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The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today

Richard H. Kohn University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History

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Lieutenant General Hubert Reilly Harmon

Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon was one of several distinguished Army officers to come from the Harmon family. His father graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1880 and later served as Commandant of Cadets at the Pennsylvania Military Academy. Two older brothers, Kenneth and Millard, were members of the West Point class of 1910 and 1912, respectively. The former served as Chief of the San Francisco Ordnance District during World War II; the latter reached flag rank and was lost over the Pacific during World War II while serving as Commander of the Pacific Area Army Air Forces. Hubert Harmon, born on April 3, 1882, in Chester, Pennsylvania, followed in their footsteps and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1915. Dwight D. Eisenhower also graduated in this class, and nearly forty years later the two worked together to create the new United States Air Force Academy.

Harmon left West Point with a commission in the Coast Artillery Corps, but he was able to enter the new Army air branch the following year. He won his pilot's wings in 1917 at the Army flying school in San Diego. After several training assignments, he went to France in September 1918 as a pursuit pilot. Between World Wars I and II, Harmon, who was a Major during most of this time, was among that small group of Army air officers who urged Americans to develop a modern, strong air arm.

At the outbreak of World War II, Brigadier General Hubert Harmon was commanding the Gulf Coast Training Center at Randolph Field, Texas. In late 1942 he became a Major General and head of the 6th Air Force in the Caribbean. The following year General Harmon was appointed Deputy Commander for Air in the Southwest Pacific under General Douglas MacArthur, and in January 1944 he assumed command of the 13th Air Force fighting in that theater. After the war General Harmon held a several top positions with the Air Force and was promoted to Lieutenant General in 1948.

In December 1949 the Air Force established the Office of Special Assistant for Air Force Academy Matters and appointed General Harmon its head. For more than four years Harmon directed all efforts at securing legislative approval for a U.S. Air Force Academy, planned its building and operation, and served on two commissions that finally selected Colorado Springs, Colorado, as the site for the new institution. On August 14, 1954, he was appointed first Superintendent of the Air Force Academy. Upon General Harmon's retirement on July 31, 1956, the Secretary of the Air Force presented him with his third Distinguished Service Medal for his work in planning and launching the new service academy and setting its high standards. In a moving, informal talk to the cadets before leaving the Academy, General Harmon told the young airmen that the most important requirements for success in their military careers are integrity and loyalty to subordinates and superiors. "Take your duties seriously, but not yourself," he told the cadets.

General Harmon passed away on February 22, 1957, just a few months before his son Kendrick graduated from West Point. The general's ashes were interred at the Air Force Academy's cemetery on September 2, 1958. On May 31, 1959, the Academy's neurodulization building up a graduated form were all the force and the second seco

the Academy's new administration building was named Harmon Hall in his memory.

The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today

Richard H. Kohn* University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Officers and cadets of the Air Force Academy, ladies and gentlemen: I feel honored to present the Harmon Memorial Lecture this year. Twenty-five years ago I first visited the Academy to present a paper at your history department's tenth Military History Symposium, and of course have returned frequently since, with many rich and happy memories. It is particularly meaningful to me to give this lecture during Lieutenant General Tad Oelstrom's tenure as Superintendent. His exceptional ability and imperturbable temperament first struck me at the Army War College in the fall of 1980 when he corrected me in my own classroom. I had made some remark about "driving" an F-4 out over the Florida Straits during the Cuban Missile Crisis, holding up my hands to simulate piloting as if it were the same as driving a car. After questioning my interpretation of the event, he noted in his laconic but authoritative voice, "and oh, by the way, you 'drive' an F-4 *this* way (gesturing with his fist, as though holding the 'stick' of a fighter plane)!" Two years later I observed his skill as a leader when I visited his squadron and flew in the backseat of his Phantom. Many times after that I have had the pleasure of enjoying his company and observing his extraordinary professional ability in all sorts of situations, official and informal. It is unwise to embarrass one's host. But my duty as a scholar to the truth prompts me to share this judgment: in over thirty-five years as a military historian, nearly twenty in close association with the Air Force, I have not known a military officer or a commander I respect or trust more than Tad Oelstrom. Our republic is truly blessed to have men of his judgment and character leading our youth, and safeguarding our security.

On a more somber note, it is "duty to the truth" that leads to my subject this evening, a troubling subject, an unpleasing one, one that will make us uncomfortable-me by talking about it and you in listening to it, particularly on such a gala occasion. The subject is significant, however, because it is crucial to our national security and to our survival as a republic.

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The subject involves the civil-military relationship at the pinnacle of our government, and thus the very nature of our political system. My fear, baldly stated, is that civilian control of the military has weakened in the United States in the last generation, and is threatened today. I ask you to listen to my thinking with an open mind so that we can consider the problem together. It needs our attention. Merely bringing this issue to a military audience may introduce a remedy; a frank, open discussion could, by raising the awareness of the American public and alerting the armed forces, set in motion a healing of this tear in our civic and political fabric. My thinking is not the product of some nightmare about a possible *coup d'etat*, but rather a concern that the military has grown in influence to the point of being able to impose its own viewpoint or perspective on many policies and decisions. What I have detected is no conspiracy, but repeated efforts on the part of the armed forces to evade or frustrate civilian authority when it promises to produce outcomes the military opposes or dislikes. While I do not foresee any crisis, I am convinced that civilian control has diminished to the point where it could alter the character of American government and undermine national defense. My views result from nearly four decades of reading and reflection about civilian control in this country, half of which includes personal observation from inside the Pentagon

during the 1980s, and since then, watching the Clinton and two Bush administrations struggle to balance national security with domestic political realities.

Understanding the problem begins with a review of the state of civil military relations during the last nine years, which in my judgment has been extraordinarily poor, and in many respects as low as any period in American peacetime history. No president was ever as reviled by the American professional military-treated with such disrespect, or viewed with such contempt-as Bill Clinton. And on the other side, no administration ever treated the military with more fear and deference on the one hand, and indifference and neglect on the other, as the Clinton Administration.

The relationship began on a sour note during the 1992 campaign. As a youth, Clinton had avoided the draft, written a letter expressing "loathing" for the military, and demonstrated against the Vietnam War while in Britain on a Rhodes Scholarship. (It wasn't the protesting so much as organizing public demonstrations on foreign soil.) Relations turned venomous with the awful controversy over gays in the military, when the administration-in ignorance and arroganceannounced its intention to abolish the ban on open homosexual service immediately, without study or consultation. The Joint Chiefs responded by resisting, floating rumors of their own and dozens of other resignations, maneuvering with their retired brethren to arouse congressional and public opposition, and then negotiating a compromise more or less openly with their commander in chief.¹ The President was publicly insulted by the troops in person, in print, and in speeches, including one by a two-star general. So ugly was the behavior that commanders had to remind their subordinates of their constitutional and legal obligations not to speak derogatorily of the civilian leadership, and the Air Force Chief of Staff warned his senior commanders in a message "about core values, including the principle of a chain of command that runs from the president right down to our newest airman."² Nothing like this had ever occurred in our history. This was the most open manifestation of defiance and resistance by the American military since the publication of the Newburgh addresses over two centuries earlier at the close of the American War for Independence. Then the officers of the Army openly contemplated revolt or resignation en masse over the failure of Congress to pay them or fund the pensions they had been promised over the course of a long and debilitating war. All of this led me, as a student of civilian control of the military, to ask why a military as loyal, subordinate, successful, and professional as any in the world could so suddenly violate one of its most sacred traditions.

