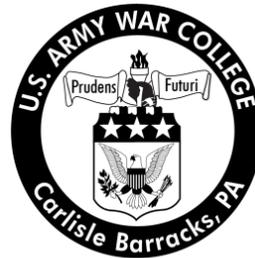


# The Need for Proper Military Dissent

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2012

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# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 03-02-2012		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Strategy Research Project		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> The Need for Proper Military Dissent				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Lieutenant Colonel Brian W. Gibson				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Chaplain(Colonel) Charles D. Reese Department of Command, Leadership, and Management				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Approved for public release, distribution is unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The future security environment is poised to become even more difficult for strategic leaders to navigate, exposing national security policy to an increasingly global and interconnected audience. Advancing technologies, further interconnecting international systems and increasing and faster media access will immediately display the civil-military discourse and its impact on the national security apparatus. The past ten years has highlighted strategic gaps in that discourse, leading to significant damage to individuals, organizations, and institutions. Strategic leaders, civilian and military alike, share responsibility to uphold the highest ideals in conducting future discourse, emphasizing ethical, and professional, decision making. there is likely no more difficult calling for a military professional than to dissent, especially when there are clear moral, legal, or ethical reasons to do so. It is when those reasons blur in a world increasingly turning grey where our future civil-military discourse demands strategic military leaders to fully understand dissent, and its implications, when speaking truth to power. The last decade shows that the military's robotic acquiescence to political masters is outdated and that there indeed is a place for dissent in today's environment, as long as it remains respectful and private.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Military Dissent, Civil-Military Relations, Profession of Arms					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  UNLIMITED	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>  32	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE NEED FOR PROPER MILITARY DISSENT**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Brian W. Gibson  
TITLE: The Need for Proper Military Dissent  
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project  
DATE: 03 February 2012 WORD COUNT: 6,073 PAGES: 32  
KEY TERMS: Military Dissent, Civil-Military Relations, Profession of Arms  
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The future security environment is poised to become even more difficult for strategic leaders to navigate, exposing national security policy to an increasingly global and interconnected audience. Advancing technologies, further interconnecting international systems and increasing and faster media access will immediately display the civil-military discourse and its impact on the national security apparatus.

The past ten years has highlighted strategic gaps in that discourse, leading to significant damage to individuals, organizations, and institutions. Strategic leaders, civilian and military alike, share responsibility to uphold the highest ideals in conducting future discourse, emphasizing ethical, and professional, decision making.

There is likely no more difficult calling for a military professional than to dissent, especially when there are clear moral, legal, or ethical reasons to do so. It is when those reasons blur in a world increasingly turning grey where our future civil-military discourse demands strategic military leaders to fully understand dissent, and its implications, when speaking truth to power. The last decade shows that the military's robotic acquiescence to political masters is outdated and that there indeed is a place for dissent in today's environment, as long as it remains respectful and private.



## THE NEED FOR PROPER MILITARY DISSENT

We warriors must keep foremost in our minds that there are boundaries to the prerogatives of leadership.

—Vice Admiral James Stockdale<sup>1</sup>

The future security environment is poised to become even more difficult for strategic leaders to navigate. Competition for dwindling resources, advancing technologies, expanding social media, globalization and continued military involvement in limited wars will undoubtedly sharpen pressure on senior political and military leaders, creating an environment where the impacts of their views instantaneously become more vivid, and possibly, more divisive.

Strategic leaders, civilian and military alike, share responsibility to uphold the highest ideals in conducting proper discourse that emphasizes ethical, and professional, decision making. When there is disagreement, however, there is likely no more difficult calling for a military professional than to dissent, especially when clear moral, legal or ethical reasons exist. It is when those reasons blur in a world increasingly turning grey where our future civil-military discourse demands strategic military leaders to fully understand the need for dissent when speaking truth to power.

Dissent by the military establishment is not new, and the last ten years show that it is a vitally important topic for strategic leaders. The cases of General Eric Shinseki in 2003 and General Stanley McChrystal in 2010 specifically highlight how recent strategic leaders dealt with dissent and the resultant impacts, including significant damage to individuals, organizations and institutions. More importantly, they demonstrate that Samuel Huntington's foundational theory of robotic acquiescence by the military to its

political masters is outdated. There is a need for dissent in shaping effective national security policy today, but only if it remains respectful and private. Strategic leaders can better embrace this reality by appreciating future security challenges, traversing academic civil-military underpinning, dissecting relevant lessons of recent military dissent and critically thinking about how to move the idea of dissent forward so that it strengthens, rather than hinders, the profession of arms.

