

## CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JCS

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE  
CHAIRMAN OF THE JCS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Generals Powell and Myers are members of an exclusive fraternity of military professionals. This club, with membership currently numbered at seventeen is restricted to those men who have served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both reached the zenith of their profession through demonstrated competence, intelligence and an acute understanding of how the military operated at the political level. Each served during tumultuous times, providing military advice through multiple conflicts and transformation initiatives. The ability of the Chairman to establish a trusting relationship is imperative as he serves at the nexus between the military and the civilian authorities. One Chairman apparently affected a civil-military relationship resulting in an amiable atmosphere while another navigated through what was labeled a toxic environment of distrust between the armed forces and the Secretary of Defense. What then were the salient factors of their respective tenures that led to such differing results, especially in the realm of civil-military relations?

## CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JCS

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff entered the crowded room with his written testimony in hand. He spent the last thirty-nine years of his life serving his country, and was still humbled at being selected to serve as the senior uniformed member of the armed services. He was anxious about the potential questions he was about to be asked. In front of him sat the members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. For weeks, the media had been reporting a growing rift between the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There were rumors the Chairman was being pressured to resign. The military was currently executing combat operations in two separate theaters. Major decisions involving strategies and troop strength levels were still being evaluated. Having conflict between the Secretary of Defense and the senior uniformed member of the Armed Forces was not something Congress was going to accept without an explanation. The Senate Armed Services Committee called on the Chairman to testify alone, without his boss, the Secretary of Defense. After being sworn in, the Chairman began his testimony. He acknowledged immediately that the relationship between the Secretary of Defense and himself was strained and that he had tried hard to work privately with the Secretary on the multitude of issues in which they disagreed. The Chairman was adamant that it was his duty to carry out his responsibilities as specified in the Goldwater-Nichols Act and that he had no intention of resigning or asking to retire. He mentioned that it was his job to represent the armed forces, and if conflict with his civilian boss ensued, then it would be his decision to retain or fire him.

The vignette above describes a relationship between the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which while highly improbable, is possible under current law. Historically, the seventeen men who have served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have never publically rebuked the Secretary of Defense. However, the nuances of this relationship have an enormous impact upon civil-military relations and most importantly, national security. Focusing on the performances of two officers who have executed the duties of Chairman recently, this paper attempts to ascertain how each affected civil military relations and national security while also identifying the salient factors that led to such results.

Generals Powell and Myers are members of an exclusive fraternity of military professionals. This club, with membership currently numbered at seventeen is restricted to those men who have served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both reached the zenith of their profession through demonstrated competence, intelligence and an acute understanding of how the military operated at the political level. Each served during tumultuous times, providing military advice through multiple conflicts and transformation initiatives. General Powell's major challenge was fighting the Gulf War, a conflict that included universal condemnation of the Iraqi Army's invasion of Kuwait. For General Powell and the Bush 41 administration, building coalitions to defeat Saadam Hussein was not difficult. In contrast, General Myers was faced with two theaters of war, Afghanistan and Iraq. With Iraq being a highly unpopular war, especially amongst traditional allies of the United States, developing coalitions was problematic at best. Additionally, unlike the Gulf War, there was significant opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 in both houses of Congress and the American public.

Finally, both served under Secretaries of Defense that were professional politicians with strong personalities. What were the salient factors of their respective tenures that led to such differing results, especially in the realm of civil-military relations?

Under General Powell, the military was successful in two operations, OPERATION JUST CAUSE and OPERATION DESERT STORM. Additionally, the military began transforming to meet the new strategic landscape initiated by the collapse of the Soviet Empire. General Powell, who became Chairman three years after the passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, felt empowered with the new responsibilities designated in the law. He took full advantage of his position by actively pursuing and safeguarding the interests of the United States Military. He also understood that his tenure would establish the limits and boundaries of power for the Chairman as he put into execution the newly assigned responsibilities specified in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. He, in effect, would establish the precedents for the men who would succeed him as Chairman. During his tenure as Chairman, the atmosphere of civil-military relations was amiable in that trust levels between the military and the civilian leadership were quite high.<sup>1</sup> When General Myers was sworn in as Chairman, he was the first Air Force general in 20 years to hold the position and would be the first ever to hold it while the nation was at war. He was also cognizant of the Goldwater-Nichols Act when executing his responsibilities, but chose to execute them without maintaining the conditions established by his predecessors in working with his civilian supervisors. The two wars that began under his tenure, OPERATIONS ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM are still ongoing. Major acquisition programs conceived during his tenure both as the Vice-Chairman and then as the Chairman have been cancelled or