While open conflict soon dropped from public sight, bittemess hardened into a visceral hatred that became part of the culture in many parts of the military establishment, kept alive by a continuous stream of incidents and controversies.³ To cite but a few: the undermining and driving from office of Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in 1993; the humiliation of finding a replacement who then withdrew; and controversies over the retirement of at least six four-star flag officers, including the tragic suicide of a Chief of Naval Operations and the early retirement of an Air Force Chief of Staff, both of which were unprecedented occurrences. There were ceaseless arguments over gender, perhaps the single most continuous running sore between the Clinton administration and its national security critics.⁴ These ranged from the botched investigations of the 1991 Tailhook scandal to the 1997 uproar over Air Force First Lieutenant Kelly Flinn, the first female B-52 line pilot, who despite admitting to adultery, lying to an investigating officer, and disobeying orders, was allowed to leave the service without court martial. Other incidents included the outrages at Aberdeen Proving Ground where Army sergeants had sex with recruits under their command, and the 1999 retirement of the highest ranking women army general in history amid accusations that she had been sexually harassed by a fellow general officer some years previously. There were bitter arguments over readiness, over budgets, over whether and how to intervene with American forces abroad from Somalia to Haiti to Bosnia to Kosovo, and over national strategy more generally.⁵ So poisonous became the relationship that two Marine officers in 1998 had to be reprimanded for violating Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the provision about contemptuous words against the highest civilian officials, and the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps felt constrained to warn all Marine generals about officers publicly criticizing or disparaging the Commander in Chief.⁹ The next year at the Military Ball at the Plaza Hotel in New York City, a local television news anchor, playing on the evening's theme "A Return to Integrity," remarked that he "didn't recognize any dearth of integrity here" until he "realized that President Clinton was in town"-and the crowd, largely of officers "which included 20 generals," went wild." During the election of 2000 the chief legal officers of two of the largest commands in the Army and Air Force issued a similar warning lest resentment over Gore Campaign challenges to absentee ballots in Florida boil over into outspoken contempt.8

These illustrations emphasize the negative. By all accounts people in uniform respected and worked well with Secretary of Defense William Perry, and certainly Generals John Shalikashvili and Hugh Shelton, chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since 1993, appeared to have been liked and respected by civilians in the Clinton administration. But these men, and other senior officers and officials who bridged the two cultures at the top levels of government, seemed to understand that theirs was a delicate role: to mediate between two hostile relatives who fear and distrust each other but realize that for better or for worse, they must work together if both are to survive.

Now to discount all this as atmospherics-essentially insignificant-would be mistaken, for the toxicity of the civilmilitary relationship damaged national security in at least three ways: first, by paralyzing national security policy; second by obstructing and in some cases sabotaging American ability to intervene in foreign crises or to exercise leadership internationally, and third by undermining the confidence of the armed forces in their own uniformed leadership.

In response to that first, searing controversy over open homosexual service, the administration concluded that this president, with his Democratic affiliation, liberal leanings, history of draft evasion and opposition to the Vietnam War, and his admission of marital infidelity and experimentation with marijuana, would never be acceptable to the military. Knowing little or nothing about military affairs and national security, and not caring to develop a deep or sympathetic understanding (one knowledgeable insider characterized the White House as reflecting the demography of the post-Vietnam Democratic Party: people who had never served in uniform and who had a "tin ear" for things military),¹⁰ the administration decided that for this president and this administration, military affairs was a "third rail." No issue with the military was worth exposing this vulnerability-nothing was worth the cost. All controversy with the military was to be avoided. In fact from the beginning, the Clintonites tried to "give away" the military establishment: first to the congressional Democrats by making Les Aspin Secretary of Defense; then, when Aspin was driven from office, to the military itself by nominating Admiral Bobby Inman; then, when he withdrew, to the military-industrial complex in Bill Perry and John Deutsch, which lasted until 1997; and finally to the Republicans in the person of Maine Senator Bill Cohen. From the outset, the focus of the administration in foreign affairs was almost wholly economic in nature, and while that may have been genius, one result of the Clintonites' inattention and inconstancy was the disgust and disrespect of the national security community, particularly those in uniform.¹¹ By the time he left office, some officials admitted that he had been "unwilling to exercise full authority over military commanders."¹² "Those who monitored Clinton closely during his eight years as president believed ... that he was intimidated more by the military than by any other political force he dealt with," reported David Halberstam, Said "a former senior N.S.C. official who studied [Clinton] closely, ... 'he was out-and out-afraid of them "¹³

Forging a reasonable and economical national security policy was crucial to the health and well being of the country, particularly at a time of epochal transition brought on by the end of the Cold War. But the administration's indifference to military affairs, and the decision to take no risks and expend no political capital, resulted in paralysis. Rethinking strategy, force structure, roles and missions of the armed services, organization, personnel, weapons, and other choices indispensable for the near and long term, was rendered futile. Now, over a decade since the end of the Cold War, there is still no common understanding about the fundamental purposes of the American military establishment or on what principles the United States will use military power in pursuit of the national interest. In fact the first Bush administration, and Clinton's initially, studiously avoided any public discussion of what role the United States should play in the world, unless one believes that asserting the existence of a "new world order" or labeling the United States "the indispensable nation" constitutes discussion.¹⁴

The Clinton administration held itself hostage to the organization and force structure of the Cold War.¹⁵ At the beginning of the administration, Secretary Aspin attempted to modify the basis of American strategy–the ability to fight two "Major Regional Contingencies" (changed later to Major Theater Wars) almost simultaneously. But Aspin caved in to the opposition amid charges that such a change would embolden America's adversaries and weaken security arrangements with allies in the Middle East and Asia.¹⁶ The result was a defense budget known to be incapable of fully supporting the size and configuration of the military establishment even without the intervention contingencies which constantly threw military accounts into deficit.¹⁷ Budgets became prisoners of readiness. Forces could not be reduced because of the many military commitments around the world, but if the readiness to wage high intensity combat fell or seemed to diminish, Republican critics would jump all over the President. Thus the uniformed leadership–each service chief, regional or

functional commander in chief, sometimes even a division, task force, or wing commander-gained the political weight to veto any significant change in nation's fundamental security structure.

As a result, the Clinton administration never could match resources with commitments, balance readiness with modernization, or consider organizational changes that would relieve the stresses on personnel and equipment.¹⁸ All of this occurred when the services verged on the brink, or were actually undergoing, what many believed to be such major changes in weaponry and tactics as to constitute a "revolution in military affairs."¹⁹ One result of the disjunction between the frequency of operations and the resources of people and money was the increased loss from the services of large numbers of their best officers and NCOs, at the very same time that economic prosperity and other factors produced shortfalls in the numbers of men and women willing to sign up for military service in the first place. The paralysis in military policy provoked the Congress in the 1990s to attempt by legislation at least four different times to force the Pentagon to reevaluate national security policy, strategy, and force structure, with as yet no significant result.²⁰ Perhaps the last of these efforts, the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century (also called the Hart-Rudman Commission), which undertook a comprehensive review of national security and the military establishment, will have some effect. If so, it will be because the Bush Administration possessed the political courage to brave the civil-military friction required to reorganize an essentially Cold War military establishment into a force capable of meeting the security challenges of the 21st century.² But the evidence has indicated otherwise: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's secrecy and lack of consultation with the uniformed military and Congress; the forces gathering to resist change; the priority of the Bush tax cut and national missile defense, which threatened to limit severely the money available and force excruciating choices; and Rumsfeld's fudging and distancing himself thetorically from "transformation." Even the September 11 terrorist attacks have not broken the logiam, except perhaps monetarily. The administration has committed to slow, incremental change so as not to confront the inherent conservatism of the armed services or imperil the weapons purchases pushed so powerfully by the defense contractors and their congressional champions.²² This despite the belief that the failure to exert civilian control over the 1990s left a military establishment declining in quality and effectiveness.

Second, the Clinton administration-despite far more frequent foreign interventions with military forces-was often immobilized over when, where, how, and under what circumstances to use military force in the world. The long, agonizing debates and vacillation over interventions in Haiti, Africa, and the former Yugoslavia reflected in part the weakness of the administration compared to the political power of the uniformed military.²³ The lack of trust between the two sides distorted decision-making to an extreme. Sometimes the military exercised a veto over the use of American force, or if not a veto, the ability to so shape the character of American intervention to the point where means determined ends-a roundabout way of exercising a veto. At other times, civilians ignored or even avoided advice from the military. By the time of the 1999 Kosovo air campaign, the consultative relationship had so broken down that the President was virtually divorced from his theater commander and that commander's communications with the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs corrupted by misunderstanding and distrust. The result was a campaign misconceived at the outset and badly coordinated not only between civilian and military, but between the various levels of command. The consequences could have undone the NATO alliance, but at a minimum stiffened Serbian will, exacerbated divisions within NATO councils and criticism at home in the United States, and prolonged the campaign beyond what most everyone involved predicted.²⁴

Last, the incessant acrimony-the venomous atmosphere in Washington-shook the confidence of the armed forces in their own leadership. Different groups accused the generals and admirals at one extreme of caving in to political correctness, and at the other of being rigid and hidebound about gender integration, war-fighting strategy, and organizational change. The impact on morale contributed to the hemorrhage of able young and mid-rank officers from the profession of arms. The loss of so many fine officers, combined with declines in recruiting (which probably included a diminution in the quality of officer and enlisted recruits), may weaken our military leadership in the next generation and beyond, posing greater danger to national security than any defective policy or blundering decision. Certainly many complex factors have driven people out of uniform and impaired recruiting, but the loss of confidence in the senior uniformed leadership has been cited by many as a reason to leave the service.²⁵

Now to attribute all of these difficulties to the idiosyncrasies of the Clinton administration alone would be a mistake. The unwillingness to exert civilian control and the friction in civil-military relations has followed a larger trend that has roots

stretching all the way back to World War II. Unquestionably Mr. Clinton and his appointees bungled civil-military relations badly, from the beginning. But other administrations have also, and others will again in the future.

