. In 1947, Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royal defied President Harry S. Truman's order to integrate the Army. Royal based his stance on an Army study that held that racial integration eroded combat effectiveness. With the Secretary defending the results of the study, uniformed officers did not have to take a visible stand even though most opposed integration. Eventually the manpower demands of the Korean War solved the issue.³⁰ Similarly, when President Clinton pledged to change the law so that homosexuals could serve openly in the military, he struck a major nerve.

The entry of new issues onto the security agenda also upsets the civil-military balance. By forcing the United States to mature as a strategic power, the Cold War sparked the most radical restructuring of civil-military relations in American

history. From 1814 to the mid-20th century, the United States faced no truly serious external threat. The Cold War changed that, and gave defense issues a salience that brought intense scrutiny. Suddenly, national security strategy was too important to be left to generals and admirals. At the same time, the military began to use a portion of the national income unprecedented in peacetime, thus linking military strategy to the economic health of the nation.³¹

On a more specific level, the emergence of nuclear weapons forced a reevaluation of civil-military relations.³² The military was slow to develop a clear understanding of the role of nuclear weapons in American strategy. According to Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, "military thinking seemed, at the outset, to be paralyzed" by the challenge.³³ Such new problems demanded a type of creativity that was not the strong suit of military strategists. Civilian defense experts quickly filled this conceptual vacuum, chipping away at the prestige and prerogative of the military.³⁴ And competition between the military services for control of nuclear forces sparked civil-military tension as each sought political allies.³⁵ At the other end of the conflict spectrum, U.S. military involvement in counterinsurgency and nation-building, both of which fell on the border between traditional military and traditional civilian responsibilities, also complicated civil-military relations.³⁶ Official policy gave the State Department authority for organizing and managing American efforts.³⁷ But military officers were often dissatisfied with the diplomats' informal methods of problem-solving and disdain for armed force. More recently, an article by a serving military officer warned of the damage to civil-military relations that could emerge from the involvement of the armed forces in peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, counter-narcotrafficking, and support to civil authorities.³⁸

Even when responsibilities are clear, problems emerge from the different approaches to decisionmaking favored by civilian policymakers and the military. Because the military's *raison d'être* is the organization of extensive and expensive resources for dangerous and intricate tasks, it favors linear logic and formal decisionmaking procedures. Within the

Department of Defense, this is codified in the Joint Strategic Planning System and the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System.³⁹ Even at lower levels, standardized products (five paragraph operations orders, standard operating procedures, rules of engagement, memoranda of policy, program objective memoranda, etc.) dominate. Everything from training schedules to doctrine has an official method and format, all designed to maximize effectiveness and minimize flaws. Personal relationships are structured by rank and protocol. A glance at the shoulders or sleeves gives a reasonable assessment of an individual's influence and importance. Despite popular stereotypes, military thinking is not necessarily inflexible and rigid, but it is as orderly as humanly possible. In effect, military decisionmaking is similar to the legal process where the existence of clear, transcendental objectives—whether adherence to the law or attainment of the military mission—facilitate formality and complexity in decisionmaking.

Political decisionmaking is markedly different. Its currencies are bargaining, compromise, and consensus-building. Trade-offs, deals, and “backscratching” are tools of the trade. “End runs” and emotional public appeals are acceptable. Informality dominates. Politics assumes that individual interests coexist with collective interests that apply to all. The objective is an outcome where at least the key players attain their particular interests while the group as a whole attains an acceptable level of the collective interest. Political decisionmaking thus seeks solutions that all can abide rather than the “best” outcome in terms of long-range effectiveness or efficiency. An outcome that attains short-term objectives but alienates important constituencies is unacceptable.