### The Future Security Environment

The future security environment will undoubtedly mandate coherent civil-military discourse in dealing with tomorrow's complexities. The transcendent pace of innovation, emerging technologies and rising security challenges will necessitate faster, more adaptable and increasingly coherent national policy between the military and its political leadership. The early 21st century alone has seen significant progress: the breadth of democracy has expanded; the global economy has grown; there is peace between major powers; the threat of nuclear war has diminished; and international commerce has brought people and nations together. Unfortunately, this environment has also given way to enduring challenges: religious, ethnic and non-state ideologies are increasing; weapons of mass destruction are proliferating; natural resources are dwindling; and people are sharing both global food supplies and increased public health dangers.<sup>2</sup>

Many renowned futurists and visionaries concur that the future will continue to globalize and connect at unimaginable speed, touching more people simultaneously than ever before. Advancing technologies will shrink earth's furthest, and most remote, frontiers (including space), interconnecting people, places and ideologies unimaginable today. These advanced technologies will challenge the notion of traditional international

systems, leading to a globalized, web-enabled network where “work gets done where it can be done most effectively and efficiently.”<sup>3</sup> The geographic, moral, ethical and legal boundaries of sovereign nation-states and non-state actors will increasingly blur, giving way to an era dominated by “the potential for disruption, as opposed to an orderly transfer of power from the old winners to the new winners.”<sup>4</sup> This environment will further strain state privacy, pressuring strategic leaders, military and civilian alike, to keep national policy disagreement private.

### Dissent and the Strategic Military Context

The idea of dissent is straightforward. It is merely a difference of opinion. In a civilian business context, especially in non-hierarchical organizations, dissent can be seen as critical to the creative inspiration of a company. To the military, however, it fundamentally strikes at the heart of the hierarchical chain of command and differing authorities. The higher rank and position the military leader attains, the more fundamental the issue of dissent becomes. The interaction of policy formulation, resourcing and advice that occurs at the strategic level between the President, Congress and military takes on a decidedly different character than at the tactical level. At the strategic level, properly communicating dissent is both nationally and internationally important as the U.S. secures its global leadership responsibilities.

At its foundation the U.S. democratic system creates a possibly contentious environment. The public elects officials to serve as the President and the Congress, endowing them with the Constitutional responsibility of national security. The public elects, views, judges, and, arguably, demands the political process to be inherently representative and partisan. With the inherent public trust elected authorities who parlay

in partisanship and differing constitutional authorities thrust senior military leaders into this environment.

At the birth of the U.S. republic the founding fathers recognized civilian control of the military as a foundational principle, splitting control between the executive and legislative branches. Article 1, Section 8 of the constitution states Congress shall have the power "to raise and support Armies ..." and "to provide and maintain a Navy."<sup>5</sup> Article 2, Section 2 states "The President shall be the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States when called into the actual Service of the United States."<sup>6</sup> This explicit principle of civilian control has not fundamentally morphed, even in the midst of World Wars. Service members swear to this right at the oath of enlistment, pledging to simultaneously defend the Constitution and obey the President. It is this political reality that senior military leaders must navigate in providing their best military advice. It is the proverbial political conundrum.

The founding fathers intentionally split U.S. national security responsibilities in order to assure the proper balance of power, ensuring the military could not challenge the state. On the one hand, the President, as commander-in chief, appoints the senior uniformed and civilian leaders of the military forces. On the other hand, congress enacts its legislative duties of raising and supporting (i.e. resourcing) armies, writing military laws and declaring war.

Congress takes this so seriously that in many recent senate confirmation hearings, senators have asked four-star appointees, including General Shinseki in 1999, this pointed question: "If confirmed, do you pledge to return to this committee and other congressional committees when asked and to render your best professional

military judgment regardless of administration policies?”<sup>7</sup> More recently, General Petraeus reiterated to President Obama during Afghanistan troop surge deliberations “that he would faithfully support and execute his [President Obama] decision, but he noted that he would have to say, if asked at his confirmation hearing in two days, that the timeline was more aggressive than he had recommended.”<sup>8</sup> Arguably, any senior military official responding negatively is likely at risk of congressional confirmation.<sup>9</sup>

What guiding principles, then, can senior leaders utilize to better navigate the potential perils of this conundrum? Since World War II, tremendous academic thought has provided a rich body of thought on dissent. Specifically, Samuel P. Huntington and Morris Janowitz provide the bulk of the classical theoretical underpinning.