If one measures civilian control not by the superficial standard of who signs the papers and who passes the laws, but by the reality of the weight of influence between the uniformed military and civilian policy makers in the two great areas of concern in military affairs outlined here (national security policy and the use of force internationally), then civilian control has deteriorated significantly in the last generation. In theory civilians have the authority to issue virtually any orders and organize the military forces in any fashion they choose. But in practice, the relationship is far more complex. Both sides frequently disagree among themselves. The military has the ability to evade or circumscribe civilian authority by framing the alternatives or tailoring their advice, by leaking information or appealing to public opinion through various indirect means like lobbying groups or retired generals and admirals, by going to friends in the Congress or, on the basis of professional expertise, predicting all sorts of nasty consequences. They can even fail to implement decisions or carry out directives in such a way as to stymie the intent. The reality is that civilian control is not a fact but a process, measured across a spectrum–something that is *situational*, dependent on the people, issues, and political and military forces involved. We are not talking about a *coup* here, or anything demonstrably illegal; what we are talking about is who is calling the tune in military affairs in the United States today.²⁰

Contrast the weakness of the civilians with the strength of the military, not only in the policy process, but in defining American purpose, consistency of voice, and the willingness to exert influence both in public and behind the scene in national security affairs.

The power of the military within the policy process has been growing steadily since a low point under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in the 1960s. Under the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols law, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs has influence within the Pentagon that rivals everyone's except that of the Secretary of Defense, but the Chairman possesses a more competent, focused, and effective staff, often a clearer set of goals, less political constraints, and under some circumstances greater credibility with the public. In the glow of the Gulf War success, the efforts to exorcise Vietnam, the high public esteem enjoyed by the armed forces, and the disgust Americans felt for politics in general and the partisanship in the Washington in particular, the Chairman has grown in status quite beyond his legal or institutional position. The Joint Staff is the most powerful agency in the Department of Defense; frequently, by dint of its speed, agility, knowledge, and expertise, the Joint Staff frames the choices.²⁷ The Joint Requirements Oversight Council has gathered influence and authority over the most basic issues of weapons and force structure.²⁸ Within the bureaucracy, JCS has a representative in the interagency decision process that permits the uniformed military a voice separate from that of the Department of Defense. The armed services, moreover, maintain their own congressional liaison and public affairs bureaucracies that are so large that they are impossible to monitor fully. (One officer admitted to me privately that his duty on Capitol Hill was to encourage Congress to restore a billion dollars that the Pentagon's civilian leadership had cut out of his service's budget request.)²⁹ The regional commanders-in-chief have come to assume such importance in their areas-particularly in the Pacific and in the Middle East and Central Asia-that they have effectively displaced American ambassadors and the State Department as the primary instruments of American foreign policy.

In recent reorganizations, these CINCs have so increased in stature and influence within the defense establishment that their testimony can sway Congress and embarrass and impede the administration, especially when the civilians in the executive branch are weak and the Congress is dominated by an aggressive leadership of the opposition political party. In fact, so powerful have institutional forces become, and so intractable the problem of altering the military establishment, that the new Rumsfeld regime in the Pentagon decided to run the comprehensive review of national defense in strict secrecy, effectively cutting the CINCs, the Chiefs, and Congress out of the process so that opposition could not organize in advance of the effort at transformation.³¹ One knowledgeable commentator put it this way in early 1999: "The dirty little secret of American civil-military relations, by no means unique to this [the Clinton] administration, is that the commander in chief does not command the military establishment; he cajoles it, negotiates with it, and, as necessary, appeases it."³² A high Pentagon civilian privately substantiated the interpretation: what "weighs heavily ... every day" is "the reluctance, indeed refusal, of the political appointees to disagree with the military on any matter, not just operational matters." Why? This observer cited "three reasons, only one of which is peculiar to this administration. Lack of military experience ... widely noted but worse than most people realize. ... Low priority of national security issues.... They were burned so badly on gays in

the military (and deservedly so) that they have instructed their appointees in the Pentagon to maintain political peace above all.³³

Furthermore, senior military leaders have been able to use their leverage for a variety of purposes, either because of civilian indifference, or deference, or ignorance, or because they have felt it necessary to fill voids of policy and decisionmaking. But sometimes the influence is exercised intentionally and purposefully, even aggressively. After fifty years of World and Cold War struggle, the leak, the bureaucratic maneuver, the alliance with partisans in Congress-the ménage a trois between the administration, Congress, and the military-have become a way of life.³⁴ In the 1970s, responding to the widely held uniformed view that a reserve call up would have galvanized public support for Vietnam, allowed an intensified prosecution of the war, and prevented the divorce between the Army and the American people, the Army Chief of Staff deliberately redesigned army divisions to contain "roundout" units of reserve or National Guard troops, making it impossible for the President to commit the Army to battle without mobilizing the reserves." In the 1980s, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral William Crowe worked "behind the scenes" to encourage Congress to strengthen his own office even though the Secretary of Defense opposed such a move. Crowe pushed for American escort of Kuwaiti tankers in the Persian Gulf because he believed it important for American foreign policy. He and the Chiefs strived to slow the Reagan administration's strategic missile defense program. Crowe even went so far as to create a personal communications channel with his Soviet military counterpart, apparently unknown to his civilian superiors, to avert any possibility of a misunderstanding leading to war. "It was in the nature of the Chairman's job," Crowe remembered, "that I occasionally found myself fighting against Defense Department positions as well as for them."

In the 1990s, military leaks led directly to the weakening and ultimate dismissal of the Clinton administration's first Secretary of Defense.³⁷ In 1994 the Chief of Naval Operations openly discussed with senior commanders his plans to manipulate the Navy budget and operations tempo to force different priorities on the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Congress. When a memo recounting the conversation surfaced in the press, no civilian in authority called the CNO to account.³⁸ The 1995 Commission on the Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces recommended consolidating the staffs of the service chiefs and the service secretaries, further weakening civilian power at the service secretary level, but no one mentioned the diminution of civilian control that would take place.³⁹ During the 1990s, even when the administration appeared to be forceful, insisting upon the use of American forces over military objections or resistance, the military leadership often arbitrated events. The 1995 Bosnia intervention was something of a paradigm. American priorities seemed to have been: 1) overwhelming numbers in order to suffer few if any casualties, 2) a deadline for exit, 3) robust rules of engagement, again to forestall casualties, 4) narrowing the definition of the mission to be incontrovertibly "do-able," and 5)-*fifth*–reconstructing Bosnia as a viable independent country.

In recent years the senior uniformed leadership has spoken out on issues of policy–undoubtedly with the encouragement or at least the acquiescence of civilian officials, but sometimes not. Sometimes these pronouncements endeavor to sell policies and decisions to the public or within the government before a presidential decision, even though such public advocacy politicizes the Chairman, a Chief, or a CINC and inflates their influence in the public discussions of policy. A four-star general publishes a long article in our most respected foreign affairs journal, preceded by a *New York Times* op-ed article a scant ten days after retiring. In it, he criticizes the administration's most sensitive (and vulnerable) policy–with virtually no comment in the press or elsewhere as to whether his action was professionally appropriate. ⁴¹ The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff gives "an impassioned interview" to the *New York Times* "on the folly of intervention" in Bosnia while "the first Bush administration" ponders "the question of whether to intervene."⁴² Another Chairman coins the so-called "Dover Principle," cautioning the civilian leadership about the human and political costs of casualties when American forces are sent to intervene in some crisis or conflict. This public lecture clearly aimed to establish boundaries in the public's mind and constrain civilian freedom of action in intervening overseas.