significantly curtailed e.g., the Future Combat Systems and the F-22. Additionally, the atmosphere of civil-military relations became so baneful, the Iraq Study Group felt compelled to mention it in their report. Recommendation 46 reads: “The new Secretary of Defense should make every effort to build healthy civilian military relations, by creating an environment in which the senior military feel free to offer independent advice not only to the civilian leadership in the Pentagon but also to the President and the National Security Council, as envisioned in the Goldwater-Nichols legislation.”<sup>2</sup>

These experiences raise the question, how should the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff influence civil military relations and to what extent does this impact national security? These questions underscore the essence of this paper in that the national security of the country relies on a trusting relationship between the civil authorities and the military. Richard Kohn believes “toxic civil-military relationships damage national security in at least three ways: first by paralyzing national security policy; second, by obstructing and in some cases sabotaging American ability to intervene in foreign crisis or to exercise leadership internationally; and third, by undermining the confidence of the armed forces in their own uniformed leadership.”<sup>3</sup> If you accept that establishing positive civil-military relations is essential for national security then the senior members of the military along with their civilian supervisors owe it to the American people to work in a collaborative manner in safeguarding the national security interests of the country. The ability of the Chairman to establish a trusting relationship is imperative as he serves at the nexus between the military and the civilian authorities. How then, was one Chairman able to affect a civil-military relationship resulting in a positive atmosphere while another navigated through what was labeled a

toxic environment of distrust between the armed forces and the Secretary of Defense?<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the nuances of civil-military relations requires a historical review and discussion of the conditions in which this relationship developed.

### What are Civil-Military Relations?

Civil-military relations is a topic discussed and written about for centuries. With the rise of democracies coupled with the need to have professional standing armies, having good civil-military relations benefited both national security and society in general. With the defeat of the Axis forces in 1945, America emerged as one of the two super powers. With the invention of nuclear weapons and the onset of limited war (Korea and Vietnam), the study of civil-military relations and its influence on national security became a popular topic of military scholars. In United States history, the conduct of war was always considered an extension of policy and subject to civilian oversight. The concept of civilian control became more pronounced with the onset of limited war and the growing arsenal of nuclear weaponry. Additionally, the media's uncensored reporting of the battlefield resulted in many military decisions having political implications. During this period, one of America's original leading scholars on civil-military relations was Samuel Huntington.

Samuel Huntington was a renowned expert in civil-military relations, his book, *The Soldier and the State* continues to be read and critiqued to this day, some 52 years after being published. Huntington was one of the first scholars that recognized that a military career was a profession. He writes, "The professional man is a practicing expert working in a social context and performing a service, which is essential to the functioning of society."<sup>5</sup> In regards to the military officer and military profession, he comments, "the officer possesses intellectual skill, mastery of which requires intense

study. His client is society.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally Huntington believed, “The military profession exists to serve the state, to render the highest possible service the entire profession and the military force which it leads must be constituted as an effective instrument of state policy.”<sup>7</sup> Huntington was a strong advocate in giving the military autonomy in the execution of military operations. He coined the term, Objective Civilian Control in describing the division of responsibilities between the military and the civilian leadership. In his model, the military focuses solely on the execution of military operations, or as Huntington would say, “the management of violence”, while the civilian authorities focus on the political aspects and establish policy.<sup>8</sup> In Huntington’s mind, it was essential that military professionals remain apolitical. Being apolitical while exercising military autonomy would facilitate an atmosphere of complete subordination to the civilian leadership. With this division of responsibilities, Huntington proposed a trusting relationship between the military and the civilians. Volumes have been written criticizing Huntington’s model of Civilian Objective Control.