#### Dissent Academically Explored

Huntington’s seminal 1957 work, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, forcefully calls for the military to remain above the political fray stating “politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism...The military officer must remain neutral politically.”<sup>10</sup> Huntington further argues that the military professional, by remaining politically neutral, is restricted in his responsibilities to the state. Specifically, the military leader is an “expert advisor...who can only explain to his client [the state] his needs in this area, advise him as to how to meet these needs, and then, when the client has made his decisions, aid him in implementing them.”<sup>11</sup>

For Huntington, these narrowly defined responsibilities are imperative to recognize the military as a profession, an idea he calls “Objective Civilian Control.”

...It is that distribution of political power between military and civilian groups which is most conducive to the emergence of professional attitudes and behavior among the members of the officer corps. Objective

civilian control is thus directly opposed to subjective civilian control. Subjective civilian control achieves its end by civilianizing the military, making them the mirror of the state. Objective civilian control achieves its end by militarizing the military, making them the tool of the state...The antithesis of objective civilian control is military participation in politics...<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to Huntington's strict civilian control framework, Morris Janowitz in his 1960 work, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, argued that the officer corps must become more politically savvy to meet the demands of the emerging nuclear environment. For Janowitz, the military does this "when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory, because it has incorporated a protective military posture."<sup>13</sup>

Expanding upon the notion of military leaders becoming more politically savvy, Janowitz further delineated types of politics. Internal politics "involves the activities in influencing legislative and administrative decisions regarding national security policies and affairs."<sup>14</sup> Conversely, external politics include "the consequences of military actions on the international balance of power and the behavior of foreign states."<sup>15</sup> Janowitz however, questioned increasing military involvement in external politics, cautioning: "How adequate and well prepared are top military leaders for the continuing political tasks?"<sup>16</sup>

Janowitz also realized that war increases the "political involvements and responsibilities of the military" where "decision is not merely a matter of military administration, but an index of political intentions and goals."<sup>17</sup> He foresaw that politically astute military officers can help the nation's leadership more appropriately blend all the elements of national power, especially in war.

Similar to the intensity between Huntington and Janowitz in the early parts of the Cold War, and in light of very public U.S. military dissent cases since 2001, renewed

interest in proper civil-military relations has provided reenergized discussion on military professionalism and dissent. Like Huntington, well-known commentator Richard Kohn today insists that the military is “to advise and the execute lawful orders...If officers at various levels measure policies, decisions, orders, and operations against personal moral and ethical systems, and act thereon, the good order and discipline of the military would collapse.”<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, the U.S. official military publication, *The Armed Forces Officer*, starkly draws a line on the civil-military discourse:

Having rendered their candid expert judgment, [military] professionals are bound by oath to execute legal civilian decisions as effectively as possible – even those with which they fundamentally disagree – or they must request relief from their duties, or leave the service entirely, either by resignation or retirement.<sup>19</sup>

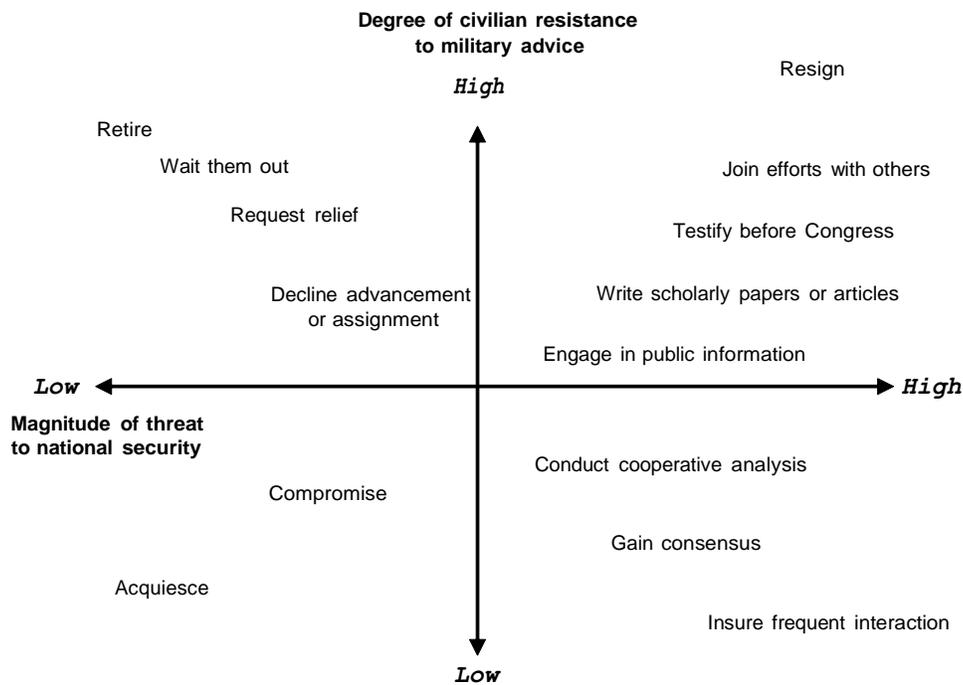


Figure 1.