Certainly Generals Shalikashvili and Shelton have been more circumspect about speaking out on issues of policy, but their predecessor, Colin Powell, possessed and used extraordinary power throughout his tenure as chairman of the JCS. He conceived and then sold to a skeptical Secretary of Defense and a divided Congress the "Base Force" reorganization and reduction in 1990-1991. He shaped the Gulf War to limited objectives, the use of overwhelming force, and a speedy end to the combat and the immediate exit of American forces. He spoke frequently on matters of policy during and after the election of 1992 (an op-ed in the *New York Times* and more comprehensive statements of foreign policy in *Foreign Affairs*). Powell virtually vetoed intervention in Somalia and Bosnia, ignored or circumvented the other chiefs and the services on a regular basis, and managed the advisory process so as to present only single alternatives to civilian policy makers. All of this antedated his forcing President Clinton to back down on the open service of homosexuals in 1993.⁴⁵ In fact, General Powell became so powerful and so adept in the bureaucratic manipulations that often decide crucial questions before the final decision-maker affixes a signature, that in 2001 the Bush administration purposely installed an experienced,

powerful, highly-respected figure at the Defense Department lest Powell control the entire foreign and national security apparatus in the new administration.

All of these are examples-and only public manifestations-of a policy and decision-making process that has tilted far more toward the military than ever before in American history in peacetime.

Now an essential question arises: do these developments differ from previous practice or experience in American history? At first glance, the answer might seem to be "no." Military and civilian have often been at odds, and on occasion the military has acted beyond what might be thought proper in a republican system of government which defines civilian control, or military subordination to civil authority, as obligatory.

Historical examples abound. Commanding Generals and Chiefs of Staff of the Army from James Wilkinson in the 1790s through Maxwell Taylor in the 1950s have fought with presidents and Secretaries of War or Defense in the open and in private over all sorts of issues-up to and including key military policies in times of crisis. Officers openly disparaged President Lincoln during the Civil War and the President's problems with his generals were legendary.⁴⁵ Two Commanding Generals of the Army were so antagonistic toward the War Department that they moved their headquarters out of Washington: Winfield Scott to New York in the 1850s and William Tecumseh Sherman to St. Louis in the 1870s.⁴⁶ In the 1880s, reform-minded naval officers connived to modernize the Navy from wood and sail to steel and steam. They captured the civilian leadership in the process, forged an alliance with the steel industry, and for the first time in American history, in coordination with political and economic elites, sold naval reform and a peacetime buildup of standing forces to the public through publications, promotions, displays, reviews, and other precursors of the promotional public relations that would be used so frequently–and effectively–in the 20th century.⁴⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s, the youthful Army Air Corps became so adept at public relations, and at generating controversy over air power, that three different presidential administrations were forced into appointing high-level boards of outsiders to study how the Army could (or could not) properly incorporate aviation.⁴⁸

Both Presidents Roosevelt complained bitterly about the resistance of the armed services to change. "You should go through the experience of trying to get any changes in the thinking . . . and action of the career diplomats and then you'd know what a real problem was," FDR complained in 1940. "But the Treasury and the State Department put together are nothing as compared with the Na-a-vy. . . . To change anything in the Na-a-vy is like punching a feather bed. You punch it with your right and you punch it with your left until you are finally exhausted, and then you find the damn bed just as it was before you started punching."

The interservice battles of the 1940s and 1950s were so fierce that neither Congress or President could contain them. The internecine warfare blocked President Harry Truman's effort to unify the armed forces in the 1940s ("unification" resulted in loose confederation) and angered President Dwight D. Eisenhower through the 1950s. Neither administration fully controlled strategy, force structure, or weapons procurement; both had to fight service parochialism and interests, and ruled largely by imposing top-line budget limits and forcing the services to struggle over a limited pie. Eisenhower replaced or threatened to fire several of his Chiefs. Only through byzantine maneuvers, managerial wizardry, and draconian measures did Robert McNamara install a modicum of coherence and integration to the overall administration of the Defense Department in the 1960s. The price, however, was a ruthless, relentless bureaucratic war that not only contributed to the disaster of Vietnam, but a left a legacy of suspicion and deceit that still infects American civil-military relations to this day.⁵⁰ The point of this history is that civil-military relations *are* messy and frequently antagonistic; military people *do* on occasion defy civilians; civilian control *is* situational.⁵¹

But the past differs from the present in four crucial ways.

First, the military has *united* to oppose, evade, or thwart civilian choices, whereas in the past, the armed services were usually divided internally or amongst themselves. Indeed most civil-military conflict during the Cold War arose from rivalry between the services over roles, missions, budgets, or new weapons systems, rather than over the use of American armed forces or general military policies.

Second, the issues today reach far beyond the narrowly military, not only to the wider realm of national security, but often to foreign relations more broadly. In certain cases military affairs even affects the character and values of American society itself.

Third, military leaders have drifted over the last generation from the civil-military role primarily of advisors and advocates within the private confines of the executive branch, to a much more public function. They champion not just their services but policies and decisions in and beyond the military realm. Sometimes they mobilize public or congressional

opinion either directly or indirectly (whether in Congress or the Executive Branch) prior to civilian officials reaching a decision. To give but three examples: on whether to sign a treaty banning the use of land mines, or whether to put American forces into the Balkans to stop ethnic cleansing, or whether to join the International Court of Criminal Justice. While these actions are not unprecedented, they have occurred with increased frequency, and represent a significant encroachment on civilian control of the military.⁵²

Fourth, senior officers now lead a permanent peacetime military establishment that differs fundamentally from any of its predecessors. Unlike the large citizen forces raised in wartime and during the Cold War, today's armed services are professional and increasingly disconnected, even in some ways estranged, from civilian society. Unlike previous peacetime professional forces which were also isolated from civilian culture, today's are far larger, far more involved worldwide, far more capable, and often indispensable (even on a daily basis) to American foreign policy and world politics. Five decades of world and cold war, moreover, have created something entirely new in American history: a separate military community, led by the regular forces but including also the National Guard and reserves, veterans organizations, and the communities, labor forces, industries, and pressure groups active in military affairs. More diverse than the "Military-Industrial Complex" of President Eisenhower's farewell address forty years ago, this "military" has become a recognizable interest group. And it is larger, more political, more politically active, more partisan, more purposeful, and more influential than anything similar in American history.⁵³

Now one might argue that this is all temporary, the unique overhang of fifty years of world and cold wars, and that it will dissipate and balance will return now that the Clinton Administration is history. Perhaps. But civil-military conflict is not very likely to diminish. In "Rumsfeld's Rules," Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld states that his primary function is "to exercise civilian control over the Department for the Commander-in-Chief and the country." He understands that he possesses "the right to get into anything and exercise it [civilian control]." He recognizes that "when cutting staff at the Pentagon, don't eliminate the thin layer that assures civilian control."⁵⁴ His effort to recast the military establishment for the post-Cold War era–promised during the 2000 presidential campaign–provoked such immediate and powerful resistance (and not just by the armed forces) that he has abandoned any plans to force reorganization or cut so-called "legacy" weapons systems. ⁵⁵ In the Afghanistan campaign, Rumsfeld and other civilian leaders have been reported to be frustrated by a supposed lack of imagination on the part of the military, and at least one four-star in return accused Rumsfeld of "micromanagement"⁵⁶ There is also other evidence of conflict to come: traditional conceptions of military professionalism–particularly the ethical and professional norms of the officer corps–have been evolving away from concepts and behaviors that facilitate civil-military cooperation.

If the manifestations of diminished civilian control were simply a sine curve, that is, a low period in an alternating pattern, or the product of a strong Joint Chiefs and a weak president during the coincidence of a critical transitional period in American history and national defense (the end of the Cold War), there would be little cause for concern. Civilian control is situational and to a degree cyclical. But the decline extends back before the Clinton administration. And there are indications that the long trend that began during the Vietnam war has coincided with a weakening of the structures in our social, political, and institutional life that have assured civilian control over the course of American history.

