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Civil Discourse or Civil War?
The Influence of Civil-Military Relations on Iraq and Afghanistan War Strategy

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations

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Signature: _____

4 May 2011

Contents

Abstract

Strained relations between U.S. civilian leaders and operational commanders have hindered the development of a coherent policy for Operations IRAQI and ENDURING FREEDOM (OIF/OEF) in Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to demonstrate a connection between failed civil-military relations and its resultant impact on strategy, this paper will describe the state of civil-military relations during the preliminary and execution phases of the two most recent wars in the Middle East. It will then analyze how those relations have hindered the U.S.'s ability to formulate war strategy. Little research has been conducted to examine *how* the civilian-military relationship influences the formulation and execution of strategy and policy. In the U.S., strong civil-military relations depend on four core principles: the recognition of military subordination to civilian leaders; the willingness of military leaders to offer candid advice; the ability for civilian and military leaders to engage each other in a respectful, professional manner; and an environment that fosters trust and collaboration. Moreover, civil-military relations can negatively affect strategy in five ways: if there exists a "broad line of demarcation" between civilian and military leaders; if service cultures influence the collaborative process; if statutory changes, such as those brought about by Goldwater-Nichols, inherently alter the civil-military relationship; if politicization of the officer corps forces a disconnect in the upper echelons of leadership; and if a breakdown in policy cooperation occurs. Drawing on examples from OIF/OEF, civilian leaders and operational commanders should realize that the nature of their interactions has a real, measurable effect on the policies they produce. Recommendations for bridging the civilian-military divide—with the goal of creating stronger policy—are discussed.

A great politician is not of necessity a great military leader.
--General George Patton[1]

When cutting staff at the Pentagon, don't eliminate the thin layer that assures civilian control.
--Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld[2]

Entangled in two asymmetric wars half way around the globe for the past decade, the challenges faced by top U.S. civilian leaders and operational commanders have been nearly insurmountable. But at precisely the time when unity of command was needed most, newspaper headlines painted a grim picture of reality: "Mideast Commander Retires After Irking Bosses"; Defense Secretary's "Design for [Iraq] War Criticized on the Battlefield"; Commanding General "Seeks Military-Civilian Unity in Afghanistan."[3] To be sure, this wartime reporting reads more like an obituary page chronicling the swift downfall of myriad senior military officers' careers. However, despite the disharmony permeating the highest ranks of both the government and the military, few critics appear to be asking if the U.S. can afford to maintain such an acrimonious *status quo*. If civil-military relations truly are "the hidden dimension of strategy,"[4] have top U.S. decision-makers failed to recognize that the manner in which they interact may have a tangible affect on the policy they produce?

Since the time of Cincinnatus—the citizen-soldier who successfully led the Roman Legions and then humbly retired to his farm rather than accept the title of Caesar—the relationship between military operational commanders and the civilian leaders under whom they serve has shaped the nature of armed conflict. Writing in his 1832 treatise, *On War*, the Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz, observed, "War is nothing more than a continuation of politics by other means." It serves to follow, then, that the nature of personal and professional interactions between civilian and military leaders provides a backdrop against which war strategy is formulated. Eliot Cohen, whose 2003 book, *Supreme Command*,

analyzes the relationship between four past heads of state and their top wartime commander, notes, "For Clausewitz there is no field of military action that might not be touched by political considerations."[5] Ten years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan validate his argument.

Indeed, strained relations between U.S. civilian leaders and operational commanders have hindered the development of a coherent policy for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, in order to demonstrate that such a connection—and its impact on strategy—does, in fact, exist, it is necessary first to analyze the state of civil-military relations during the prelude to, and execution of, the two most recent wars in the Middle East, and then to consider how those relations have affected the U.S.'s ability to formulate war strategy.

Part I. What constitutes positive civil-military relations and what did OIF/OEF reveal?

Little research has been conducted to examine the less clearly defined, yet considerably important, aspect of *how* the civilian-military relationship influences the formulation and execution of strategy and policy.[6] As Naval War College Professor Mackubin Owens notes, "Unfortunately very little has been written on the relationship between civil-military relations and success in war. But difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the issue to the fore."[7] Though some authors, notably Thomas Ricks and Bob Woodward, have reported extensively on top-level strategy sessions for the U.S.'s two most current campaigns, Operations IRAQI and ENDURING FREEDOM (OIF/OEF), they primarily discuss personal interactions between civilian leaders and operational commanders within a larger context and do not examine the intrinsic connection between the nature of those interactions and their effect on the wars' strategy and operational plans.