Formal and informal decisionmaking are not incompatible. Part of the genius of the American political system is that it successfully intermingles the informality of politics with the formality of law to spark creative tension. Similarly, an ingrained aversion to budgetary politics does not always make the military inept at political maneuvering. “There isn’t a general in Washington,” according to General Colin Powell, “who isn’t

political, not if he's going to be successful, because that's the nature of our system."⁴⁰ Or as Admiral William Crowe put it, "Few officers these days made it into the higher ranks without a firm grasp of international relations, congressional politics, and public affairs."⁴¹ Yet few officers ever grow fully comfortable with political-style decisionmaking. As Sam C. Sarkesian and John A. Williams note, "Military professionals historically have been suspicious of politicians and contemptuous of political activity. Bargaining, negotiations, compromises, and consensus building have been seen as self-serving and contrary to professional principles."⁴² The inclination of those is uniform is to deny that they seek the particular institutional interest of their service, but to consider the service objectives as in the national interest. The Air Force truly believes that it is in the national interest to retain manned, fixed-wing aircraft; the Navy truly believes the national interest demands carrier battlegroups; the Marines truly believe that it is in the national interest to retain amphibious warfare capability; and the Army truly believes that it is in the national interest to have armor-heavy divisions. The services resist thinking in terms of direct trade-offs between major weapons systems and job training, schools, roads, prisons, and health care. Political leaders do.

No one would argue that the U.S. military should move away from formal, orderly thinking processes or become more overtly political in terms of making public appeals and engaging in deal-making. The world would be a much more dangerous place if it did. Similarly, few would suggest that political leaders can or should make decisions in a radically different way. In the American political system, decisionmaking is *deliberately* inefficient. The more power and authority are diffused, the harder they are to abuse. The military must recognize this, and accept the frustrations and inefficiencies of democratic politics. Of course the obverse is also true: Military decisionmaking is poorly understood outside Washington. According to William Crowe, even Congress does not fully grasp it.⁴³ Civilians hold even more caricatures of the military than the military does of civilian policymakers. The services try to ameliorate this through a range of outreach and public education efforts, but the gap can never be fully bridged.⁴⁴ This tension is part of the

landscape of American civil-military relations; its adverse effects can only be minimized and controlled.

The military must also recognize that it can inadvertently intimidate civilians. This is a common phenomenon in the world of politics. Americans, for instance, are often perplexed when friendly or allied nations are alarmed by U.S. influence in world affairs. This can be called the “paradox of unintended intimidation” as the *ability* to impose power receives greater attention than statements of good intent or even benign behavior. The same paradox applies to military involvement in policymaking. While military leaders fully know they have no intention of seizing power or playing a praetorian role in politics, the fact that they *could* is sometimes a source of anxiety. The warfighter ethos amplifies this distrust. The military professional is a useful but alien being to mainstream America. He not only dresses, talks, and behaves differently, but also seems driven by unusual goals and values. Steps to foster communication and understanding between military professionals and the civilian mainstream—outreach programs, the reserve system, civilian education for commissioned and noncommissioned officers, military involvement in domestic disaster relief, the Army’s emphasis that it is “America’s Army”—are useful, but not ultimate solutions to the problem of unintended intimidation. Promoting the image of obedience to civilian authorities is a never-ending task. Damage from even murmurs of disobedience or disrespect, much less what historian Richard Kohn depicted as the “ridicule and contempt expressed openly” about President Clinton within the officer corps, takes years to repair.⁴⁵

This suggests another important dilemma of American civil-military relations: Perceptions and appearances often matter more than reality. Formal institutional arrangements are often less important than attitudes.⁴⁶ During his initial meeting with the JCS, Nixon’s first Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, accorded the chiefs great esteem—something McNamara had not done. According to Mark Perry, this “stands out as the primary example of just how a civilian leader can both dampen military mistrust and gain military allegiance” by according its leaders respect.⁴⁷ Public appearances are also vital. When Air

Force Chief of Staff Larry Welch began espousing a plan for upgrading the ballistic missile force somewhat at odds with the Bush administration's position, new Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, who "understood the symbolic importance of first impressions," publicly rebuked him, leaving Welch "stunned."⁴⁸ The general's major lapse was forgetting the symbolic content of civil-military relations and the frequent need for exaggerated acquiescence.