For over three centuries, civilian control has rested on four foundations which individually and in combination not only prevented any direct military threat to civilian government, but kept military influence, even in wartime, largely contained within the boundaries of professional expertise and focus. First has been the rule of law and with it, reverence for a constitution that provided explicitly for civilian control of the military. Any violation of the Constitution or its process was sure to bring retribution from one or all three of the branches of government, with public support. Second, Americans kept their regular forces small. The United States relied in peacetime on ocean boundaries to provide sufficient warning of attack and depended on a policy of mobilization to repel invasion or wage war. Thus the regular military could never endanger civilian government—in peacetime because of size and in wartime because the ranks were filled with citizens unlikely to cooperate or acquiesce in anything illegal or unconstitutional. The very reliance on citizen-soldiers—militia, volunteers, and conscripts temporarily in service to meet the emergency—was a third safeguard of civilian control. And finally, the armed forces themselves internalized military subordination to civil authority: accepted it willingly as an axiom of American government and the foundation of military professionalism. "When we enter the army we do so with full knowledge that our first duty is toward the government, entirely regardless of our own views under any given circumstances," Major

General John J. Pershing instructed First Lieutenant George S. Patton, Jr. in 1916. "We are at liberty to express our personal views only when called upon to do so or else confidentially to our friends, but always confidentially and with the complete understanding that they are in no sense to govern our actions."⁵⁷ Or, as Omar Bradley, the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put it: "thirty two years in the peacetime army had taught me to do my job, hold my tongue, and keep my name out of the papers."⁵⁸

Much about these four factors has changed. More than sixty years of hot and cold war, a large military establishment, world responsibilities, a searing failure in Vietnam, changes in American society–among other factors–have weakened the foundations upon which civilian control have rested in the United States.

First, and most troubling, is the skepticism, even cynicism, expressed about government, lawyers, and justice, part of a general and generation-long diminution of respect for people and institutions that has eroded American civic culture and American faith in law. Polling data show that Americans have more confidence in their least democratic institutions: the military, small business, the police, and the Supreme Court. Americans express the least confidence in the most democratic: Congress.⁵⁹ So dangerous is this trend that Harvard's Kennedy School of Government established a "Visions of Governance for the Twenty-first Century" project to explore the phenomenon, study its implications, and attempt to counteract some of the more deleterious effects.⁶⁰ American leaders cannot continue to vilify government, the U.S. government in particular, and expect patriotism to prosper or even survive as a fundamental civic value.

Second, the media, traditionally the herald of liberty in this society, has become less substantial, more superficial, less knowledgeable, more focused on profit, less professional, and more trivial. About the only liberty the media seems to champion vocally is the freedom of the press. Issues of civilian control seem to escape the press; time after time, events or issues that in past years would have been framed or interpreted as issues of civilian control, go unnoticed and unreported as such.⁶¹

Third, the nation's core civic culture has deteriorated. Basic social institutions such as marriage and the family, and indicators of society's health such as crime rates and out-of-wedlock births, while stabilizing or improving in the 1990s, have weakened over time. Our communities, neighborhoods, civic organizations, fratemal groups, and social gatherings have diminished in favor of individual entertainment, staying at home with the video and the Internet, and avoiding crime, crowds, traffic, or dealing with the crumbling physical and social infrastructure of our society. American society has become more splintered and people more isolated into small groups "clustered" geographically and demographically, with similar values, culture, and lifestyles. With this deterioration of civic cohesion–gated communities being perhaps emblematic–has been a weakening of shared values: less truthfulness, less generosity, less sacrifice, less social consciousness, less faith, less common agreement on ethical behavior, and more advocacy, actimony, individualism, relativism, materialism, cynicism, and self-gratification. The September 11 attacks and the war on terrorism are unlikely to reverse these trends as long as the national leadership exhorts the American people to go back to "normal."⁶²

Civilian control is one common understanding that seems to have faded in American civic consciousness. The American people-whose study and understanding of civics and government generally has declined-have lost their traditional skepticism about the professional military that made civilian control a core political assumption that was widely understood and periodically voiced. Simply put, the public no longer thinks about civilian control-doesn't understand it, doesn't discuss it, and doesn't grasp how it can and should operate.⁶³ An occasional popular movie like *The Siege* and *Thirteen Days* raises the issue, but most recent films caricature the military and frequently, like *GI Jane* and *Rules of Engagement*, lionize an honest, brave, faithful military and demonize lying, avaricious politicians.

Fourth, in the last generation the United States has abandoned the *first* principle of civilian control, the bedrock practiced throughout American history extending back into pre-modern England: the reliance on the citizen soldier for national defense.65 National security policy no longer seriously includes mobilizing industry and the population for large-scale war. Americans in uniform, whether they serve for one hitch or an entire career, are taught to view themselves (and do) as professionals. To be the apotheosis of citizen soldiers, some members hold civilian government jobs in their reserve units or elsewhere in the government in national security, and others serve on active duty considerably more than the one weekend a month and two weeks a year of traditional reserves.⁶⁶ Furthermore, while Guards and reserves pride themselves on their "professionalism" and both voice and believe the traditional rhetoric about citizen soldiering, the views of their up-and-coming officers mirror almost exactly those of their regular counterparts.⁶⁷ Reserve forces are spending more and more time on active duty, not simply for temporary duty for the crisis over homeland defense. Increasingly, the National Guard and reserves are being used interchangeably with the regulars, even in overseas deployments on constabulary missions,

something wholly unprecedented.⁶⁸ Even if they call themselves citizen soldiers, the fundamental distinction between citizens and soldiers has so blurred that in 1998, at two of the most respected of our professional military educational institutions, Marine majors who spent their adult lives in uniform and National Guard adjutant generals who have done the same, could both insist that they were "citizen soldiers."⁶⁹ Americans have lost the high regard they once possessed for temporary military service as an obligation of citizenship, along with an understanding of its underlying function for civic cohesion and civilian control of the military.⁷⁰ Today, fewer Americans serve or know service, and the numbers will decline as a smaller percentage of the population serve in the uniform.⁷¹ Their sense of ownership or interest in the military, and their understanding of the distinctiveness of military culture–its ethos and needs–has declined. In recent years the number of veterans serving in the U.S. Congress has fallen fifty percent, and those veterans are fewer now as a percentage than in the population as a whole, reversing (in 1995) a trend of the entire 20¹¹ century.⁷² And the recent change is dramatic; less than ten years ago, 62 percent of the Senate and 41 percent of the House were veterans. Today in the 107th Congress, the Senate is 38 percent and the House 29.⁷³

Finally, at the same time that civilian control has weakened in public awareness, so too has the principle declined in the consciousness and professional understanding of the American armed forces. Historically, one of the chief bulwarks of civilian control has been the American military establishment itself. Its small size in peacetime, the professionalism of the officers, their political neutrality, their willing subordination, and their acceptance of a set of unwritten but largely understood rules of behavior in the civil-military relationship, has made civilian control succeed-messy as it has been, and situational as it may always be. In the last half century, however, while everyone in armed forces continues to support the concept, the ethos and *mentalité* of the officer corps has changed in ways that damage civil-military cooperation and undermine civilian control.

Reversing a century and a half of practice, the American officer corps has become partisan in political affiliation, and overwhelmingly Republican. Beginning with President Richard Nixon's politics of polarization-the southern strategy and reaching out to the "hard-hats"–Republicans embraced old-fashioned patriotism and strong national defense as a central part of their national agenda. During the late 1970s, when the armed services suffered lean budgets and the "hollow force," and in the 1980s when Ronald Reagan made rebuilding the military establishment and taking the offensive in the Cold War centerpieces for his presidency, Republicans reached out to the military as a core constituency. They succeeded in part because in the wake of Vietnam, the Democratic Party virtually abandoned the military, espousing anti-military rhetoric and reduced defense spending. During the same period, voting started to become a habit in the officer corps. In the 1950s, the Federal Voting Assistance Program came into existence in order to help enlisted men, most of whom were draftees or draft-induced volunteers, to vote. In every unit an officer was designated to connect the program to the men, and undoubtedly the duty began slowly to break down the old taboo against officers exercising their franchise. How credibly could officers assist their soldiers if they themselves abstained from voting?⁴

Today the vast majority of the officer corps votes and identifies with a political philosophy and party: comparing the TISS sample of active duty officers with earlier data, from over 54% independent, no preference, or other in the 1976 to 28% in 1998-1999, and from 33% to 64% Republican.⁷⁵ In the presidential election of 2000, Republicans targeted military voters by organizing endorsements from senior retired flag officers, advertising in military publications, using Gulf War heroes Colin Powell and H. Norman Schwartzkopf on the campaign trail, urging soldiers to register and to vote, and focusing special effort on absentee military voters, which proved critical–and perhaps the margin of victory–in Florida where thousands of the officers were legal residents.⁷⁶

Every generation of American professional officers since before the Civil War abstained as a group from partisan politics, studiously avoiding any partisanship of word or deed, activity or affiliation, to the point where by George C. Marshall's generation the practice was not even to vote.⁷⁷ Historically a handful of the most senior pursued their own personal political ambitions, usually trying to parlay wartime success into the presidency. In a very few instances, some even ran for office while on active duty. But these were exceptions. The belief was that the military, as the neutral servant of the state, stood above the dirty business of politics. Professional norms dictated faith and loyalty not just in deed but in spirit to whomever held the reins of power under the constitutional system. To Marshall's generation, partisan affiliation and voting conflicted with military professionalism.⁷⁸

Marshall and his generation must have sensed that the habit of voting leads to partisan thinking, inclining officers to become invested in policy choices or decisions that relate directly to their professional responsibilities.²⁹ Officers at every level have to bring difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions to their troops and motivate them to accomplish the task. Likewise senior officers must advocate the needs and perspectives of the troops to political leaders even when that advice is unsolicited and unwanted. How effective can that advice be if the civilians know the officers are opposed to the policy?