As the term suggests, the civilian-military relationship is a partnership; anchored by doctrine—namely, the U.S. Constitution and Federal Code—and buoyed by trust. In a representative democracy, such a system takes shape by granting elected and appointed civilian leaders the power to decide when and if to go to war, while simultaneously giving military commanders considerable autonomy in determining the manner in which to fight. It is the ultimate form of "command by negation"; a system in which the military adheres to a strict code of subordination to their political leaders, and where even operational and tactical decision-making can be reversed by civilian higher-ups.[8]

Perhaps the most sacred tenet of American civil-military relations—*military subordination*—is the notion that both civilian and military leaders should acknowledge each other's role as established in the Constitution; specifically, that while commanders are obligated to offer their best professional advice, their civilian "masters" are not bound to heed it. Such a dynamic can frustrate the military because as an organization, it is wholly subservient to individuals who, often times, have little (if any) experience in dealing with military matters. Indeed, civilian leaders "may be politically astute and militarily naïve…[while operational commanders] are militarily expert but often politically naïve. Thus, in this most important of relationships, the stage is set for a clash of cultures."[9]

Traditional study of civil-military relations has had a "myopic focus"[10] on civilian control over the military, and theorists such as Samuel Huntington and Richard Kohn have focused their analyses on *how* civilian leaders can best achieve that control. However, as OIF/OEF demonstrated (perhaps surprisingly, to some), this sacred principle was never really placed in serious question—a notable accomplishment considering the high turnover of key civilian policymakers (President, Secretaries of State and Defense, National Security

Advisor, even the parties controlling Congress) during critical stages in the war. Indeed, the early years of the war have been described as "a period of political dominance" over the military.[11] As will be shown, although disagreements within the long corridors of the Pentagon have made it to the front pages of our nation's newspapers, such "clashes" largely focused on strategy and policy formulation and not on the underlying validity of civilian control over the military. An exception, and the "first evidence that civil-military relations were broken was the torrent of leaks that came out in the run-up to the war from senior officers within the planning process who were unhappy with [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld's numerous interventions into the details of the operation."[12]

The second core principle that is a prerequisite for well-oiled civil-military relations is the ability for military leaders to be *candid*; in short, the freedom for operational commanders to offer their honest, professional assessment (in the appropriate setting) to legislative and executive policymakers without fear of retribution. Kohn notes, "When the relationship works—when there is candor, argument, and mutual respect—the result aligns national interest and political purpose with military strategy, operations, and tactics."[13] Unfortunately, as the U.S. embarked on war in Iraq and Afghanistan, such a dynamic was severely lacking.

Adding to his perceived susceptibility towards micro-management and the strained relationships he had with his senior-most officers, Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, even moved to stifle debate about the wars' prosecution occurring outside the Pentagon.[14] In the clearest example, General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in February, 2003 that "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers" would be needed to stabilize post-war Iraq. Wolfowitz

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immediately—and publicly—dismissed Shinseki's ultimately prophetic pronouncement as "wildly off the mark," asserting, "I am reasonably certain that [the Iraqis] will greet us as liberators and that will help us keep requirements down."[15] As historian Michael Desch notes, in the prelude to the war in Iraq, "Civilian willingness to challenge the professional military on tactical and operational matters…had a chilling effect on other Army officers…and was not conducive to proper civil-military relations."[16] The Pentagon civilian leadership's point was clear: military judgment should mirror policy aims.

Shortly after Shinseki's appearance in Congress, Rumsfeld put intense pressure on General Tommy Franks, the Commander of U.S. Central Command who was charged with devising the OIF operational plan, to reduce the number of troops called for in the initial invasion and follow-on occupation, even going so far as to reject mobilization plans until he was satisfied. Later, when lawmakers and the media scrutinized the decision to go to war with a skeletal force, "Rumsfeld blamed the general, asserting that 'Franks made a call and he made a judgment that…they [would] not be needed and it would not be appropriate.'"[17]

There can be no doubt that the ability for a military commander to be candid relies heavily on an environment of mutual trust: "I've got your back" is more than a simple catchphrase to these officers; it is a bold statement of professional support and personal reassurance. And, though the military's advice will not necessarily be superior, civilian leaders should take caution not to claim outright superiority in military expertise.[18] Robert Gates, who succeeded Rumsfeld at the Department of Department (DoD), pointedly told West Point cadets in 2008, "If as an officer—listen to me very carefully—if as an officer you don't tell blunt truths or create an environment where candor is encouraged, then you've done yourself and the institution a disservice."[19]

Third, and in addition to the concept of military subordination and candor, positive civil-military relations also demand that both civilian and military leaders engage one another in a *respectful*, professional manner. While seemingly an intuitive behavioral maxim instilled by one's mother at an early age, cordiality was lacking during OIF/OEF. "Respect" and "professionalism" are difficult variables to quantify; nonetheless, examples abound of clashes between civilian and military leaders that seemed far better suited for the tabloids than for the war rooms. For example, Rumsfeld displayed outward contempt towards many of the officers assigned to his, and the Joint Staff's, planning teams. It reached a point in early 2003 that "many U.S. military officers, especially in the Army, view Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld the way most Europeans do—as headstrong, abrasive, and arrogant. Mr. Rumsfeld, in turn, appears to view many Army officers and unimaginative."[20] Moreover, Rumsfeld became comfortable giving off the impression—both in private and, increasingly, in public—that he "enjoyed putting [senior officers] down," which was hardly conducive to a productive working relationship with his senior military advisors.[21] The tipping point came in 2006, in the now-famous "Revolt of the Generals": "Several retired Army and Marine Corps generals publicly and harshly criticized Secretary Rumsfeld…their language was intemperate, indeed contemptuous. The seemingly orchestrated character of these attacks suggested that civil-military disharmony had reached a new and dangerous level."[22]

The fourth, and final, key to good-working civil-military relations is open *collaboration* in order to ensure that all participants are reading off the same sheet of strategic or operational music. Similar to the issues mentioned above, there is considerable evidence that cooperation was significantly lacking during the strategic planning, and operational execution, stages of OIF/OEF. On the civilian side, Rumsfeld began excluding

his operational commanders from taking part in critical defense reviews, "save as a kind of uniformed research assistants."[23] Combined with his open distrust of many of the Army's senior leadership, and with his authoritarian leadership style, the military was rapidly excised from planning the very operational and tactical missions they would be tasked to carry out.