Eliot Cohen, in his book *Supreme Command* labels Huntington’s model as the Normal Theory of civil-military relations.<sup>9</sup> Cohen disagrees that civilian leadership should not get involved in military operations. When interpreting Clausewitz’s famous dictum that war is merely of continuation of politics by other means, Eliot Cohen argues, “For Clausewitz, there is no field of military action that might not be touched by political consideration. In practice, politics might not determine the stationing of pickets or the dispatch of patrols, but in theory it could.”<sup>10</sup> Eliot Cohen is a strong advocate of statesmen making military decisions. He writes, “When the politicians abdicate their role in making those decisions, that nation has a problem.”<sup>11</sup>

Another critic of Huntington's model is Matthew Moten. He believes, "The essential flaw in Huntington's theoretical wall is that it splits the responsibility for policy from the responsibility for strategy. This bifurcation demands too little both of military professionals and the civilian superiors."<sup>12</sup> In addressing the importance of developing national security policy, Marybeth Ulrich writes that "National Security Policy is the product of the overlapping participation of all members of state's national security community, (including the military). In order to craft effective national security policy, civilian and military national security professionals must develop overlapping areas of competence."<sup>13</sup> Ulrich's postulation contradicts Objective Civilian Control in that she included the military in policy development, a domain Huntington believe should be left to the political leadership. Not only were the scholars debating the merit of civil-military relations, America's elected leaders were cognizant of this important relationship. For many reasons, particularly lack of unity in joint operations, dysfunctional command and control relationships and limited powers of the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, Congress passed legislation that included an aspect focused on promoting good civil-military relations. This was the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

#### The Impetus behind the Goldwater-Nichols Act

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act (GNA) was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on 1 October 1986. The act culminated years of intensive review and debate on how to improve systemic military inefficiencies, specifically in the areas of command and control architecture and joint operations. At the time, the military was still suffering from multiple failed joint operations that included the aborted 1980 Iran Hostage Rescue and the 1983 Marine Barracks bombing in Beirut. Additionally, OPERATION JOINT FURY, the invasion of Grenada, had failed to

meet expectations when evaluated from a joint operations perspective. These events were in addition to the decade's long inter-service rivalries e.g., fierce competition for congressional funding for programs and new equipment, which at times prevented consensus on behalf of the uniformed military leadership. Without a single voice to represent the uniformed military's collective opinion, civilian leaders were forced to make decisions based on service centric advice from each of the service chiefs. While the duties of the Joint Chiefs of Staff evolved since inception during World War II, the position of Chairman had minimal powers. The Tydings Bill, a bill designed to supplement the National Security Act Amendment of 1949, prescribed the following duties for the Chairman: 1. Serve as the presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2. Provide the agenda for meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 3. Inform the Secretary of Defense and when appropriate the President, of those issues upon which agreement among the Joint Chiefs of Staff has not been reached.<sup>14</sup> These duties clearly indicated the Chairman was an equal amongst the service chiefs and that his influence was no greater than any of the chiefs. His power base was limited to ascertaining the collective position of the Joint Chiefs. Congressional leaders realized that legislation was needed to force the inveterate military leadership to empower the Chairman's position and to transform the military into a joint force. When the sweeping national security legislation, Goldwater-Nichols Act, finally passed, it met with almost universal consensus by both Houses of Congress and without significant administration opposition, albeit, the military leadership was far from a supporting consensus.<sup>15</sup> With the Combatant Commanders now working directly for the Secretary of Defense, the service chiefs were not happy that they were no longer in the chain of command. The numerous modifications

directed in the Goldwater-Nichols Act had an immense impact on the military. While the Goldwater-Nichols Act affected a broad range of topics, this discussion concentrates on the responsibilities of the Chairman.

One of the primary goals of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was to reduce inter-service rivalries amongst the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Prior to the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Chairman shared with the service chiefs an equal voice in regard to advising the President and the Secretary of Defense. This equality led to service parochialism amongst the service chiefs since the Chairman lacked adjudicating authority. To mitigate these rivalries, the Goldwater-Nichols Act designated the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the “principal” military advisor to the President of the United States and the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF).<sup>16</sup> The Act requires the Chairman to provide advice and counsel that represents the military as a single entity without bias toward any one service. Additionally, the Goldwater-Nichols Act states that if there is lack of consensus between the Chairman and other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chairman is expected to present the dissenting opinions to the SECDEF or the President. Additional responsibilities of the Chairman codified in the Goldwater-Nichols Act and listed in Chapter 5, Title 10 U.S. Code include: providing strategic direction, strategic planning, contingency planning, advice on requirements, programs and budget, as well as developing joint doctrine, training and education, and a comprehensive examination of the National Military Strategy each even numbered year.<sup>17</sup> These additional responsibilities empowered the Chairman with the appropriate authority to coordinate and synchronize the services to successfully operate in a joint environment. With the passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Chairman now had by

law, unique access and potential influence with the President, the Secretary of Defense and other members of the National Security Council. The new responsibilities of the Chairman were long in coming as the officers who previously served in the position were given limited authority. The men who served as Chairman prior to the passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act were of impeccable quality and character. Each endured their own challenges and persevered under enormous pressures. Their legacies date back to Admiral Leahy and World War II.