What are the effects on morale when the troops know their officers dislike, disrespect, or disagree with the politicians, or think the mission is unwise, ill-conceived, or unnecessary?

The consequences of partisanship can also be more subtle and indirect, but equally far-reaching, even to the point of producing contempt for civilian policy and politicians, or unprofessional, disruptive behavior, as in 1993. There is a belief current today among officers that the core of the Democratic party is 'hostile to military culture' and engaged in a 'culture war' against the armed forces, mostly because of pressure for further gender integration and open homosexual service.⁸⁰ During the 2000 election campaign, when Al Gore stumbled briefly supporting a 'litmus test' on gays in the military for selecting members of the Joint Chiefs, he confirmed for many in uniform that Democrats do not understand the military profession or care about its effectiveness. His campaign's effort to minimize absentee votes in Florida and elsewhere through technical challenges outraged the armed forces, raising worries that a Gore victory might spark an exodus from the ranks, or that attitudes toward him were so soured that a Gore administration would have even more troubled relations with the military than Clinton's.⁸¹

Partisan politicization loosens the connection of the military to the American people. If the public begins to perceive the military as an interest group driven by its own needs and ethos, support-and trust-will diminish. Already there are hints. When a random survey asked a thousand Americans in the fall of 1998 how often military leaders would try to avoid carrying out orders they opposed, over two-thirds answered at least "some of the time."

Partisanship also poisons the relationship between the president and the military leadership. When a group of retired flag officers, including former CINCs and Chiefs, endorsed presidential candidates in 1992 and again in 2000, they broadcast their politicization to the public and further legitimated partisanship in the ranks, for everyone knows four-stars never really retire. Like princes of the church, they represent the culture and the profession just as authoritatively as their counterparts on active duty. If senior retired officers make a practice of endorsing presidential contenders, will the politicians trust the loyalty and discretion of the generals and admirals on active duty, in particular those who serve at the top, not to retire and use their inside knowledge to try to overturn policy or elect opponents? Will not presidents begin to vet candidates for the top jobs for pliability, or equally deleterious, party or political views, rather than for excellence, achievement, character, and candor? Over time, the result will be weak military advice, declining military effectiveness, and accelerating politicization. The investment of officers in one policy or another will lead civilians to question whether military recommendations are the best professional advice of the nation's professional military experts. Perhaps one reason Bill Clinton and his people dealt with the military at such arm's length is that he and they knew that officers were the most solidly Republican group inside the government.⁸³ One need only read Richard Holbrooke's memoir about negotiating the Dayton accords to plumb the depth of suspicion between military and civilian at the highest levels. In 1995, convinced that the military opposed the limited bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs, Holbrooke and Secretary of State Warren Christopher believed that the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was lying to them when he asserted that the Air Force was running out of targets.⁸⁴

Certainly officers have the right to vote and to participate privately in our nation's political life. No one questions the prerogative of retired officers to run for office or endorse candidates. But they must recognize its corrosive effect on military professionalism and the threat to the military establishments relationship with Congress, the President, and the American people. Having a right and exercising it are two very different things.

A second example of changing military professionalism has been the widespread attitude among officers that civilian society has become corrupt and perhaps degenerate, while the military has remained a repository for virtue and perhaps is the one remaining bastion of the traditional values that make the country strong in an increasing unraveling social fabric. Historically officers have often decried the selfishness, commercialism, and disorder that seems to characterize much of American society.⁸⁵ But opinion today has a harder, more critical, more moralistic edge, less leavened by that sense of acceptance that enabled officers in the past to tolerate the clash between their values and those of a democratic, individualistic civilian culture–and reconcile the conflict with their own continued service. Nearly 90 per cent of the elite military officers (regular and reserves) surveyed in 1998-1999 by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies agreed that "the decline of traditional values is contributing to the breakdown of our society." Some 70 per cent thought "through leading by example, the military could help American society become more moral" and 75 per cent that "civilian society would be better off if it adopted more of the military's values and customs."⁸⁶ Is it healthy for civilian control when the American armed forces believe that they are morally, organizationally, institutionally, and personally superior to the rest of society–and contemptuous of that society? Do we wish civic society in a democratic country to adopt military norms, values, outlooks,

and behaviors? In my judgment that is an utter misreading of the role and function of our armed forces. Their purpose is to defend society, not to define it. The latter is militarism, in the classic definition: the same thinking that in part inclined the French and German armies to intervene in the politics of their nations in the 20th century.

Third, and the most disturbing change in military sentiment, is the belief that officers should confront and resist civilians when their policies or decisions threaten to weaken national defense or lead the country into disaster. Many think that officers should speak out publicly, or work behind the scenes, to stop or modify a policy, or even resign in protest. Some senior leaders have been willing to speak publicly on issues of national security policy and foreign and military policy before policy is formulated, and afterwards as spokespersons for what are often highly controversial and partisan initiatives or programs. In 1998 and 1999, the respected retired Army colonel and political scientist Sam Sarkesian, and the much-decorated Marine veteran, novelist, and former Secretary of the Navy James Webb, called publicly for military leaders to participate in national security policy debates, not merely as advisers to the civilian leadership, but as public advocates, an idea that seems to resonate with many in the armed forces today.⁸⁷ "Military subservience to political control applies to existing policy, not to policy debates," admonished Webb, as if officers can subscribe to policy and debate it honestly at the same time.⁸⁸ Such behavior politicizes military issues and professional officers directly, for rare is the military issue that remains insulated from politics and broader national life.

This willingness, indeed in some cases eagemess, to engage in forming public opinion and striving publicly to affect decision-making and policy outcomes is a dangerous role for our military, and extraordinarily corrosive of civilian control. Is it proper for military officers to leak information to the press "to discredit specific policies-procurement decisions, prioritization plans, operations that the leaker opposes," as Admiral Crowe in his memoirs admits happens "sometimes" and "copiously?"⁸⁹ Is it proper every year for the four services, the CINCs, or the Joint Chiefs to advocate to the public directly their need for ships, airplanes, divisions, number of troops, and other resources? Or what percentage of the nation's economy should go to defense as opposed to other needs?⁹⁰ This advocacy reached such a cacophony in the fall of 2000 that the Secretary of Defense warned the military leadership not "to beat the drum with a tin cup" for their budgets during a presidential campaign and a transition to a new administration.⁹¹ Do we wish the military leadership to argue their views on the merits or demerits of intervention in the Balkans or elsewhere in order to mobilize public opinion one way or the other, before the President decides? Or debate whether or not the United States should sign a land mine treaty or international court of criminal justice treaty? Imagine 1941: should the Army and the Navy have pronounced publicly on the merits or dements of Lend Lease, or convoy escort, or occupying Iceland, or the Europe first strategy? Or 1861: on whether the Lincoln administration should reinforce Fort Sumter, or fight to restore the Union after the conflict began? Should senior military officers question the President's strategy in the midst of a military operation, as happened publicly in leaks within the first week of the bombing campaign over Kosovo in 1999?⁹² In such instances, what happens to the President's, and Congress's, authority and credibility with the public, or ability to lead the nation? And how would such advocacy affect the trust and confidence between the President, his cabinet officers, and the most senior generals and admirals, which is so necessary for effective policies and decisions?