All of these dilemmas and problems are structured by the fact that the military is the *subject* of civil-military relations rather than a full partner; its role and function are largely outside its control. As such, it can become an intentional or unintentional pawn in political struggles among civilians. In fact, disputes between Department of Defense civilians, especially those pitting the Secretary of Defense and Congress, often are cast as problems or crises of civil-military relations rather than intra-civilian conflicts.⁴⁹ Those at odds with the military on policy issues will often blame inadequate civilian control.⁵⁰ During the Cold War the informal alliance between the uniformed military and congressional conservatives sometimes led congressional liberals to complain of faltering or inadequate civilian control of the military. The military found that it could not participate in policymaking without charges of partisanship. Policymaking is an inherently partisan activity; to participate is to be political. Since disengagement or silence is not an option for the modern military, the only solution again is extreme, perhaps even exaggerated, nonpartisanship and obedience to civilian authorities. For the system to function smoothly civilian allies of the military (especially the service secretaries) must take the lead in rebuffing charges of inadequate civilian oversight when the roots of such charges are actually policy differences.

American civil-military relations are built on an ingrained asymmetry between the services, each organized as a coherent, corporate body, and its civilian overseers who are not.⁵¹ Civilians control the military's budget, can fire individual military leaders, approve senior-level promotions and assignments, and, in the case of the National Command Authorities, can give direct orders. In addition, many civilians,

both permanent civil service and political appointees, have a long tenure in the policymaking world while military officers come and go. On the other hand, a well-structured career pattern makes it easier for the military to deliberately improve the political skill and strategic acumen of its members. Officers can be required to study world politics and strategy before attaining senior positions. Civilians are sometimes self-taught in the strategic arts, often with a background in law rather than international studies or national security affairs. As a result, their knowledge is frequently less systematic than their military counterparts (although not necessarily less extensive). To some extent, recent reform legislation widened this gap. According to James Kitfield:

Tight ethics restrictions have discouraged good candidates for top civilian posts at the Pentagon from serving. And as an unintended result, the pendulum of power over defense affairs has swung from the civilian to the military side of the government's national security apparatus.⁵²

This is an important point. Because warfighting is an inherently chaotic activity, the military has developed an institutional abhorrence of disorder. In policymaking, inadequate or inconsistent attention to important problems and the absence of logical, sequential planning procedures are considered disorderly. Military officers thus grow frustrated by the failure of civilians to adopt rigorous procedures for defining strategic objectives and allocating resources and attempt to seize functions that they perceive civilians are not performing or not performing adequately. But the arrogation of function occurs within narrow confines. In the broadest sense, the American system offers several informal techniques for influencing policy: deal-making, populism, and coalition-building. These are not exclusive—on some issues, the military may use all three—but only the last of these is readily available to the military. Open deals and direct public appeals are unacceptable; the military only turns to them as a last resort on particularly vital issues. Officers must be willing to pay the political price when using public fora to air dissent. When Congress was considering wide-ranging reform of the Department of Defense in the early 1980s, Secretary of

Defense Caspar Weinberger expressed open displeasure when JCS Chairman David C. Jones and Army Chief of Staff Edward C. Meyer published articles supporting change.⁵³ More recently, General Colin Powell was twice the center of controversy due to public statements seemingly at odds with official policy and for publication of an essay in the influential journal of opinion, *Foreign Affairs*. In both cases, it was less the *content* of dissent than its *form* that mattered.

Because the military's influence over national security policy is largely informal, its influence is directly related to whether its recent endeavors are considered successes or failures. Influence is thus iterative. Following perceived failures like Vietnam or the attempted hostage rescue in Iran, the prestige and influence of the services diminished. Since the American military has never faced outright defeat, such declines are usually temporary, lasting only until the next success. The obverse is also true: After perceived successes such as *Desert Storm*, the military's influence surges, but this, too, is fleeting. This relationship of influence to perceived operational success or failure may cause the military to become timid in its recommendations to national policymakers. For instance, Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor suggest that Colin Powell's highly cautious approach to the use of American military power reflected his fear "that American public opinion could turn against the armed forces, as it did during the Vietnam War."⁵⁴

Adjustments.

American civil-military relations evolve in a distinct pattern.⁵⁵ First, changes in the domestic and international political environments make existing attitudes and structures obsolete. Then there is usually dramatic change, either through galvanizing events such as Truman's firing of MacArthur and Cheney's rebuttal of General Welch, or by key legislation such as the National Security Act of 1947 or the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Throughout the process, there is an attempt to sustain equilibrium and balance between the military and its civilian overseers. Today, the extent of change in the strategic environment suggests that American

civil-military relations are approaching disequilibrium again and major readjustment may be imminent.