#### History of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

During the early years of World War II, President Roosevelt restructured the military command relationships by placing the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Chief of Naval Operations to include the strategic planners of the Army and Navy under his direct control.<sup>18</sup> Realizing the potential for inter-service rivalry, and that unbiased advice would be needed, President Roosevelt established a military advisory position that would report to him directly. In 1942 Admiral William D. Leahy was called out of retirement by the President. In addition to his advisory role, Admiral Leahy was charged with overseeing the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The position Leahy held proved to be invaluable to the President and would eventually be codified in 1949 with an amendment to the National Security Act of 1947. While Admiral Leahy had to build an ad hoc staff, the National Security Act officially established and authorized a Joint Staff.

Throughout each succeeding administration, the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was used in accordance to the needs of the President and the Secretary of Defense. Experienced World War II veterans dominated the Chairman's position, beginning with General Omar Bradley in 1949 and ending with General John Vessey in 1985. The seven Chairmen, including the incumbent, who held the position since

General Vessey's retirement, all served in Southwest Asia during the Vietnam War. From the Truman administration up to the Reagan administration, there was minimal to moderate conflict between the presidential administrations and the military with the Johnson and Nixon administrations being the exceptions.<sup>19</sup> The Chairmen who served during this period were loyal men dedicated to serving their country and following the orders of their civilian bosses. Even during the Vietnam War, a time period that Dale Herspring categorized as high conflict between the administration and the military, General Earle Wheeler, the Chairman from 1964 to 1970, did not publically contradict his civilian bosses. General Wheeler's determination to keep his professional relationship with the Secretary of Defense private and away from the media resulted in him being accused of being "too silent", especially in regard to Vietnam War strategies. Historians accuse him of both inaction and not standing up to the civilian leadership when things were going poorly in the war. Wheeler's silence is an issue for historians to explain, however his reluctance to not go public was indicative of all the World War II veteran flag officers who served as Chairman. These ten Chairmen remained apolitical and provided their best military advice, as prescribed in Samuel Huntington's Civilian Objective Control theory.

In 1985, when Admiral Crowe succeeded General Vessey as Chairman, there would be, for the first time a non-World War II veteran to occupy the position. While the first ten Chairmen were talented men who participated in a highly popular war that saw the American Military reach a zenith both in power and prestige, the men who would now occupy the Chairmanship would be veterans of a war which saw the military reach its lowest point in prestige. This low point, which many in the military blamed on the

politicians, would affect how the new breed of Chairman would carry out their duties. Heeding the lessons learned from the Vietnam War would greatly influence the men who would now serve as Chairman. Armed with the “never again” aphorism in regard to the Vietnam War, the conditions were ripe for the new coterie of flag officers to provide stronger and greater influence with the civilian leadership. The gentlemen who occupied the position of Chairman after General Vessey would leverage both their Vietnam War experience and the new responsibilities provided via the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Two Chairmen, General Colin Powell and General Richard Myers would execute their duties in their own unique manners. Both men served their Chairmanship while the military was involved in multiple combat operations. The influence each held with their respective civilian bosses was quite different. This resulted in contrasting civil-military relationships. Reviewing the career paths of both gentlemen leads to an understanding of how each approached the role of Chairman.

#### General Powell Background

General Colin Powell was commissioned an Army Infantry Officer in 1958. He held positions at the battalion and division level during the Vietnam War. Being an infantryman, General Powell personally witnessed the death, destruction and carnage of war. He would carry this experience for the rest of his professional life, always remembering the horribly destructive nature of war. Throughout his career he commanded troops at multiple levels including a four star command at U.S. Forces Command. Prior to being appointed Chairman, he had several tours in the Pentagon and White House culminating in an appointment in 1987 as the National Security Advisor for Ronald Reagan. Prior to serving as the National Security Advisor, he served under Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger and is widely credited in helping him

develop his now famous Weinberger Doctrine. Colin Powell was an intelligent and politically astute general officer that knew how the military operated both inside and outside of the nation's capital. With experience in Vietnam and multiple senior level commands in addition to tours in the White House and the Pentagon, perhaps there was never before a flag officer more prepared to execute the responsibilities of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff than Colin Powell. Armed with the newly passed Goldwater-Nichols Act, General Powell was determined to be a prominent player in the national security arena. During the initial months of his tenure, General Powell remembers his boss, Secretary Cheney telling him, "Your off to a good start as Chairman, your forceful and taking charge—but you tend to funnel all the information coming to me—that's not the way I want it."<sup>20</sup>