In fairness, the Defense Secretary was not the only one to blame. While Rumsfeld was alienating the senior officer corps in Washington, L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq, "had a deeply strained relationship with the coalition commander," Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez.[24] Later, in Afghanistan, both the Ambassador, Karl Eikenberry (himself a retired three-star Army general and former battlefield commander in the country), and the U.S. envoy to the region, Richard Holbrooke (himself a lifelong diplomat), had a contentious relationship with the ground commander, General Stanley McChrystal, who headed the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). Indeed, there existed a "chill" between Eikenberry and McChrystal that apparently dated back years. Moreover, after McChrystal made a public plea for an Afghani "surge," Eikenberry, possibly upset at not being consulted during McChrystal's strategic assessment, sent a cable—soon leaked— back to Washington that questioned the efficacy of such an operational outlook.[25] (The Ambassador is also reported to have a strained relationship with McChrystal's successor, General David Petraeus, who has "kept his distance from Eikenberry"[26]). To say the least, collaboration was hard to come by in Iraq and Afghanistan for entirely too long.

In addition to failed personal relationships, there also existed a sizable divide between top civilian leaders and operational commanders in terms of which theater strategy would be most effective. For example, Admiral William Fallon, the U.S. Central Commander from 2007-2008, gave an interview to *Esquire* magazine in which he openly questioned the

brinksmanship-like stance the U.S. seemed to be playing with Iran.[27] These pronouncements

angered the neo-conservatives in the Bush administration, who felt they had their military

options unilaterally wiped off the table by a combatant commander, and the situation

illustrated a disconnect between the two sides that resulted from a failure to collaborate on

greater Middle East policy.

Problems of cooperation on OIF/OEF policy continued into the Obama

administration—namely, in October, 2009, when General McChrystal gave a speech in

London to the International Institute of Strategic Studies think tank in which he asserted that

only a full-scale counterinsurgency strategy—requiring tens of thousands more troops—

would succeed in Afghanistan. *Prima facie*, such a recommendation seemed legitimate;

however, McChrystal gave the speech while the administration was conducting a wide-

ranging OEF strategic assessment, and his opinion effectively "boxed-in" the President,

limiting the courses of action he could reasonably pursue.[28] "The president had already

agreed to 21,000 more troops and a request for 40,000 more was on its way. This was

probably one of the biggest shocks a president could receive, hauntingly reminiscent of the

June 7, 1965 request by General William Westmoreland for 41,000 more troops in

Vietnam."[29] In short, McChrystal and the administration were at odds over which strategy

would work best, yet neither side was willing to forge common ground.

Part II. Have strained civil-military relations affected OIF/OEF strategy?

Much has been written about the U.S.'s "strategic deficit" and the dearth of grand

strategic planning in OIF/OEF—Kohn calls Iraq "the metaphor for an absence of strategy."[30]

But what correlation exists between fractured civil-military relations and this failure to

produce strategy? Kohn observes that all aspects of strategic policy are, in some way, intrinsically linked to civil-military relations. "No decision in war, no military policy proposed to or considered by the Congress, no military operation—nothing in the military realm—occurs that does not derive in some way from the relationship between civilians…and the military leadership."[31] Five reasons can be identified as to why there has been a "failure of American civil-military relations to generate strategy."[32]

First, at the onset of the war, there existed an antiquated view of civil-military relations, one where civilian leaders and military commanders distanced themselves from the other because each possesses separate responsibilities and exercises different authority. There is considerable evidence that Rumsfeld shared this "belief that there is a clear line of demarcation between civilians who determine the goals of the war and the uniformed military who then conduct the actual fighting."[33] Indeed, "Rumsfeld believed that his first task was to reassert civilian control over the military—control that he believed had been lost during the Clinton administration."[34] The Pentagon quickly became a contentious autocracy in which the neo-conservative political leaders perceived the military as unruly, rebellious, and naïve, and the military believed the civilian leadership to be aloof, inexperienced, and intractable.