The basic nature of armed conflict, for instance, may be shifting with conventional state-versus-state war declining in strategic salience. Some writers predict a melding of law enforcement and traditional military functions in response to "gray area" threats, the privatization of security, and new forms of high-tech terrorism.⁵⁶ The concept of national security may be expanded to include protection of cyberspace, the ecology, and public health. Future armed conflict may often involve subnational enemies, whether ethnic militias or well-armed and highly organized criminal gangs. As Martin van Creveld argues, low-intensity conflict may pose the dominant security threat.⁵⁷ At the same time, the ongoing "revolution in military affairs" (RMA) might alter the nature of essential military skills, further eroding the distinction between things military and non-military.⁵⁸ Prophets of the RMA predict the American military will increasingly rely on precision, stand-off weapons and, eventually, robots. If national security can be protected at a computer terminal rather than on a traditional battlefield, it may no longer make sense to have a distinct military. The crux of civil-military relations has always been finding a way to both preserve and control the unique skills of the warrior. If these skills become obsolete, civil-military relations must change.

The role of military power in American national security strategy has always shaped civil-military relations. If the strategic role of military power changes, so, too, must civil-military relations. Over the next decade the United States may militarily disengage from many parts of the world, leaving responsibility for security to regional powers, alliances, or international organizations. This could greatly lessen the need for power projection and erode the rationale for military involvement in policymaking. During the Cold War, the armed services became major players in policymaking largely because the military element of national power was a central component of U.S. national security strategy. If the importance of military power diminishes, the political influence of the armed forces must decline. The expanded use of the U.S. military in operations other than war, whether peacekeeping, disaster

relief, ecological clean-ups, or counter-narcotrafficking, could also have long-term effects on civil-military relations. The military services and civilian leaders currently agree that the primary tasks of the armed services are to deter and win wars. But if traditional war is replaced by conflict short of war as the preeminent security threat faced by the United States, the military may become a peripheral actor in policymaking. Moreover, ambiguous, protracted military operations can erode the support and popularity that the armed services earned in the Gulf War, thus altering the political balance of power between the military and their civilian overseers. Recognizing this, the military might oppose its use in operations other than war, thus sparking a true crisis with civilian policymakers.

The changing composition of Congress and of Executive Branch civilians may affect relations with the military. With the end of the draft and the shrinking of the armed forces, only a small proportion of the American public has had military service. Moreover, as fewer and fewer American political leaders have military service, they may understand the military less. This gap is enlarging. Samuel Huntington argued that the American military is essentially and necessarily a conservative organization nested in a liberal society.⁵⁹ During the Cold War, the tendency to “rally round the flag” papered over deep differences in values and perspectives between the military and the majority of the American public. The end of the Cold War, in conjunction with the ongoing socio-cultural diversification of the United States, may further isolate the military from mainstream American culture and affect civil-military relations.

In the past, declining defense budgets often set the military services against one another as they competed for resources. This made civilian control easier but eroded the coherence of military advice to policymakers to unacceptable levels. It is possible that “jointness”—cooperation among the armed services—has now become so fully ingrained that they will continue to cooperate even as budgets decline. However, the intensity of service debate during the ongoing “roles and missions” study suggests that under the veneer of inter-service

comity lurks the potential for conflict. If this explodes into the open, civil-military relations will be affected as the services scramble for allies. Similarly, changes in the defense industrial and technological base may also change civil-military relations. During the Cold War, defense spending affected most parts of the United States—a fact not lost on Congress. Today, the old military-industrial complex is greatly weakened if not altogether dead. This may lessen the military's influence in Congress.

Some changes not designed to affect civil-military relations end up doing so. For example, closing military bases was intended to make the services more efficient. An unintended side effect has been the end of military presence in many parts of the United States. Physically, the military is abandoning locations in the northeast and midwest and moving nearly all its resources to the nation's southern and western littoral. This simplifies power projection, but also means that an increasing number of Americans—as well as their representatives in Congress—will have little or no first-hand experience with the military. And in response to declining resources, the armed services, particularly the Army, are beginning to reconsider or adjust the relationship between Active and Reserve Components. Some military leaders and defense analysts feel that during a time of frugality for the armed services, a large Reserve Component is a luxury. Dollar for dollar, the argument goes, more is gained from money spent on active forces, especially as warfare becomes increasingly complex and crisis reaction more central to our national security strategy. But the Reserve Components have long been one of the primary connections between the military and American society. Thus, decisions to diminish reserve forces—even if made solely on the grounds of military effectiveness—may have unintended side effects for civil-military relations.