### General Powell as Chairman

General Powell was appointed Chairman in 1989, a seminal year for world transformation as the Soviet Empire was falling apart, accentuated with the opening of the Berlin Wall in November of the same year. He realized the strategic landscape was changing and that the military needed to adapt to meet a new national security environment. In response to the growing pressure to reduce the size of the military, General Powell writes, "I was determined to have the JCS drive the military strength."<sup>21</sup> He was not about to let Congress or the Office of the Secretary of Defense determine what end strength should look like. Working diligently with his staff and the services, General Powell developed what was to be called the Base Force. In regard to his strategic thought process, Richard Kohn writes, "Powell thought through a new national security policy for the country, all with out outside help. He easily sold his plan to the White House. Thus in the first two years as Chairman, without guidance from above,

Powell pushed through the most significant change in our military establishment since 1940.”<sup>22</sup> During the Gulf War, he inserted himself between the Combatant Commander in the field, General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander of U.S. Central Command and the Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney. Understanding the Goldwater-Nichols Act purposely placed the Chairman out of the chain of command, and that the Combatant Commanders worked directly for the Secretary of Defense, General Powell deftly placed himself between General Schwarzkopf and the Secretary of Defense. General Powell effectively filtered most information requests from the White House, the Secretary of Defense and Congress that were directed for General Schwarzkopf. He was always in the information flow, and he exploited that aspect of his position. His effort allowed General Schwarzkopf to focus on warfighting. A primary objective of General Powell was in mitigating the impact for the notorious 6,000 mile screw driver, made infamous during the Vietnam War when the White House mulled over locations to bomb in North Vietnam. General Powell was adamant in avoiding the errors of Vietnam. In his memoirs, General Powell writes, “I had been appalled at the docility of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fighting the war in Vietnam without ever pressing the political leaders to lay out clear objectives for them. Before we start talking about how many divisions, carriers and fighter wings we need, I said we have to ask to achieve what end?”<sup>23</sup> The power and influence General Powell held as Chairman was unprecedented. His approach in carrying out his duties as Chairman contrasted with that of Air Force General Richard Myers.

### General Myers Background

General Richard Myers was commissioned an Air Force Officer in 1965. That same year he graduated flight training school. In 1969, he was stationed in Thailand

where he flew multiple combat missions in a F4 Phantom into Vietnam. In his biography, he never mentions stepping foot in Vietnam. He fought his war from the air and when the mission was complete, returned to the airbase in Thailand to be with his wife, who also lived there.<sup>24</sup> Flying combat missions over North Vietnam was perilous, especially when the war dragged on allowing the enemy to vastly improve their Air Force and anti-aircraft capability. General Myers and his wife helped other Air Force families cope with the stress of combat fatalities and the equally stressful issue of Air Force pilots who were prisoners of war. Like General Powell, General Myers would carry the memories of his Vietnam experience throughout his professional life. Throughout his career he commanded at multiple levels including four star commands at United States Space Command and Pacific Air Forces. Prior to being selected Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October of 2001, he served as an assistant to the Chairman in 1996, and later served as the Vice Chairman beginning in September of 2000.