The second reason that splintered civil-military relations affected OIF/OEF strategy was the overarching influence of service culture on the collaborative process. Carl Builder was the first theorist to describe the phenomenon that each service espouses a unique organizational culture with varying personalities, identities, behaviors, and interests—all of which reveal "their approaches to military strategy, planning, and analysis."[35] As a result, each service's culture "exerts a strong influence on civil-military relations," which can

constrain or impede policy development.[36] Moreover, culture is linked to service doctrine,

which shapes the structure of each organization differently and prescribes varying guidelines

for use of force.[37]

Perhaps the clearest example of service culture's influence in molding war strategy

was the inability of the Army to adapt to the asymmetric guerilla-style warfare it faced in

Iraq in 2003. Writing in the *Armed Forces Journal* in 2007, then-active duty Lieutenant

Colonel Paul Yingling notes that—much like in Vietnam—the pre- and immediately post-

September 11, 2001 Army was entirely focused on fighting high-intensity, technologically

advanced, conventional nation-on-nation ground wars. The Army was a stagnant

organization that "fought the global war on terrorism for the first five years with a

counterinsurgency doctrine that was last revised in the Reagan administration."[38] The Army

lacked adequate post-conflict reconstruction or security force development guidance even

though repeated "stability operations" in the 1990s essentially foreshadowed this type of

fighting. Yingling continues, "At the dawn of the 21st century, the U.S. is fighting brutal,

adaptive insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq, while our armed forces have spent the

preceding decade having done little to prepare for such conflicts."[39]

This nearsighted cultural focus on conventional warfare strained civil-military

relations because, with a few heroic exceptions, the General officer corps seemingly

abdicated its responsibility to properly advise civilian leaders on the threat the nation faced.

As H.R. McMaster describes in his seminal work on the subject, *Dereliction of Duty*, this

colossal failure in leadership mirrored operational commanders' naïveté, ineptitude, and

inadaptability in dealing with these same transformative issues in Vietnam.[40]

The third reason that unstable civil-military relations have inherently affected the development of OIF/OEF strategy is the impact of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act, which emphasized "jointness" among the services and fundamentally changed the way that operational commanders interact with civilian policymakers.[41] The Goldwater-Nichols Act effectively increased the power of geographic and functional combatant commanders, and of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, but it also simultaneously diminished the role of the service chiefs. Whereas the Chairman was once relatively powerless—relegated to forwarding the service chiefs' policy recommendations on to the Defense Secretary and President—he now had the authority to make decisions of his own. By consequence, "the generals and admirals [of the Joint Chiefs] had been reduced to creating plans rather than participating in deliberations" with senior civilian policymakers, thus altering the nature of their relationship.[42] Moreover, while Goldwater-Nichols did not eliminate the cultural biases of the individual services, it did transfer these issues from the administrative service chiefs to the newly empowered operational combatant commanders.[43]

Inadvertently, Goldwater-Nichols also redrew the "line of demarcation" between military and civilian leaders by "reinforcing the idea that there is an autonomous realm of military action within which civilians have no role. The result of such disjunction between the military and political realms is that war plans may not be integrated with national policy."[44] Moreover, the legislation reflected—or, as some would argue, *caused*—a cultural shift in the policy arena: civilian expertise in national security affairs decreased while the military was forced to become better educated professionally and more astute politically.[45] Combined with the fact that combatant commanders were increasingly being employed as regional ambassadors—encroaching on a traditional State Department mission carried out by

civilian Foreign Service diplomats—it became clear that the legislation marked a paradigm shift for how policymakers and commanders operated.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan illustrate the Goldwater-Nichols Act's influence on civil-military relations and strategy. For example, in November, 2001—as the U.S. was beginning its war in Afghanistan—Secretary Rumsfeld worked directly with General Franks, U.S. CENTCOM Commander, to draw up plans for a potential invasion of Iraq.[46] This is a clear case of the senior civilian leader in the Pentagon circumventing the Joint Chiefs and instead choosing to coordinate operational plans directly with the lead theater commander.

Additionally, shortly after the U.S.'s "Shock and Awe" campaign in Iraq in 2003, civilian leaders made a unilateral decision to disband the Iraqi Ba'athist army. "That decision, as much a military one as political, was arrived at without a canvas of the Joint Chiefs for their input. Some 400,000 men went home" without so much as a basic reintegration plan.[47] Again, the service chiefs were intentionally cut out of the decision-making loop, and the outcome—which proved to be one of the largest strategic blunders of the war—haunted the chances for a quick or lasting victory. In fact, as Dale Herspring writes in *The Pentagon and the Presidency*, "Many of the problems encountered in the aftermath of the invasion could have been avoided had it not been for the determination of the civilian leadership in the Pentagon to control everything in Iraq."[48]

Finally, President Bush frequently consulted directly with General Petraeus, who commanded both Multi-National Force—Iraq (MNF-I) and CENTCOM, thereby pushing the Joint Chiefs to the decision-making sideline. Petraeus "enjoyed direct and regular access to the [Bush] White House" and, while this was largely a function of the strong personal bond forged between Bush and Petraeus, it was enabled by the organizational changes brought

about by Goldwater-Nichols. Owens notes, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff are responsible for integrating theater strategy and national policy. But if they are marginalized, as they were during much of the time during the Bush administration, such integration does not occur."[49]

The fourth reason that strained civil-military relations have negatively influenced OIF/OEF policy is the perception of an increasing trend of partisanship within the officer corps and the growing perception that civilian leaders are politicizing senior military officers in order to further their own political objectives. Lawrence Korb, a retired naval officer and former Assistant Secretary of Defense under President Reagan, asserted, "President George W. Bush and his appointees have used military professionals to support their political agenda."[50] Bush's hyper-political administration employed its senior officers (largely viewed as nonpartisan, credible, and affable by the public) as mouthpieces to advocate for certain war strategies, positions, or policies—in short, it was an attempt by civilian leaders to co-opt the military in order to further a policy aim.[51]