Enduring Questions.

American civil-military relations exist on two distinct levels. The first is transitory and fluid. It includes specific issues and key individuals, each rising to prominence and then receding. To a large extent the president is the maestro of this ebb and flow as he shapes the policymaking process according to his

needs and proclivities. The interface between the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff is probably the single most important one in American civil-military relations. The Secretary of Defense provides the interface between civilians and military. Whether he is seen as pro- or anti-military sets the tenor for all of civil-military relations. The other level consists of enduring questions—the normative base of civil-military relations. Here debates do not concern budgets, force sizes, deployments, and weapons systems, but essential values. Individuals and issues are only important to the extent they *represent* enduring questions that must be re-debated and re-answered as the United States and the global security environment changes. Two such enduring questions are particularly important.

The first is whether the military should sustain or even increase its role in national security policymaking. Some analysts feel that the military ethos of duty and devotion, when combined with officers' extensive education in world affairs and national security policy, justify an expanded role for the military in policymaking. Mark Perry writes, "Is the military influencing our nation's foreign policy? T'wer it so."⁶⁰ This position assumes that civilian control is so ingrained that the U.S. military poses no threat to democracy. It also rejects the notion that there is a distinctly military approach to foreign policy. It is not immediately clear, though, that the military should *want* a greater role in policymaking. After all, this would bring responsibility for the outcome of particular policies and thus has the potential to damage the public respect that the military worked so hard to re-earn after Vietnam. The only real justification for a deliberate attempt to gain a greater role in policymaking by the military would be persistent incompetence on the part of civilian strategists and policymakers. Under such circumstances the real solution may not be an expanded role for the military, but some way of creating and cultivating better civilian strategists and policymakers.

Other analysts contend that with the end of the Cold War, the policymaking role of the U.S. military—which was temporarily enlarged in response to a temporarily imminent security threat—should diminish. Samuel Huntington, for

instance, writes, "The military must abandon participation in public debate about foreign and military policy, stop building alliances amongst the public and in Congress for defense spending—and resist the temptation to maneuver in the bureaucracy to achieve its own ends, however commendable."⁶¹ This is based on the assumption that military intervention in politics remains feasible and risky. It also assumes officers and civilians hold distinct perspectives on national policy, and that the military one should only dominate in times of serious threat. Such assumptions may be obsolete in the modern world. Today the precise *extent* of military involvement in policymaking is less important than the *type* of individuals involved. If the military chooses senior leaders so focused on the military element of national power that they are unable to deal with the subtle complexity of strategy, then its role in policymaking should be limited. If civilian participants are more politicians than strategists, then the military—if it generates senior leaders who are astute strategists—may have to assume greater responsibilities.

If the military does seek an active role in national policymaking, it must consider whether its existing procedures produce senior leaders adept at managing civil-military relations. According to Mark Perry, the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act guaranteed the Joint Chiefs a voice in national policymaking, but cannot ensure this advice will be heeded.⁶² In terms of producing politically sensitive leaders, the U.S. military in general and the Army in particular have exhibited contradictory tendencies. On one hand, advanced civilian education, often in political science or related disciplines, is encouraged and the senior service schools (especially the National War College) devote large portions of their curriculum to national policymaking. On the other hand, field command is the most important criterion for the attainment of flag rank in all the services. To be an "intellectual" in terms of education and publication may not be a hinderance for promotion, but it is far less important than command of troops, airplanes, ships, or submarines. As Henry Kissinger noted, "A man who has been used to command finds it almost impossible to learn to negotiate, because negotiation is an admission of finite power."⁶³