### General Myers as Chairman

General Myers became Chairman immediately following the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. His aviation expertise would prove valuable as the initial combat operations into Afghanistan would be air centric. General Myers was a major advocate in transforming the military; his strategic vision was shaped primarily from two combat tours and extensive time in operational assignments. General Myers writes, "For those of us who served multiple tours of duty during the long Indo-China war, and who later became senior military leaders, the lessons learned from our service were obvious. The collapse of South Vietnam served as a warning that the American National Security establishment had to reinvent itself based on an all volunteer force,

innovative technology, and a more realistic blend of practical strategy and flexible tactics.”<sup>25</sup> During his tour as Vice Chairman, General Myers worked for General Hugh Shelton who was a strong proponent of joint solutions in transforming the military. After the 9/11 attacks, there was additional pressure to accelerate transformation. General Myers writes, “After 9/11, transformation of our military became even more urgent, not just another trendy bureaucratic slogan. It marked the creation of an effective twenty-first U.S. Military through the integration of current and emerging technologies, organizations and concepts. Transformation at its core is about flexible thinking. It takes place in a complex national security arena and is never finished.”<sup>26</sup> In regards to communication with the Combatant Commanders, General Myers did not insert himself between the Secretary of Defense and the CENTCOM Commander. Secretary Rumsfeld routinely spoke directly with his subordinate combatant commanders which followed the command and control relationship directed in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. General Myers however, contends that Secretary Rumsfeld always consulted him or the Vice Chairman on any big decisions. “During the four years of my tenure, he never made an important decision without consulting with me or Pete Pace (Vice Chairman).”<sup>27</sup>

Reviewing the experiences of both Generals Powell and Myers helps explain the how and why they approached the role as Chairman. In one case, we have an officer who experienced war in a very personal manner given the fact that he was on the ground witnessing the bloodshed. When given the opportunity, he acted aggressively with his civilian supervisors in avoiding the errors of a previous war. In comparison, the other officer’s experience in war was perhaps less personal in that he never saw the

carnage since he never stepped foot on Vietnam soil. General Myers' expertise in air operations had limited applicability as both OEF and OIF evolved into counter-insurgency operations. Secretary Rumsfeld initially refused to accept that there was an insurgency in Iraq, a viewpoint to which General Myers did not object. Regardless, he attempted to heed the lessons of the previous war, but took a more pliable approach in working with his civilian supervisors. How did these two approaches affect civil-military relations?

### Civil-Military Relations after the Passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act

In 1993, Richard Kohn wrote an article published in the Naval War College Review titled, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States". In the article he posits that, "the American Military has grown in influence to the point of being able to impose its own perspective on many policies and decisions...I am convinced that civilian control has diminished to the point where it could alter the character of the American government and undermine national defense."<sup>28</sup> In 2003, Eliot Cohen published his book, *Supreme Command* in which he wrote, "It is fair to say that in late 2001, American civil-military relations were in a state of crisis."<sup>29</sup> The Iraq Study Group briefed President Bush in December of 2006 and were compelled to include in their findings a recommendation to create an environment where the senior military would feel comfortable in providing candid advice to the civilian leadership. This recommendation illuminated the fact that numerous senior military officers felt the Pentagon's civilian leadership, beginning with the Secretary, paid minimal attention to their advice. Whether this was perception or fact, it was a lead indicator that civil-military relations were troubled. In 2009, Sarah Sewall and John White published their findings after a comprehensive study on the current state of U.S. Civil-Military Relations.

They concluded, “While not in crisis, civil-military relations are not entirely positive, and they have not functioned as they should have.”<sup>30</sup> These references illustrate a spectrum of opinion on the state of U.S. civil-military relations over the past three administrations.

#### Civil-Military Relations under General Powell

The vicissitudes of civil-military relations is a function of the personalities that occupy the key positions, specifically the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Some of our leading scholars on civil-military relations argue that there is a “crisis” and that national security could possibly be at risk. However, the factors that lead to their “crisis” conclusion are suspect. Richard Kohn, in 1993 wrote, “The stature of the Chairman has grown to a magnitude out of proportion to the legal institutional position.”<sup>31</sup> His conclusions were based primarily on how General Powell influenced national security when he was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Richard Kohn did not like the fact the General Powell was so heavily involved in National Security Policy and that he had such influence with the President, Congress and the media. He felt General Powell constantly overstepped his authority and the Secretary of Defense made minimal effort to abate his power. He writes, “The real problem of civilian control is the relative weight or influence of the military in the decisions the government makes, not only in military policy and war, but in foreign defense, economic and social policy.”<sup>32</sup> Richard Kohn does conclude that the Republic is probably not in danger stating, “If the civil-military relationship varies over time and the relative weight and influence of military and civilian are situational and personal, then the system is our savior.”<sup>33</sup> Richard Kohn is obviously a proponent of making sure that the power of the military is firmly held in check by the civilian leadership, and when that power and influence drifts too much toward the military end of the spectrum, steps