Other recent voices, however, reflect that there are greater choices “beyond blind obedience, resignation, or retirement.”<sup>20</sup> Leonard Wong and Douglass Lovelace postulate a model (Figure 1) comprised of a range of options for senior military leaders to consider. They postulate that as the degree of civilian resistance to military advice varies with the magnitude of threat to national security, so too do the options available to the officer.<sup>21</sup>

Don Snider, a strong advocate for appropriate civil-military relations, accepts Wong’s and Lovelace’s set of choices, but adds that the elemental bond of trust must fundamentally be considered by dissenting military leaders.<sup>22</sup> For Snider, dissent must be analyzed against this bond of trust with the strategic leader’s three clients: the American people, civilian leaders and subordinates.<sup>23</sup> In order to assess the effect, or impact, on these trust relationships the strategic leader should consider: the gravity of the issue to the nation, the relevance of the strategic leader’s professional expertise to the issue at hand, the degree of sacrifice involved for the dissenter, the timing of the act of dissent, and the leader’s authenticity. Ultimately, Snider concludes that less public dissent strengthens the trust relationships, and thus, the profession.<sup>24</sup>

Marybeth Ulrich further argues, in *Infusing Normative Civil-Military Relations Principles in the Officer Corps*, that the military professional’s first obligation is to not foul the democratic policy-making process or its institutions.<sup>25</sup> She affirms that the military professional provides critical advice and expertise that is essential in developing national security policy.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, military professionals, with accountability to both the legislative and executive masters in mind, should offer their best advice and then wholeheartedly support the civilian policy. If the military professional cannot fully support

the policy and considers dissent, Ulrich proposes the following civil-military norm.

“Military professionals must develop the professional judgment to recognize when the bounds of the policy-making process might be breached,” and when they dissent, “must acknowledge that they have gone beyond the limits of their roles.”<sup>27</sup> This recognition and acknowledgement will contribute to balanced civil-military relations – a fundamental requirement for effective national policy-making.

Greg Foster goes the furthest among the current academic thinking on dissent, arguing for a broader, and more mature understanding of what ideal civil-military discourse could look like. He contemplates five precepts that, if accepted, will lead to more mature discourse; first, today’s governing environment outdates traditional civil-military thinking; second, traditional reasons for suppressing military dissent are lessening; third, war no longer pits military peers against one another where perceived dissent could be so drastically exploited; fourth, globalization has fully converged tactical and strategic environments, deleting the traditional boundaries of military purview; and lastly, how can a democratic nation silence an institution charged with defending democracy?<sup>28</sup>

Foster’s underlying thesis emerges from these precepts, arguing that “if open disagreement with policy is to be forbidden, then so too must open support of policy be.”<sup>29</sup> For Foster, a healthy state of civil-military relations can only be enjoyed by adapting and positively shaping change that “prefigures maturity – a higher order of being attended by learning, growth and a measure or acquired wisdom.”<sup>30</sup>

Fundamentally differing with traditionalists, Foster calls for a more broadened and open civil-military discourse.

With this academic underpinning in mind it is useful to look at two recent case studies where military dissent caused significant damage to individuals, organizations and institutions. General Shinseki, as the Army Chief of Staff in 2001, and General McChrystal, as the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan in 2009, both provide the needed context for future strategic leaders to more thoroughly understand the difficulty in embracing the policies of civilian masters.

### General Shinseki

General Eric K. Shinseki dissenting with the Secretary of Defense and the White House concerning troop levels for the Iraq War in 2003 is a rich case study of how, and why, a sitting military service chief navigated the political conundrum and the resultant impact. General Shinseki became the U.S. Army Chief of Staff in 1999, capping a long and varied military career highlighted by service and sacrifice. Highly decorated for grievous injuries sustained in Vietnam, General Shinseki rose through esteemed command and staff positions, including earning a Master's Degree from Duke University, serving multiple staff positions in the Pentagon, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division and ultimately, U.S. Army Forces in Europe. "Trim, reserved, and unassuming, he was well respected in the Army for his integrity and his toughness, although some outside the service opined that he might be too traditional, a dinosaur."<sup>31</sup>

While serving in the late 1990s as the U.S. Army Forces Europe Commander, General Shinseki witnessed the Army struggling to find its post cold-war meaning. Limited wars in Panama, the Persian Gulf, Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo in the midst of dwindling budgetary and manpower resources highlighted the realities of the decade, leading to ever expanding military employment.<sup>32</sup> Against this backdrop, Secretary of Defense William Cohen selected General Shinseki as the Army Chief of