Ongoing changes in the nature of armed conflict and national security suggest that the military should, in fact, explicitly develop civil-military relations skills among its leaders. The growing importance of operations in which the military works closely with civilian government and non-government agencies, as well as the global publicity that accompanies military activity, amplify this need. There is now a need for smooth civil-military relations at the operational and tactical levels as well as the strategic, thus changing the skills needed by even junior officers. By contrast, the argument can be made that education for officers in civil-military relations, constitutional law, diplomacy, politics, and economics is a distraction from crucial warfighting skills. In Samuel Huntington's words, "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."⁶⁴ From this perspective, the goal for the military should be minimally acceptable civil-military relations skills and warfighting proficiency. This issue must be decided within a much larger strategic framework. The key is the role of military power within the nation's array of foreign policy tools. If military power is to be fully and seamlessly integrated with other elements of national power, political skill is vital for officers at all levels. But if military power is to remain somehow distinct from the other elements of national power, then political skill will remain a secondary capability for warfighters, necessary only at the highest levels.

The second enduring issue concerns the ultimate loyalty of officers within the framework of civilian control. Clearly this loyalty should lie somewhere outside officers' individual desires or even the good of their service. Transcendental allegiance is, after all, one thing that distinguishes militaries like the American one from the coup-prone, corrupt, and politicized institutions found in some parts of the Third World. The question is whether ultimate loyalty resides with the commander-in-chief, the national interest, or the Constitution. Most of the time, there is no divergence or incompatibility among the three. Legally and ethically, ultimate loyalty should

lie with the Constitution. A member of the U.S. military swears allegiance to the Constitution, not to the commander-in-chief. But while this concept is clear, reality is not so neat. Peter Feaver contends the Truman-MacArthur dispute was based on the general's "novel and dangerous interpretation of civil-military relations" in which an officer could ignore the president in the name of the national interest.⁶⁵ And, in what could have been one of the most difficult decisions ever faced by American military leaders, there were rumors that President Nixon considered declaring emergency powers and using the armed forces to prevent his removal from office by Congress.⁶⁶ What, then, should an officer do when convinced that the president or official policy is wrong?

One alternative is what Lenin called "democratic centralism." This holds that an officer may dissent in private or even openly while a policy is being formulated, but once a decision is made, he must adhere. However sound in principle, this has at least two problems. First, the American system sometimes makes it difficult to know exactly when official policy has been promulgated or what that policy is. Policy is not law. Presidents and civilian policymakers sometimes choose to leave it vague in order to retain flexibility or deflect opposition. Second, slavish adherence to official policy by the military can erode an important corrective to misguided policy. If the Joint Chiefs had been more prone to question Lyndon Johnson's strategy, American involvement in Vietnam might have ended differently. A military willing to obey and apply badly flawed policies, in other words, can be as dangerous as one seeking to wrest control of policymaking from civilian officials.⁶⁷ As former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger told Dick Cheney, "After a lifetime of taking orders, generals and admirals were, if anything, too compliant."⁶⁸ There is then, a tender and complex balance between too much autonomy and too little.

Another approach is to distinguish the president (or the presidency) from his policies. This allows an officer to actively support the commander-in-chief even while opposing policy considered wrong or misguided. At its simplest, it entails saying "I think this order is blatantly stupid, but I will implement it." But

if dissent is allowed, what means are acceptable? One answer is that only private disagreement with existing policy is permitted if the officer intends to continue service. In extreme cases of dissent, public resignation is acceptable. Another answer holds that under some circumstances, the military should and must publicly air its disagreement with official policy in order to inform debate. Smooth civil-military relations, according to this line of reasoning, are not always desirable—sometimes creative tension is needed. During the implementation of the “New Look” strategy during the Eisenhower administration, the Chiefs often took issue with official policy during congressional testimony (despite Eisenhower’s displeasure), but did not take their case to the public or resign in protest (even though they considered it). More recently, senior military leaders have taken issue with official policy in even more open fora such as interviews and publications. Occasionally this was punished and at other times accepted, thus showing that the parameters of acceptable dissent are not immutable. As a general rule, disagreement with Congress and even official *military* policy is tolerated to a greater extent than disagreement with the President or Secretary of Defense.