must be taken to right the course. Richard Kohn likens the role of civilian control of the military to card playing, "Civilians possess not only all the face cards and all the trumps, but make up all the rules of the games."<sup>34</sup> Few would argue that civilians must not be in charge of the military. The political leadership possesses a strategic vision that may not be apparent to the military. Both Richard Kohn and Eliot Cohen agree that a military coup has never been an issue in the history of the United States Military. Eliot Cohen writes, "The overall record of the American Military remains one of complete subordination and loyalty to the Constitution."<sup>35</sup> If both scholars agree that the state of the Republic is not in danger nor has it ever been then why so much concern with the state of U.S. civil-military relations? Both scholars argue that when the military appears to have too much influence over their civilian supervisors, the state of civil-military relations is in crisis. Richard Kohn wrote extensively on how Colin Powell became the most powerful military leader since George C. Marshall. He wrote, "Powell's power had many sources, his experience, his shrewdness and adeptness, his personal charm and charisma, the web of contact of people who knew and trusted him, his obscurity-to-fame personal story and his race."<sup>36</sup> Richard Kohn believed General Powell's influence was not in the best interest of the country.

Civil-military relations have and always will be a function of personalities. It all begins with the Commander in Chief and follows through the Secretary of Defense and crosses over into the military via the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chairman plays a pivotal role in shaping civil-military relations. In their research, Sewell et al., write that relations between the civilian leadership and military leadership begin with the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Sewell

quotes a former Secretary of Defense who, “attributes the health of the civil-military partnership to the Chairman of the JCS.”<sup>37</sup> With so much written about the toxic command climate introduced by Secretary Rumsfeld, what was General Myers doing to mitigate the air of distrust?

### Civil-Military Relations under General Myers

In General Myers autobiography, he discusses his thoughts on civil-military relations. “Before becoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I had often reflected on the often-complex civil-military relationship. Fortunately, I had met Dr. Dick Kohn during my year at the Army War College in 1980. He sent me a couple chapters of Eliot Cohen’s book *Supreme Command. The Commander in Chief or the Secretary of Defense makes the decisions. And unless they are illegal or immoral, the military must carry out the orders of the President or the Secretary. To do otherwise would be to impose our own military judgment on what are political decisions, an action that’s fundamentally inconsistent with our constitution or the laws of the land.*”<sup>38</sup> Prior to assuming the duties of Chairman, General Myers took counsel in the writings and advice of civil-military relations scholars that have been discussed in this analysis, Richard Kohn and Eliot Cohen. General Myers’ record as Chairman indicates he followed their advice in that he remained apolitical, ensured he did not overstep his authority and approached his boss in a docile manner. To this day, even with the arguably failing strategies that were implemented during his Chairmanship, both in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Richard Myers has remained apolitical and loyal to his old boss, Secretary Rumsfeld.

In multiple interviews and in his autobiography, General Myers makes no apologies for planning failures in Operation Iraqi Freedom, specifically the post kinetic

operations know as phase IV. In a 2005 interview with Jim Leher, Myers comments on the phase IV planning; “Well, there was a lot of planning done for the postwar environment, I will say that. There was an awful lot of planning that was done for that, every possible contingency was thought about and there were plans laid for it. .... A lot of planning was done on the civilian side of the house, not necessarily on the military side of the house, but Central Command knew they were going to be responsible for the phase of operations we call Phase 4.”<sup>39</sup> Throughout his autobiography, General Myers makes several disparaging remarks about General Tommy Franks. There are multiple references to how General Franks refused to address phase IV planning. In one of the most disconcerting accusations, General Myers accuses General Franks of not having his head in the game because he was planning his upcoming retirement. General Myers writes, “At the end of major combat in May, Franks expressed his intention to retire as soon as possible. Even though General John Abizaid, his deputy, would move up to replace Franks, I’m sure we paid a price in the quality of our decisions on organizational structure by having Franks distracted.”<sup>40</sup> When the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff accuses a Combatant Commander of not having his head in the game and essentially disregarding a directive to plan for phase IV, unity of effort within the senior ranks of the military is at risk. Apparently General Myers felt it was necessary to ensure the blame for lack of phase IV planning was placed with the Combatant Commander. It is hard to imagine General Powell publically blaming General Schwarzkopf for problems during the 1991 Gulf War. In their respective autobiographies, both Generals Powell and Schwarzkopf mention disagreeing with each other but neither tossed the other under the proverbial bus, like General Myers did to