Similarly, scholars have identified unprecedented levels of partisanship and political association in the modern officer corps.[52] This inherently changes the civilian-military relationship because officers—whose professional ethos demands that they remain apolitical—begin applying partisan biases when dealing with their civilian bosses. Dr. Douglas Macgregor, a retired Army Colonel and West Point classmate of General McChrystal, observed after McChrystal's firing, "The senior ranks are politicized in ways never seen in the history of the United States. The top bureaucrats in uniform—that is, the top generals and admirals—are tied to neoconservative political circles in Washington, DC in ways that did not exist before 2001."[53] Furthermore, there has also been speculation that Petraeus would seek the Republican presidential nomination in 2012, and that President

Obama's decision to nominate him as ISAF Commander was a "tactical move" that embodied the notion of "keeping your friends close, and your enemies closer."[54]

However, it is important to distinguish between partisanship and politicization, and political savvy and sophistication. Kohn recalls, "Throughout their history, the American armed forces have maneuvered for budgets, roles, and missions—policies that benefited their warfighting capacity."[55] Senior officers are regular participants in congressional hearings and National Security Council meetings, where their ability to persuade and cajole, to bargain and compromise, makes them key lobbyists for their service. To be sure, as then-General Colin Powell said, "The fact is there isn't a general in Washington who isn't political, not if he's going to be successful, because that's the nature of our system."[56]

The fifth, final, and most likely reason that broken civil-military relations negatively influenced OIF/OEF strategy stemmed from the complete breakdown of trust and collaboration between policy-makers and operational commanders. As discussed, personal confidence and professional cooperation are absolutely essential variables for constructive civil-military relations to exist and, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated, "the lack of trust between the civilian leadership and the military has its most detrimental effect on strategy making and military effectiveness."[57]

Ten years of complex irregular warfare illustrate that the gap between military leaders and civilian policymakers has widened, hindering honest discourse, consistent messaging, and collaborative policy formulation. Owens observes, "The real lessons of the post-9/11 era are less about the civilian authorities dictating policy to the military than about the tenor of the dialogue and the quality of the policy decisions and strategic plans that emerge from that dialogue."[58] At the beginning of the war, blame for this discordant dichotomy was due, in

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large part, to Secretary Rumsfeld's inhospitable management style and uncongenial interactions with his senior officers. Richard Kohn, a leading military ethics scholar who staunchly and steadfastly advocates for strong civilian control over the military, acknowledges, "Nearly six years of Donald Rumsfeld's intimidation and abuse have encouraged in the officer corps a conviction that military leaders ought to—are obliged to—push back against their civilian masters."[59] Such rebellious attitudes have percolated throughout the chain of command's upper echelon because Rumsfeld engendered such "disgust" within the senior officer corps that he "has rendered *all* politicians suspect in the imaginations of generals and admirals."[60]

Though Rumsfeld can be given a lion's share of the blame for begetting such a breach between civilian and military leaders, examples abound of the failure of others to collaborate on OIF/OEF strategy and operational plans. For example, General David McKiernan, who preceded McChrystal as ISAF Commander and who was responsible for directing the war in Afghanistan while a majority of the U.S.'s attention was on Iraq, was effectively fired in May, 2009 in part because senior civilian policymakers did not believe he was prosecuting the war strongly enough. At the time, Secretary Gates tersely stated that "fresh eyes were needed…[and that] a new approach was probably in our best interest," but evidence also pointed to the fact that McKiernan was not on the same strategic page with the President or Secretary of Defense.[61]

While McChrystal was pulled from his post at Joint Special Operations Command and placed in charge of Afghanistan under renewed public and political support, the strained relationships he had in Kabul (with Ambassadors Eikenberry and Holbrooke) and in Washington (with Vice President Joe Biden, who was a key advisor on Afghanistan strategy)

hampered his ability to effectively produce, and execute, a successful wartime policy. The

episode first played out in London, where McChrystal, in his October, 2009 speech,

unabashedly called on the President to dedicate 40,000 more troops—a "number that was

being debated on live television before it was being discussed in the Situation Room"—to

Afghanistan to wage a full-scale counterinsurgency, at precisely the same time that the

President and his National Security Council were debating the merits of a limited versus full-

scale approach.[62] Charles Allen, a retired Army Colonel and Professor at the Army War

College, writes, "McChrystal seemed at odds with the potential policy direction by referring

to Afghanistan as 'Chaosistan'…and providing a bleak assessment of success if the al-Qaida-

centric counterterrorist strategy was adopted"—such as the "Counterterrorism Plus" strategy

that Biden promoted.[63] To those in the West Wing of the White House, the speech appeared

to be a classic, calculated attempt to limit the president's strategic and operational options

and provided all the proof they needed that "the military was on a search-and-destroy mission

aimed at the president."[64]

Such suspicions were affirmed after McChrystal gave unprecedented access to a

Rolling Stone reporter into his inner circle of planners and advisors. What emerged was

shocking: openly disparaging remarks made against the top civilian political leaders,

including Vice President Biden and Ambassadors Eikenberry and Holbrooke. The episode

demonstrated the "urgent need to recalibrate the relationship between democratic politicians

and military commanders" and President Obama quickly fired McChrystal "not on the basis

of 'any difference in policy' nor out of 'any sense of personal insult,' but because the article

had eroded the trust and undermined 'the civilian control of the military that's at the core of

our democratic system.'"[65]