The final approach—and the most dangerous one—holds that an officer’s loyalty is not to the president or even the presidency, but to the Constitution or the national interest *as he defines it*. This, of course, was MacArthur’s position. The pitfalls are obvious. To make it work, officers must be experts on constitutional law and the national interest. “If each professional military officer were to defend the constitution as he interpreted it individually without reference to the administration in power,” Donald Bletz writes, “the American democratic system would be unworkable.”⁶⁹ This approach could also pave the way toward military intervention in politics. Many Third World coups are led by officers who claim to understand the national interest better than civilian politicians, and who feel that seizure of power by the military is the only way to save the nation. Moreover, the advent of nuclear weapons, which accorded military issues an unprecedented importance and immediacy, made autonomous decisions by officers all the more dangerous. Still, the right of an officer to

appeal to higher loyalties must not be rejected *a priori*. There is always the possibility of an emergency so dire or a president so misguided that a dedicated officer must be willing to defy the commander-in-chief, all the while willing to pay the personal price this will entail.

Conclusions.

As with so many political and strategic issues, the future of American civil-military relations can be distilled to assumptions. Most Americans agree that the objective is a competent, professional military able to contribute to national security policymaking but not dominate it, but there is no consensus on the changes that the evolution of the global security environment (including the concept of national security) will bring, or on the risks of too much military involvement in policymaking. Like all assumptions, these must be periodically reexamined and debated in order to preserve a working consensus.

Future historians will consider the Cold War a seminal event in the evolution of American civil-military relations. Today, policymakers and students of national security affairs can sense the extent of change it will require, but do not yet understand the specifics. Many of the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that shaped American national security policy during the Cold War still linger—we are in the “post-Cold War” security era, awaiting the birth of a new one. The issues that will shape the future such as the changing nature of armed conflict and alterations in U.S. national security strategy are clear, but their precise impact on civil-military relations is not. The best that analysts can do at this time is illuminate the debate, point out the central determinants of future problems, and explain the complex relationship between new issues and perennial problems. Doing this suggests that if there is to be a crisis in American civil-military relations, it is not occurring now, but will happen in a decade or so when the psychological legacy of the Cold War fully fades and fundamental assumptions are again open to debate. The changes undergone by American civil-military relations in the last decades of the 20th century

will thus pale in comparison to those of the first few decades of the 21st century.

ENDNOTES

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45. Kohn, "Out of Control," p. 13.

46. Hendrickson, *Reforming Defense*, p. 28.

47. Perry, *Four Stars*, p. 217.

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49. The authors are indebted to James Kievit for this observation.

50. For instance, Mackubin Thomas Owens attributes the charges by strategic theorist Edward Luttwak that the Joint Staff is inadequately

controlled to the Pentagon's failure to adopt Luttwak's policy proposals. See Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Civilian Control: A National Crisis?" *Joint Force Quarterly*, Autumn/Winter 1994/95, p. 82; and Edward N. Luttwak, "Washington's Biggest Scandal," *Commentary*, May 1994, pp. 29-33.

51. But, as Stephen Ambrose points out, "the Armed Services are not an entity with a single world view, but rather a loose association of groups which, while agreeing on certain basic necessities, nevertheless is full of internal contradictions." (Ambrose, "The Military Impact on Foreign Policy," p. 122.)

52. James Kitfield, "Pentagon Power Shifts," *Government Executive*, April 1994, p. 72.

53. Perry, *Four Stars*, p. 300.

54. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1995, p. viii.

55. This section is based on Douglas Johnson and Steven Metz, "Civil-Military Relations in the United States: The State of the Debate," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Winter 1995, pp. 208-212.

56. See Steven Metz, "Insurgency After the Cold War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1994, pp. 71-73.

57. Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York: Free Press, 1991, pp. 192-227.

58. See Steven Metz and James Kievit, *The Revolution in Military Affairs and Conflict Short of War*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1994, pp. 20-21; and Bill Gertz, "Mass Attacks Feared by Future Terrorists," *Washington Times*, February 22, 1995, p. 4.

59. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 143-162.

60. Mark Perry, letter to Brad Roberts, editor of *Washington Quarterly*, January 17, 1995.

61. Huntington, letter in "Exchange on Civil-Military Relations," p. 30.

62. Perry, *Four Stars*, p. 341.

63. Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812-1822*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, n.d., p. 43.

64. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 71.

65. Feaver, *Guarding the Guardians*, pp. 4-5.
66. Perry, *Four Stars*, pp. 257-259.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
68. *Ibid.*
69. Bletz, *The Role of the Military Professional in U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 49.

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