The way in which military officers have interpreted a study of the Joint Chiefs of Staff role in the decision on intervention and in the formulation of strategy in Southeast Asia in the 1963-1965 period exemplifies the erosion of professional norms and values. H. R. McMaster's book *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* is by all accounts the most widely read and discussed history book in the military in the last several years.⁹⁴ Officers believe that McMaster validates longstanding military convictions about Vietnam: that the Joint Chiefs, lacking a proper understanding of their role and the requisite courage to oppose the strategy of gradualism that they knew would fail, should have voiced their opposition–publicly if necessary–and resigned rather than carrying out the strategy. Had they done so, goes this credo, they would have saved the country a tragic, costly, humiliating–and above all, unnecessary–defeat.⁹⁵

McMaster's book neither says nor implies that the Chiefs should have obstructed U.S. Vietnam policy in any other way than by insisting on presenting their views frankly and forcefully to their civilian superiors, and speaking honestly to the Congress when asked for their views: no leaks, no public statements, and no resignations unless they personally and professionally could not stand, morally and ethically, to carry out the policy. There is in fact no tradition of resignation in the American military. In 1783 at Newburgh, New York, as the War for Independence was ending, the American officer corps rejected individual or mass resignation—which can be indistinguishable from mutiny. George Washington dissuaded them not to march on Congress or to refuse orders over Congress's unwillingness to pay them or guarantee their hard-earned

pensions. The precedent has survived for over two centuries. No American army ever again considered open insubordination. Proper professional behavior cannot include walking away from a policy, an operation, or a war an officer believes is wrong or will fail. That is what the left advocated during the Vietnam War and the American military rightly rejected it. Imagine the consequences if the Union Army had decided in late 1862 that it had signed on to save the Union but not free the slaves, and had resigned *en masse* because it disagreed with the Emancipation Proclamation, as many did? Air Force Chief of Staff Ronald Fogleman did not resign in protest in 1997, as many officers wish to believe; he requested early retirement and left in such a manner-quietly, without a full explanation—so as *not* to confront his civilian superior over a decision with which he deeply disagreed.⁹⁶ All McMaster says (and believes), and all that is proper in the American system, is for the military to advise, honestly and forthrightly, or to advocate in their confidential advisory capacity, a course of action. If their advice goes unheeded, and the policy or decision is legal, carry it out.

Resignation in protest directly assails civilian control. Resigning with a public explanation, however softly couched, would constitute an effort to marshal all of an officer's military knowledge, expertise, and experience–and the profession's standing with the public and reputation for disinterested patriotism–to undercut something that the officer opposed. The fact that officers today either ignore, or are oblivious to this basic aspect for their professional ethics, and would countenance, even admire, such truculent behavior, illustrates both a fundamental misunderstanding of civilian control and its weakening as a primary professional value.⁹⁷

Our military leadership has already traveled far in the direction of self-interested bureaucratic behavior in the last half century, to become advocates for policy outcomes, as opposed to advisors-to advocate not only the military perspective on a problem, or the needs of the military establishment and national defense, or the interests of their service or branch, but their own views of foreign and military policy, even to the point of pressing for a specific policy outcomes outside the normal advisory channels. Some of this is unthinking, some the product of civilian abrogation of responsibility. Some originates in the unintended consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 which so strengthened the Chairman and the CINCs. But some is quite conscious. In his memoirs, Colin Powell, the most publicly celebrated soldier of the era, wrote that he learned as a White House Fellow from his most important mentor that in the government "you never know what you can get away with until you try."⁹⁸ Is that a proper standard of professional behavior for a uniformed officer? He also declared that his generation of officers "vowed that when our turn came to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in halfhearted warfare for half-baked reasons that the American people could not understand or support.""⁹⁹ Is that a proper view of military subordination to civilian authority?

Unfortunately, General Powell's views mirror attitudes that have developed over the last generation. The survey of officer and civilian attitudes and opinions undertaken by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies in 1998-1999 discovered that many officers now believe that they have the duty to force their own views on the civilians when the United States is contemplating committing American forces abroad. When "asked whether . . . military leaders should be neutral, advise, advocate, or insist on having their way in . . . the decision process" to use military force, fifty percent or more of the up-and-coming active duty officers answered "insist" on the following issues: "setting rules of engagement, ensuring that clear political and military goals exist. . . , developing an 'exit strategy," and "deciding what kinds of military units . . . will be used to accomplish all tasks."¹⁰⁰ In the context of the questionnaire, "insist" definitely implied that officers should try to compel the civilians to accept the military's recommendations.

In 2000, a three-star general casually referred to a uniformed culture in the Pentagon that labels the Office of the Secretary of Defense as "the enemy" because it exercises civilian control.¹⁰¹ In 1999 staff officers on the National Security Council attempted to promulgate a new version of the National Security Strategy in haste to prevent the President from enunciating his own principles.¹⁰² In 1997 the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs purposely coaxed the other chiefs to block Congress's effort to reform the military establishment through the Quadrennial Defense Review.¹⁰³ In the early 1990s senior officers presented alternatives for the use of American forces abroad designed purposefully to discourage the civilian leadership from intervening in the first place.¹⁰⁴ Twice in the last five years members of the Joint Chiefs threatened to resign as a means of blocking a policy or decision.

Thus, in the last generation, the American military has slipped from conceiving of its primary role as advice to civilians, and then executing their orders, to believing that it is also proper–even essential in some situations–to try to impose the military's viewpoint on policies or decisions. In other words, American officers have, over the course of the Cold War and in reaction to certain aspects of it, forgotten or abandoned their historic stewardship for civilian control, their awareness of the requirements to maintain it, and an understanding of the proper boundaries and behaviors that made it work properly and effectively. That so many voices applaud this behavior, or sanction it by their silence, suggests that a new definition of military professionalism may be forming, at least in civil-military relations. If so, the consequences are not likely to benefit national security, and could even alter the character of American government itself.

Now I am sure that to many of you these concerns seem overblown. Certainly there is no crisis. The American military conceives of itself as loyal and patriotic, universally expressing support for civilian control as a fundamental principle of government and of military professionalism. Yet at the same time, the evidence is overwhelming that civil-military relationships have deteriorated in our government. The underlying structures in civilian society and in the military profession that have traditionally supported the system of civilian control have also weakened. Over the course of the last generation, much influence and actual power has migrated to the military, who have either been allowed to define, or have themselves claimed, an expanded role in policy and decision making.¹⁰⁶ The reasons are complex: partly circumstance, partly civilian inattention or politically-motivated timidity, and partly because military leaders have either forgotten, or chosen to ignore, the basic behaviors that make civil-military relations function in such a way as to support military effectiveness and civilian control at the same time. But whatever the causes, the consequences are dangerous. The shift to greater military influence, combined with the ignorance or indifference of the American people to civilian control, and the misreading of the limits on behavior on the part of senior military officers, could at some future time produce a civil-military clash that damages American government or compromises the nation's defense.

That civilians in the executive and legislative branches of government over the last generation bear ultimate responsibility for these developments is beyond doubt. Some on both sides seem to sense it. Secretaries of defense came into office in 1989, 1993, and 2001 concerned about military subordination and determined to exert their authority. Civilian officials have the obligation to make the system work, not to abdicate for any reason. But to rely on the politicians to restore the proper balance is to ignore the conditions and processes that can frustrate civilian control. The historical record is not encouraging. Over two centuries, the officials elected and appointed to rule the military have varied enormously in knowledge, experience, understanding, and motive. Their propensity to exercise civilian control, and to provide sound, forceful leadership, has been largely situational-and unpredictable.

Nor can the changes in American society and political understanding that have weakened civilian control be easily reversed. National defense will capture at best superficial public attention even during a war on terrorism, unless military operations are ongoing or the government asks for special sacrifice. And in wartime, Americans want to rely more on military advice and authority, not less. Fewer and fewer Americans will experience uniformed service, and without a conscious effort by our media to avoid caricaturing military culture, and by our colleges and universities to expand military history and security studies, a rising generation of civilian leaders will lack not only the experience, but also the comprehension of military affairs needed to make civilian control work effectively.

A better way to alter the equation is for officers to recall the attitudes, and rejuvenate the behaviors, that civilian control requires. Certainly every officer supports the concept. Every officer swears at commissioning "to support and defend the Constitution of the United States," and "bear true faith and allegiance" to the same.¹⁰⁸ Because civilian control pervades the Constitution, the oath is a personal promise to preserve, protect, defend, and support civilian control, in actual practice as well as in theory. The requirement for such an oath was written into the Constitution for precisely that purpose.¹⁰⁹ The oath is not to maximize one service's budget, or try to achieve a certain policy outcome, or to try to reshape civilian life toward a military vision of the good society.