Finally, despite his personal popularity, General Petraeus has also pushed the acceptable boundaries of civil-military relations, which have left some questioning the resolve of the U.S. in Afghanistan. For example, Petraeus's appointment to succeed McChrystal in June, 2010 momentarily "united civilian and military leaders in Washington, who had been at war with each other over the unfolding disaster in Afghanistan."[66] However, the cordial civilian-military honeymoon did not last long; in his confirmation hearing testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Petraeus declared that he "would not make too much" out of the president's scheduled December, 2010 policy review and proposed July, 2011 commencement of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan—nearly the same sentiment shared by McChrystal in London a year earlier.[67] This clear lack of policy collaboration between top civilian leaders and operational commanders produced an ambiguous war strategy and fractured unity of effort. Citing this probability of strategic failure, Cohen concludes, "In wartime it is in the interest of both statesman and soldier to minimize their conflict in public."[68]

Part III. Can crises in civil-military relations be averted in the future?

Bedrock principles of salubrious civil-military relations—candor, respect, and collaboration—were fractured during OIF/OEF. Though it is illogical to assume that civil-military relations will be measurably superior in the future, operational commanders and the civilian leaders for whom they work should realize that the nature of their interactions could have a palpable, profound, and permanent affect on the policies they work to produce. Owens observes, "We in the U.S. think the only way to change something is to alter the organizational wire diagram. But civil-military relations does not lend itself easily to

statutory prescriptions."[69] Nevertheless, there are seven recommendations that, if adhered to, may result in stronger U.S. civil-military relations and sounder strategy.

First, operational commanders must continue to recognize—*as a given*—the importance of civilian control over the military. Accordingly, they must also acknowledge that in the American system of civil-military relations, "civilian leaders have a right to be wrong."[70] Though this paper describes numerous times in which civilian policymakers were wildly off the mark in their perceptions, predictions, and assumptions, military commanders simply cannot allow the negative experiences of OIF/OEF to undermine the entire system of civil-military relations and nearly two and a half centuries of precedent and tradition. Second, and relatedly, military officers should strive to avoid any taint of political partisanship while working in their official capacity. Such behavior "undermines public confidence in the objectivity and loyalty of the military, and by association, in the policies of their civilian masters."[71]

Third, civilian policymakers need to narrow the country's growing civilian-military gap. Both Secretary Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen have been outspoken in highlighting this sociological trend. Speaking at the National Defense University on January 10, 2011, Mullen admitted that despite a reservoir of public support and "goodwill," "America doesn't know its military. And the United States military doesn't know America."[72] One obvious remedy, debated for years and advocated by Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam, would be to institute a system of compulsory service—military or otherwise—in order to address, resolve, or countermand a slew of social and political maladies.[73]

Obligatory service is both legislatively extreme and politically sensitive; however, the "Department of Defense must undertake a series of initiatives to improve civilian understanding of military affairs."[74] To that end, there are four more subtle approaches that should be considered. For example, DoD could increase awareness of military culture and issues by augmenting its educational and media outreach to the public, as well as expanding recruitment opportunities. Additionally, the military should bolster its curriculum at the service academies, ROTC, staff and war colleges, and flag and general officer symposiums to include a study of the theory and practice of civil-military relations. Moreover, the military should consider increasing the number of officers eligible to pursue graduate degrees at civilian institutions and to participate in fellowships at think tanks and federal agencies. Such experiences not only provide the military with a "return on investment" by populating the officer ranks with educated, worldly individuals, but they also forge lifelong bonds between civilian and military personnel that will strengthen throughout the course of their respective careers.

Finally, because the creation of national security policy "depends so heavily on professional and personal relationships among the uniformed and civilian leaderships, future administrations should institutionalize procedures for team-building between political appointees and their military counterparts and subordinates."[75] President Obama's April, 2011 decision to appoint General McChrystal from retirement to lead a federal advisory board on military families is a good first step: McChrystal himself acknowledged that the "invitation to return to public service should be seen as proof to those in uniform, and to the American public, that there were no hard feelings on either side of the civilian-military divide."[76]

Ultimately, strengthening both civil-military relations and American strategy requires a decent environment where candor, respect, and collaboration flourish. Owens writes, "There are few things more important to a democratic republic than a healthy relationship between its government and its military establishment…Success in today's conflicts requires healthy civil-military relationships."[77] There can be no doubt that success in tomorrow's conflicts will be predicated on the strength of that same foundation. For, as Sir William Francis Butler, the decorated 19th Century British army officer, warned, "The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to have its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards."

Notes

[1] Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presidency: Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 23.

[2] Donald Rumsfeld, Donald, *Rumsfeld's Rules: Advice on Government, Business and Life*, special report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 7.

[3] Thom Shanker, "Mideast Commander Retires After Irking Bosses," *New York Times*, 12 March 2008, http://www.lexis-nexis.com/ (accessed 24 March 2011).