Staff, charging him to modernize the Army and make it relevant to the operating environment. Thus began his quest to “transform” the Army.<sup>33</sup>

General Shinseki’s initial intent as the new Chief of Staff not surprisingly focused on people, readiness and transformation.<sup>34</sup> During his first year, momentum gained quickly, both internally and externally to the Army, in supporting the transformative path. However, with the election of a new administration and Secretary of Defense in 2000, that path would be challenged. Like General Shinseki, the new Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, had a mandate for change under the presidential platform for defense transformation.<sup>35</sup>

That mandate for Rumsfeld, now on his second stint as the Secretary of Defense, meant, at its very core, to reassert civilian control over the military.<sup>36</sup> Rumsfeld, after being accused of heavy handed upbraiding of his senior officers, reaffirmed this mandate during a defense briefing, saying the “constitution calls for civilian control of this department. And I’m a civilian...This place is accomplishing enormous things...And it doesn’t happen by standing around with your finger in your ear hoping everyone thinks that that’s nice.”<sup>37</sup>

The difference in mandate was at the crux of the continually deteriorating relationship between the Army and the Secretary of Defense. Prior to the attacks of September 11th, 2001, misgivings about the Army’s headgear change to the black beret and private battles over force structure during the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review continued to place Shinseki and Rumsfeld at odds. The civil-military rift fully entered the public domain in April 2002 with a Washington Post article saying Secretary Rumsfeld

had decided on General Shinseki's replacement, even with two full years remaining as the Army's Chief.<sup>38</sup>

Other damaging instances followed the April 2002 article, including cancellation of the Army's Crusader weapon system. Perhaps as a function of Secretary Rumsfeld's lack of trust for General Shinseki, or out of political spite for the Army, the run-up to the Iraq War placed the general in a very difficult spot. Dwindling pre-deployment force levels and post-invasion planning from the administration did not sit well with General Shinseki, as he had recently lived through the Balkans and Kosovo.<sup>39</sup> He privately warned the administration, and ultimately the President, that he disagreed with too-low Iraq force levels - the only service chief to privately offer his best military advice, all others remained quiet.<sup>40</sup>

Conversely, Secretary Rumsfeld believed in a small military footprint. Fresh on the heels of a quick and decisive toppling of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, he affirmed that technology had produced a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) where pinpoint, lethal capabilities could offset large troop presence. During public congressional hearings on February 25th, 2003, Senator Carl Levin pushed General Shinseki on the low troop levels for Iraq, ultimately leading to the General's fateful "several hundred thousand soldiers" statement.<sup>41</sup> The final die was cast - the Army had publicly differed with policy.

The administration quickly, and publicly, dismissed the assessment, ultimately leading to Secretary of the Army White's resignation. As a lame-duck Chief of Staff, General Shinseki spent his remaining two years focused on transforming the Army. This split was so divisive that neither the Secretary of Defense, nor a designated

representative, attended General Shinseki's retirement ceremony.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps this freed General Shinseki to comment in his farewell remarks on the civil-military discourse, saying:

...when some suggest that we, in The Army, don't understand the importance of civilian control of the military - well, that's just not helpful - and it isn't true. The Army has always understood the primacy of civilian control - we reinforce that principle to those with whom we train all around the world. So to muddy the waters when important issues are at stake, issues of life and death, is a disservice to all of those in and out of uniform who serve and lead so well.<sup>43</sup>

Since the incident General Shinseki has remained noticeably quiet, despite worsened security and increased troop levels in Iraq. He has not discussed the details in military memoirs, has refused public comment and has gone on to serve as a Cabinet Secretary in a new administration. As others described him when he assumed the Army Chief of Staff position in 2001, he has remained "trim, reserved, and unassuming... well respected...for his integrity and his toughness."<sup>44</sup> What then are the major lessons that future strategic leaders can glean from this episode?

#### Relevant Lessons – Shinseki

First, General Shinseki firmly believed in the right of civilian control of the military, or as some in the media have opined, the right of civilians to be wrong. But what is the right to be wrong? It is the constitutional authority of the President and Congress, regardless of their military background, experience or training, to wage war, raise and support forces and to determine the national strategy for the military's employment, even when decisions prove to be inconsequentially false or wildly wrong. In its simplest form, it is the military providing their best military advice, embracing and obeying the orders of civilian superiors, accepting policy, even if in private disagreement, and publicly employing the military element of power to the best of their ability. General

Shinseki's quietness since the incident indicates that he accepted, and still accepts, that notion.