General Franks. He makes no references to mistakes made by the Office of the Secretary of Defense or the Joint Staff. General Myers, along with Doug Feith, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, and Eliot Cohen praise Secretary Rumsfeld repeatedly in their respective books. Eliot Cohen writes, “The planning and conduct of the Iraqi war of 2003 followed the model of the unequal dialogue, and though it may have been painful, it yielded a swift and relatively cheap victory on the battlefield. In that respect, at the very least, Rumsfeld won his war.”<sup>41</sup>

After reviewing the tenures of both Chairmen, it is clear that civil-military relations played a prominent role in national security. With General Powell, the civilian authorities provided the military with the requested support while providing minimal oversight on operational planning. This was a direct result of General Powell and his determination to not let the civilian leadership take the country to war before all conditions were met for a successful campaign. His memories of Vietnam cemented his fortitude to not sacrifice American lives needlessly. Under General Myers, the civilian authorities overrode military planners and pushed the country to war before all conditions were set, most specifically in regard to phase IV planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom. General Myers took no action objecting to the Secretary of Defense’s micromanaging and his decision to accelerate the timeline for combat operations before all forces were in place. General Myers apparent acquiescence to his civilian boss did not bode well for overall civil-military relations.

### Conclusion

The role of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is difficult and complex. In one regard, the Chairman must speak on behalf on the entire uniformed military, for he represents every man and woman who have answered the call to serve. He must

present his views to the civilian authorities in hopes of influencing their decisions regarding the military. Developing a relationship of trust between military and civilian authorities is imperative. The Chairman must be resolute in representing the military, even when the issue may be controversial with his civilian supervisors. If the Chairman develops a relationship that appears to be too pliable, he risks losing the trust of the military. He must establish a balance that results in a trusting relationship both with the military leadership and his civilian supervisors. Gaining and maintaining confidence with both parties develops positive and productive civil-military relations. Positive civil-military relations are essential for nation security.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dale R Herspring, *The Pentagon And the Presidency: Civil-military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 409.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, co-chairs, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, December 2006, [http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq\\_study\\_group\\_report](http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report) (accessed October 14, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today", *Naval War College Review*, (Summer 2002): 12.

<sup>4</sup> Herspring, *The Pentagon And the Presidency: Civil-military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush*, 409.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1957), 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press 2002), 4

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Mathew Moten, "A Broken Dialogue," in *American Civil-Military Relations, the Soldier and the State in a New Era*, ed. Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Marybeth Ulrich, "Infusing Normative Civil-Military Relations Principals in the Officer Corps," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Loyd Matthews (New York, McGraw Hill Publishing, 2005), 656.

<sup>14</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Historical Study, *A Concise History of the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 1942-1979*, Historical Division Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff July 1980, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Richard M. Meinhart, *Chairmen Joint Chiefs of Staff's Leadership Using the Joint Strategic Planning System in the 1990's* (U.S Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2003),6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*,8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*,9.

<sup>18</sup> Michael S. Bell, *The Evolving Role of the CJCS and his Dedicated Staff*, (U.S Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, May 2004): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Herspring, *The Pentagon And the Presidency: Civil-military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush*,409.

<sup>20</sup> Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York, Random House, 1995), 425.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,437.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Kohn, "Out of Control: the Crisis in Civil-Military Relations" *National Interest*, No 35 (Spring 1994):3-17.

<sup>23</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*,464.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon: Serving on the Front Lines of National Security* (Threshold Edition, 2009), 44.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,60.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*,2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*,62.

<sup>28</sup> Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today," 1.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 226.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Sewall and John P. White, "Parameters in Partnership: U.S. Civil-Military Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", *Harvard Kennedy School Project on Civil-military Relations*, Cambridge (2009), 122.

<sup>31</sup> Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today," 16.

<sup>32</sup> Kohn, "Out of Control: the Crisis in Civil-Military Relations" 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.,15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.,14.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 241.

<sup>36</sup> Kohn, "Out of Control: the Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," 7.

<sup>37</sup> Sewall et al "Parameters in Partnership: U.S. Civil-Military Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century",14.

<sup>38</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 184.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs discusses his four year tour as Chairman, Interviewed by Jim Lehrer, Online News Hour, July 12, 2005

<sup>40</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 253.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 240.