Bernard Weintraub and Thom Shanker, "A Nation at War: Under Fire; Rumsfeld's Design for War Criticized on the Battlefield," *New York Times*, 1 April 2003, http://www.lexis-nexis.com/ (accessed 24 March 2011).

Richard A. Oppel, Jr. and Sharifullah Sahak, "Petraeus Seeks Military-Civilian Unity in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 4 June 2010, http://www.lexis-nexis.com/ (accessed 24 March 2011).

[4] Eliot Cohen, "Foreword," in *U.S. Civil-Military Relations: In Crisis or Transition?* eds. Don M. Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 1995), vii.

[5] Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2002), 7-8.

[6] A century after Clausewitz, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington became the first scholar to survey, in-depth, the manner in which civilian and military leaders interact. Huntington's 1957 book, *The Soldier and the State*, became the doctrinal foundation upon which a new field of study, called civil-military relations, was born. In the past half-century, a majority of published civil-military relations literature has focused on two main areas: civilian control of the military (in the case of democratic societies), and the study of military ethics (that is, the binding nature of the Oath of Office and appropriateness of an Officer to dissent, or refuse, to obey orders, etc.).

[7] Mackubin T. Owens, "Civil-Military Relations and the U.S. Strategy Deficit," *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-notes*, February 2010, http://www.fpri.org/enotes/201002. owens.civilmilitaryrelations.html (accessed 23 February 2011).

[8] Mackubin T. Owens in Richard B. Myers et al., "Salute and Disobey?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2007. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/62843/richard-b-myers-and-richard-h-kohn-mackubin-thomas-owens-lawrenc/salute-and-disobey (accessed 23 February 2011).

[9] Matthew Moten, "A Broken Dialogue: Rumsfeld, Shinseki, and Civil-Military Tradition," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, eds. Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009), 44.

[10] Mackubin T. Owens (professor, Naval War College, Newport, RI), interview by the author, 5 April 2011.

[11] Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 233.

[12] Myers et al., "Salute and Disobey?"

[13] Richard H. Kohn, "Coming Soon: A Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," *World Affairs*, Winter 2008, 71.

[14] Secretary Rumsfeld seemed to rule both the Pentagon and the battlefield unilaterally; "those who dared to question the correctness of [his] decisions would soon find themselves

either shunted aside to new jobs or forced to leave the Defense Department…The only individuals whose careers would survive and prosper were officers who were prepared to play Rumsfeld's game." Source: Herspring, 378. Moreover, "he would try to undercut the opposition by appointing only those officers he thought he could dominate" even, occasionally, to the point of hand-selecting two- or three-star flag and general officers. Source: Ibid., 381.

[15] Gerald Astor, *Presidents at War: From Truman to Bush, the Gathering of Military Power to Our Commanders in Chief* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 269.

[16] Michael C. Desch, "Hartz, Huntington, and the Liberal Tradition in America: The Clash with Military Realism," in *American Civil-Military Relations*, 110.

[17] Astor, 273.

[18] Myers et al., "Salute and Disobey?"

[19] Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense (address, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 21 April 2008), quoted Richard H. Kohn, "Building Trust: Civil-Military Behaviors for Effective National Security," in *American Civil-Military Relations*, 275-6.

[20] Michael, O'Hanlon, "Rumsfeld and All the Army's Men," *Washington Times*, 27 March 2003, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2003/0327iraq_ohanlon.aspx (accessed 18 March 2011).

[21] Herspring, 405.

[22] Mackubin T. Owens, "U.S. Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain," *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-notes*, January 2011, http://www.fpri.org/enotes/201101.owens. civilmilitaryrelations.html (accessed 23 February 2011). Owens continues, "Although the critics in this case were retired general officers, observers of this episode believed that these retired flag officers were speaking not only for themselves but for many active duty officers, as well…While there are no legal restrictions preventing retired members of the military—even recently retired members—from criticizing public policy or the individuals responsible for it, there are some important reasons to suggest that the public denunciation of civilian authority by soldiers, retired or not, undermines healthy civil-military relations."

[23] Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 205. Almost immediately upon entering office, Rumsfeld appeared to possess a deep-seated paranoia "that the military would actively thwart his access to information unless he was vigilant." Source: Peter D. Feaver, "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 97-98.

[24] Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, "Officials Try to Unite on Afghan Plan," *New York Times*, 8 December 2009, http://www.lexis-nexis.com/ (accessed 22 February 2011).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Michael Hastings, "King David's War." *Rolling Stone*, 17 February 2011, http://www. rollingstone.com/politics/news/king-davids-war-20110202 (accessed 24 February 2011).

[27] In a self-proclaimed attempt to de-escalate tensions in the region, he remarked to Al-Jazeera, "This constant drumbeat of conflict...is not helpful and not useful. I expect that there will be no war, and that is what we ought to be working for. We ought to try to do our utmost to create different conditions." Privately, he confided to then-President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak that the U.S. had ruled out using military force in Iran. Source: Thomas P.

M. Barnett, "The Man Between War and Peace," *Esquire*, April 2008, http://www.esquire.com/features/fox-fallon (accessed 18 March 2011).

[28] Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 193-4.

[29] Ibid., 195.

[30] Richard H. Kohn, "Tarnished Brass: Is the U.S. Military Profession in Decline?" *World Affairs*, Spring 2009, 75.