Second, it remains a personal decision to dissent. Even though the administration castigated General Shinseki for his remarks, he upheld his constitutional requirements to provide his best military advice to the President and the Congress. No one else dissented on General Shinseki's behalf - not an Army spokesman, nor a service staff representative, nor a Washington informant. When the time came, General Shinseki spoke what he believed to be truth to power, no one else.

Third, there likely will be significant personal and professional ramifications for strategic leaders that dissent. As a result of this case, a service secretary and chief of staff's professional careers ended. Institutionally, General Shinseki's dissent also affected other Army leaders. General Jack Keane, the recommended officer to replace General Shinseki, resigned, vice accepting the position. The administration had to bring retired General Schoomaker back on active duty to fill the Army Chief of Staff vacancy.

Finally, words and context matter. The speed of internet based news, faster communications and increasing global connectivity will quickly expose even the slightest perception of dissent, as exemplified in the administration's speedy castigation of General Shinseki. Alignment of words and context not only matter, but is demanded, most at the national security policy level.

General Shinseki never gave a specific number of troops that would be required. He did not have to. In policy matters, the number was simply larger than the administration's stance. That difference could have been a million soldiers or just one, it did not matter. The public may never hear from General Shinseki how, or if, he would

have handled the situation differently, but strategic leaders can learn valuable insights by studying his actions.

### General McChrystal

The case of General Stanley McChrystal being fired in June 2010 as Commanding General in Afghanistan is another relevant case study highlighting the fundamental challenges concerning civil-military discourse and military dissent. Just as General Shinseki publicly dissented by answering a series of questions regarding administration policy, so too, did General McChrystal. The important distinction, however, lays in General McChrystal's public implication of disagreement, vice General Shinseki's classical black and white disagreement. It was this implied dissent when coupled with a disparaging attitude towards civilian policy makers that led President Obama to relieve General McChrystal.

Appreciating how General McChrystal rose to the commanding general position in Afghanistan is important to understand his eventual dismissal. In August 2009, the Obama administration relieved General David McKiernan, replacing him with General McChrystal. This was not an inconsequential event. As Dr. Ulrich's research dictates, General McKiernan was the first theater level commander fired in wartime since General MacArthur in Korea.<sup>45</sup> General McChrystal now served not only in an elevated position with increased public scrutiny, but moreover, in a position the administration had vacated by reasserting civilian control of the military.

While fielding questions several months later following a speech in London at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), General McChrystal faced a similar conundrum as did General Shinseki in 2003 regarding administration policy. At the time

of the speech, President Obama and his administration were embroiled in the midst of a multi-session, multi-month, Afghanistan Review in which all pertinent national security members were participating, including General McChrystal (as recently as a day prior).<sup>46</sup> In reference to leaked discussions from that process, an audience member bluntly asked General McChrystal if he would support Vice President Biden's idea of "scaling back the American military presence in Afghanistan to focus on tracking down Al Qaeda leaders in place of the current broader effort [counter insurgency vice counter terrorism]."<sup>47</sup>

Despite ongoing policy discussions as part of the administration's review, General McChrystal responded with "the short answer is: no. You have to navigate from where you are, not where you wish to be. A strategy that does not leave Afghanistan in a stable position is probably a short-sighted strategy," likely resulting in "Chaos-istan."<sup>48</sup> General McChrystal also went further, publicly commenting on President Obama's lengthy Afghanistan Strategy Review, stating that "waiting does not prolong a favorable outcome. This effort will not remain winnable indefinitely."<sup>49</sup> Ironically, General McChrystal had publicly implied dissent with an administration that had not yet made a decision.

In quick, and sharp, rebuke the administration redressed General McChrystal, both publicly and privately. In the face of instant international media attention, President Obama surprisingly did not fire him, opting rather for a face-to-face meeting the next day in Copenhagen, Denmark – a widely considered one-sided, poignant discussion. In line with President Obama's rebuke, the National Security Adviser, General (retired) James Jones, offered that "ideally, it's better for military advice to come up through the

chain of command.”<sup>50</sup> Secretary of Defense Gates further commented, saying “it is imperative that all of us taking part in these deliberations, civilians and military alike, provide our best advice to the president, candidly but privately.”<sup>51</sup>