Examine your own personal views of civilians, particularly of your clients: the American people, their elected officials, and those appointed to exercise responsibility in national security affairs. I must admit that for the ten-plus years I worked in the Department of Defense, I measured every senior officer and official I worked with and for, and occasionally I experienced feelings of dislike, distrust, and even contempt. Now a certain amount of caution, skepticism, and perhaps distrust is healthy. But contempt? I was wrong. Contempt for clients destroys the professional relationship. Lawyers cannot provide sound legal representation, doctors effective treatment, writers useful prose, ministers worthwhile support, teachers successful learning when they do not understand and respect their clients. Military officers and civil servants who feel contempt for their bosses are not likely to advise them wisely or carry out their policies effectively.

Investigate your own professional view of civilian control. On what do you base your thinking? Much of the problem may stem from the Cold War and from one particular campaign of it. Vietnam, which continues to cast a long, sometimes

unseen shadow. Are you positive that your thinking about civil-military relations does not rest on the mistaken beliefs-and they are mistaken-that the war was lost because of too much civilian control? Or that we succeeded so magnificently in the Gulf War because the civilians got out of the way and let the military run the war? Both of those interpretations do not fit the facts of what happened in either war.

Ponder whether you are prepared to accept, as a principle of civilian control, that it includes the right of civilians to be wrong.¹¹¹ And to make mistakes–indeed to insist on making mistakes. These are very hard things to accept, given that peoples' lives hang in the balance, or the security of the nation. But remember that the military can be wrong–dead wrong–about military affairs, for after all, you are not politicians, and as Carl von Clausewitz wrote long ago, war is an extension of politics.¹¹² Were you prepared to work for and with, and to accept, a Gore administration had he won the 2000 election? And if there is doubt on your part, ponder the implications for civil-military relations and civilian control. It is likely that within the next dozen years, there will be another Democratic administration. If the trend toward increasing friction and hostility in civil-military relations during the last three–the Johnson, Carter, and Clinton administrations–continues into the future, the national security of the United States will not be served.

Last of all, consider that for civilian control to function effectively, the uniformed military will not only have to forswear or abstain from certain behavior, but to actively encourage the civilians to exercise their authority and perform their legal and constitutional duty to make policy and decide. You cannot-and will not-solve these problems yourselves, nor is it your responsibility alone. Civilian behavior and historical circumstances are just as much the causes of the present problems in civil-military relations as any diminishing of military professionalism. But you can help educate and develop civilian leaders on their role and on the processes of policy-making, just as your predecessors did, by working with them, and helping them-without taking advantage of them even when the opportunity arises. Proper professional behavior calls for a certain amount of abstinence. We hear much about the need for abstinence in so many areas of our national life. We ask children to "just say no" to drugs and pre-marital sex; we ask our media to exercise restraint in their programming; we ask our politicians to abstain from the most despicable acts of self-interest. In this, you are being asked to do no more or less than other professionals who are asked to restrain their own self-interest in dealing with their clients and customers; lawyers to act against their self interest and advise clients not to go to trial when not called for, doctors not to prescribe drugs or surgery that is not needed; teachers to help their students learn; clergy to encourage their parishioners or congregants not to commit sin.¹¹³ It will be up to you, as it is to every professional, to shape the relationship with your client, just as these others do. And at its heart, that relationship involves civilian control in fact as well as in form. ****

Let me close with some distinctions that bear remembrance. In the long history of human civilization, there have been military establishments that have focused on external defense-on protecting their societies-and those have preyed upon their own populations.¹¹⁴ The American military has never preyed on this society. Yet democracy, as a widespread form of governance, is rather a recent phenomenon, and our country has been fortunate to be the chief messenger of that democratization. For us, civilian control has been more a problem of making certain the civilians control military affairs than it has been keeping the military out of civilian politics. But if the United States is to teach civilian control-professional military behavior-to the rest of the world, our officers must look hard at our own system and our own behavior at the same time.¹¹⁵ "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise," Winston Churchill observed in 1947. "Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried. ...,"¹¹⁶ Churchill certainly knew the tensions involved in civil-military relations as well as any democratic head of government in modern history. My purpose this evening has been to remind us to be conscious of these problems, on each side-civilian and military-and to work to ameliorate them.

<u>Notes</u>

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Richard H. Kohn

Richard H. Kohn chairs the Curriculum in Peace, War, and Defense at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he is Professor of History. He also serves as Executive Secretary of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, a consortium of faculty at Duke, Carolina, and North Carolina State interested in national and international security issues.

Educated at Harvard and the University of Wisconsin, Kohn has served on the faculties at CCNY, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, and the National and Army War Colleges. From 1981 to 1991 he was Chief of Air Force History and Chief Historian of the United States Air Force. He has lectured at numerous universities and to a variety of academic and military audiences, and has served as an advisor or consultant to various academic and government organizations and agencies, including the US Indian Claims Commission, the Presidential Materials Review Board of the National Archives and Records Administration, the Advisory Board of the US Air Force's Gulf War Air Power Survey, and the Advisory Committee on Research and Collections Management for the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, which he chaired from 1991 to 1996. He served two terms as president of the Society for Military History, 1989-1993. Currently he serves on the USAF's Air University Board of Visitors and as a consultant to the US Commission on National Security/21st Century, the government group reviewing American national security policies and institutions. He also chairs the board of directors of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, the historical profession's lobbying organization.

His awards include the Organization of American Historian's Binkley-Stephenson Prize, the Society for Military History's Victory Gondos Memorial Service Award, the Air Force Historical Foundation's President's Award, two Department of the Army Certificates for Patriotic Civilian Service, and the Department of the Air Force's Organizational Excellence and Exceptional Civilian Service Awards.

A specialist in American military history and civil-military relations, he is the author of Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military

Establishment in America, 1783-1802 (1975). He has also edited, co-edited, or co-authored some eight other volumes on American military history, including The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789-1989 (1991) and The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II (1997), the report that resulted in the award of seven medals of honor to black soldiers of that conflict. Among his recent publications are "How Democracies Control the Military," Journal of Democracy, 8 (October 1997), 140-153 and "An Officer Corps for the Next Century," Joint Force Quarterly, No. 18 (Spring 1998), 76-80. Currently he is working on a book about presidential war leadership in American history, and co-directing a project investigating the gap between military and civilian attitudes and culture in the United States today. **The Harmon Lectures in Military History**

The oldest and most prestigious lecture series at the Air Force Academy, the Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History originated with Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon, the Academy's first superintendent (1954-1956) and a serious student of military history. General Harmon believed that history should play a vital role in the new Air Force Academy curriculum. Meeting with the History Department on one occasion, he described General George S. Patton, Jr.'s visit to the West Point library before departing for the North African campaign. In a flurry of activity Patton and the librarians combed the West Point holdings for historical works that might be useful to him in the coming months. Impressed by Patton's regard for history and personally convinced of history's great value, General Harmon believed that cadets should study the subject during each of their four years at the Academy.

General Harmon fell ill with cancer soon after launching the Air Force Academy at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver in 1954. He died in February 1957. He had completed a monumental task over the preceding decade as the chief planner for the new service academy and as its first superintendent. Because of his leadership and the tensions of the cold war, Congress strongly supported the development of a first-rate school and allotted generous appropriations to build and staff the institution.

The Academy's leadership felt greatly indebted to General Harmon and sought to honor his accomplishments in some way. The Department of History considered launching a lecture series to commemorate his efforts, and in 1959 the Harmon Memorial Lecture Series in Military History was born.

The Harmon Lecture series supports two goals: to encourage the interest in contemporary military history and to stimulate in cadets a lifelong interest in the study of the history of the military profession. The lectures are published and distributed to interested individuals and organizations throughout the world and many are used in courses at the Academy. In this way, we continue to honor the memory of General Harmon, who during his lifetime developed a keen interest in military history and greatly contributed to establishing the United States Air Force

Academy.

Previous Harmon Memorial Lectures

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The first thirty lectures in this series are compiled in one volume, *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History*, 1959-1987, edited by Lt. Colonel Harry R. Borowski. Published by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

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