[31] Kohn, "Coming Soon," 71.

[32] Owens, "Civil-Military Relations and the U.S. Strategy Deficit."

[33] Ibid.

[34] Herspring, 381. See also Moten in *American Civil-Military Relations*, 52, and Owens in Myers et al., "Salute and Disobey?"

[35] Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press for the RAND Corporation, 1989), 3.

[36] Mackubin T. Owens, *U.S. Civil-Military Relations After 9/11* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 93.

[37] Michael Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 18.

[38] Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2007, http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/05/2635198 (accessed 6 April 2011).

[39] Ibid.

[40] H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1997). For more, see Owens, *U.S. Civil-Military Relations After 9/11*, 95-97, and Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, "Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy," *Strategic Studies Institute*, September 2009, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute. army.mil/pdffiles/pub939.pdf (accessed 5 April 2011).

[41] Owens, "Civil-Military Relations and the U.S. Strategy Deficit."

[42] Astor, 269.

[43] Owens, interview.

[44] Owens, "Civil-Military Relations and the U.S. Strategy Deficit."

[45] Christopher G. Gibson and Don M. Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence: A Look at the National Security Decision-Making Process," *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 211.

[46] Herspring, 398.

[47] Astor, 272.

[48] Herspring, 401.

[49] Owens, "Civil-Military Relations and the U.S. Strategy Deficit." Specifically, on the 2007 "Surge" decision, "President Bush overruled some of his most important military advisors, most notably the two senior combatant commanders," General George Casey (then-commander of MNF-I) and General John Abizaid (then-commander of CENTCOM), as well as the advice of both the Joint Chiefs and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. "Although all of the senior military had 'signed off' on the strategy, many had done so grudgingly." Source: Feaver, "The Right to Be Right," 89.

[50] Myers et al., "Salute and Disobey?"

[51] For example, General Petraeus has opened himself up to criticism for his close personal ties to President Bush, who called Petraeus "his 'main man' and managed to stave off a

revolt over Iraq by Congressional Republicans by telling them 'to wait to see what David has to say. I trust David Petraeus his judgement *[sic]*.'" Source: Mehdi Hasan, "Rise of the Four-Star Deities," *New Statesman*, 5 July 2010, 22. According to Kohn, "Pushed front and center by the president as the person who would decide force levels and strategy and define success or failure in Iraq, Petraeus became for a time the virtual public face of the Iraq War. No matter how carefully he phrased his assessments or hedged his predictions…in his congressional testimony and public statements, some in the press and in Congress labeled him a 'front man' for the administration." Source: Kohn, "Tarnished Brass," 79.

[52] See Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, "The Gap: Soldiers, Civilians and their Mutual Misunderstanding," *The National Interest* 61 (Fall 2000): 34, and Kohn, "Tarnished Brass," 77-79. Such behavior, while not necessarily new, has increased markedly during OIF/OEF, and been a continual distraction. Generals Douglas MacArthur and Dwight Eisenhower were actively courted to run for president (Eisenhower by both parties). Colin Powell, an Army general who served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and who later became Secretary of State, also fielded accusations of politicization during the latter part of his military career for his public appeal not to intervene militarily in Bosnia in 1992 (even as President-elect Clinton was weighing all options to halt an emerging humanitarian crisis); his political efforts to ban gays from the military in 1993; and seemed to be perennially mentioned as a possible Republican presidential candidate.

[53] Hasan, "Rise of the Four-Star Deities," 22.

[54] Ibid., 22.

[55] Kohn, "Tarnished Brass," 77.

[56] Herspring, 297.

[57] Mackubin T. Owens, "The War on Terror and the Revolt of the Generals," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 October 2010. http://online.wsj.com/ (accessed 23 February 2011).

[58] Owens, "Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain."

[59] Kohn, "Coming Soon," 70.

[60] Ibid., 70 (emphasis included).

[61] Elisabeth Bumiller and Thom Shanker, "Commander's Ouster is Tied to Shift in Afghan War," *New York Times*, 12 May 2009. http://www.lexis-nexis.com/ (accessed 22 February 2011).

[62] Woodward, 186.

[63] Charles D. Allen, "Lessons Not Learned," *Armed Forces Journal* (6 September 2010): 30, http://www.proquest.com/ (accessed 16 February 2011). Description of "Counterterrorism Plus" in Woodward, 102.

[64] Woodward, 194.

[65] Hasan, "Rise of the Four-Star Deities," 20.

[66] Hastings, "King David's War."

[67] Hasan, "Rise of the Four-Star Deities," 22.

[68] Eliot Cohen in *U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, vii.

[69] Owens, interview.

[70] Feaver and Kohn, "The Gap," 34.

[71] Kohn, "Tarnished Brass," 79.

[72] ADM Michael Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (address, National Defense University, Washington, DC, 10 January 2011).

[73] Robert D. Putnam, professor, Harvard University (address, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 5 April 2011).

[74] Feaver and Kohn, "The Gap,", 37.

[75] Ibid., 37.

[76] Thom Shanker, "McChrystal to Lead Program for Military Families," *New York Times*, 10 April 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/ (accessed 10 April 2011).

[77] Owens, "The War on Terror and the Revolt of the Generals."

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