Just as General Shinseki continued to serve following various administration rebukes, so too General McChrystal continued to serve as the ISAF Commander, ultimately receiving an additional 30,000 soldier surge from the administration. General McChrystal’s military service, however, would take a fateful turn with the June 10 2010 release of Michael Hasting’s article, “The Runaway General”, in *Rolling Stone* Magazine. Hasting’s article unfortunately split the civil-military relationship into an unbridgeable divide, driven wholly by General McChrystal. The General’s irreverent and mocking remarks against the national security team included: a “clown...who was stuck in 1985” (General retired Jones); a “wounded animal” (Ambassador Holbrooke); “here’s one that covers his flank for the history books. Now, if we fail, they can say, ‘I told you so.’” (Ambassador Eikenberry); “Who’s that...Biden...Did you say: Bite Me?” (Vice President Biden); and “uncomfortable and intimidated...not very engaged” (President Obama).<sup>52</sup>

On the heels of the November 2009 London incident, “The Runaway General” article in June 2010 created public rebuke, unwelcome international criticism and a media frenzy. President Obama accepted General McChrystal’s resignation within four days of the article’s release, General Petraeus vacated Central Command (CENTCOM) and assumed command of the Afghanistan mission, and irrevocable damage was done to the civil-military dialogue. Like General Shinseki’s case, this incident provides abundant civil-military relations lessons for future strategic leaders.

## Relevant Lessons – McChrystal

First, in a technologically advanced world where strategic leaders' words and actions can be transmitted instantaneously to a global audience, dissent no longer has to be clearly defined in black and white terms. As General McChrystal's actions in late 2009 indicate, implied disagreement may be just as damaging as actual disagreement, and can be perceived as dissenting. The General's comments in London so disturbed President Obama that he personally redressed him within twenty-four hours, thus demonstrating the importance of perception.

Second, General McChrystal's actions in November 2009 did not end his career, but likely hastened that end, especially when coupled with his disparaging comments in June 2010. General McChrystal did not specifically state the administration was wrong or misguided, rather, he publicly implied that difference. However, the General's severe tenor and tone in June 2010 for civilian primacy of the military, when coupled with his actions in November 2009, are what abruptly ended his military service.

Third, this case highlights, according to Ulrich, how a senior leader can be the best practitioner of military operations, doctrine and training, but fail because of ineffective skill in dealing with senior civilian leadership.<sup>53</sup> This case reaffirms the idea that, even at the highest levels of military service, subordinates will take on the character of their leader. General McChrystal's allowed his disrespectful tenor for civilian leadership to privately permeate his staff, and, as Hastings' reported, to be publicly expressed.<sup>54</sup> Instead of personally speaking truth to power, General McChrystal enabled others to publically speak exactly the opposite.

Fourth, General McChrystal and his team forgot their most fundamental role, namely, to enable the democratic civil-military discourse for effective national policy

development. Their superb military tactical ability was irrelevant without appropriate civil-military underpinning. As Lieutenant General James Dubik notes, “this will be remembered as a Shakespearean tragedy. Here is a true hero who risked his life to diminish al Qaeda. He is a leader who cared for his soldiers and shared every danger with his soldiers.”<sup>55</sup>

Fifth, the strategic role, interaction and flash-to-bang effect of today’s media play a transcendent role in the civil military discourse, especially in how the political establishment perceives the military’s actions and words offered publically. Technology enables instantaneous scrutiny, positive or negative. As Dr. Ulrich reasons, the media is one of the most important contributors to “democratic accountability.”<sup>56</sup> General McChrystal, unfortunately, did not embrace his responsibility to ensure effective media-military relations and the requisite impact of that relationship in helping to shape national policy.<sup>57</sup>

General McChrystal should have known that implied disagreement, or attempting to publicly shape policy, could be perceived as actual dissent, that nothing is ever off the record and that three and four star generals serve at the pleasure of the President. President Obama ultimately concluded that General McChrystal’s behavior undermined “the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system...[and that] war is bigger than any one man or woman, whether a private, a general, or a president.”<sup>58</sup> General McChrystal’s failure to understand “that our democracy depends upon institutions that are stronger than individuals...[including] strict adherence to the military chain of command, and respect for civilian control over that chain of command” will hopefully direct future strategic leaders in proper civil-military discourse.<sup>59</sup>

## Moving Forward

Given the case studies of General Shinseki and General McChrystal what should be done to inculcate the relevant lessons into the military profession?

First, as with most things, proper training typically underpins proper action. The Officer Professional Military Education (PME) system, from initial entry through General Officer Training, needs to readdress the importance of dissent and civil-military dialogue. The days of making courses elective on this topic need to be vanquished. Mandatory periods of instruction (POI) should infuse the curricula, especially at the Senior Service Colleges where the next generation of strategic leader's hone their skills, but rote, dry lesson plans will not suffice. Vignettes, case studies and capstone exercises must directly confront officers to seriously address dissent as part of the policy process.

Second, as a critical part of that mandatory training, the Army should fully welcome and embrace senior leaders who have experienced the difficulties of dissent. If the Army is serious about developing the dissent skill set, then it needs to be serious about including those officers who have struggled with dissent into training and mentoring programs. As the cases in this paper demonstrate, a time of war is too late, and the resultant impacts too far reaching, for a senior leader to first seriously deal with dissent.

Third, responsibility also lies outside of the institutional base for developing officers' acumen on the importance of the civil-military dialogue. Senior leaders, when in leadership positions, have the responsibility to foster an environment where junior leaders can appropriately dissent, allowing subordinates to question orders and more fully understand the what, and the why. Proper employment of mission command type

leadership (task and purpose) enables junior leaders to not only develop creative thought, but more importantly, critical thought. Developing junior officers who know the importance and method of providing their best military advice through critical thinking, is perhaps, a good start point to engender future successful civil-military discourse. Advocating proper dissent skills in junior ranks alone does not assume future miscues will not occur, but at least it starts developing skills that are needed at the strategic level.

Finally, as the Army is rightfully undergoing another profession of arms campaign, it is important for officers, regardless of seniority, to remain focused on the ideas of professionalism. This professionalism requires an officer's word and deed, public or private, to remain appropriate, especially in bearing, tone and language.<sup>60</sup> Even though the public media has a responsibility to report accurately, it is, more importantly, the officer's responsibility to act and talk appropriately – especially when action and talk reside at the national security level. A very good example is how General Petraeus recently handled his responsibilities at congressional confirmation hearings to be the next CIA Director. "This is not about me...it's not about a reputation. This is about our country. And the best step for our country, with the commander in chief having made a decision, is to execute that decision to the very best of our ability."<sup>61</sup> As Gregory Foster says, "what it [the U.S.] practices and preaches, and no less what it thinks and says, must reflect a level of maturity attuned to a future that is already upon us, not to a past that has passed."<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

Advancing technologies, further interconnecting international systems and increasing and faster media access will immediately display future civil-military

discourse to the international audience. The past ten years alone has highlighted where gaps in that discourse resulted in significant damage to institutions, organizations and individuals. Strategic leaders, civilian and military alike, share responsibility to uphold the highest ideals in conducting future discourse, emphasizing ethical, and professional, decision making, to bridge these gaps.

As Wong and Lovelace point out, there is a range of options senior leaders should consider in seeking to resolve disagreement, including dissent and its ramifications. As Snider affirms though, trust is the foundation of the civil-military discourse and it must be engendered via public policy agreement, not disagreement. And as Ulrich concludes, even if strategic leaders non-maliciously dissent in public, including implicitly, they violate the do-no-harm civil-military norm, and thus, do more damage than good. There is likely no more difficult calling for a military professional than to publicly dissent, especially when there are clear moral, legal, or ethical reasons to do so. However, it is when those reasons blur in a world increasingly turning grey where our future civil-military discourse demands strategic leaders to fully understand dissent, and its implications, when speaking truth to power.

It remains the military leader's responsibility to set the right example in how to embrace the policies of their civilian masters. Leaders who accept the mantle of strategic leadership, predominantly at the Colonel level and above, implicitly accept this responsibility, placing the impact of their actions on the greater institution above oneself. This also inherently means that senior leaders must be politically astute, realizing that they may be called upon to be a key player in the political process. An extremely recent

example is how President Obama sent General Raymond Odierno to Iraq as part of diplomatic efforts to stave off escalating violence in Iraq.<sup>63</sup>

Through the past decade of persistent conflict the U.S. military has undoubtedly learned the potential of both good, and bad, national security policy making. As war fades away for the American populace and fewer civilian leaders have military experience, today's military leaders cannot relegate civil-military thinking to academic posterity. More, not less, thought is needed on how future U.S. military leaders can provide their best military advice when helping to shape national security policy, especially when policy conflicts with legal, moral or ethical standards.

The cases of General Shinseki and General McChrystal demonstrate the need for proper dissent that is both private and respectful. Even though strategic military leaders cannot pick their civilian leaders, they can always uphold their duty to provide their best military advice. This will become more difficult in a future driven by globalization and technological advancement that significantly challenge state privacy. Embracing and understanding past challenges in the political military interface can help offset these challenges, and should remain *a priori* for future strategic leaders as they navigate the national security environment. General MacArthur's famous Duty, Honor, Country speech to West Point must remain the strategic leader's guidepost in that navigation, "let civilian voices argue the merits or demerits of our processes of government"<sup>64</sup>, especially in public.

## Endnotes

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