The George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History

The Soldier, the Statesman, and the Military Historian

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The First Annual George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History was jointly sponsored by the George C. Marshall Foundation and the Society for Military History. It was delivered on 9 January 1999 at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the lecture series is to honor the accomplishments of a distinguished scholar in the field of military history; to demonstrate to members of the historical profession and the general public the relevance of military history and the contributions of its practitioners; and to commemorate the interest in history of George C. Marshall (1880–1959), former U.S. Army Chief of Staff (1939–45), Secretary of State (1947–49), and Secretary of Defense (1950–51).

IT would be difficult to build the inaugural George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History upon any other theme than that of the relationship between the soldier and the statesman, even if tensions in American civil-military relations were not the central issue of the hour among military historians. General of the Army Marshall deservedly ranks exceedingly high among exemplars of the American tradition of subordination of the soldier to the state. As Chief of Staff of the Army during the Second World War, he disagreed deeply with certain of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's decisions in military policy and strategy, most notably with Roosevelt's part in the long postponement of the cross-Channel invasion. Yet General Marshall always quietly, uncomplainingly, and faithfully carried out the decisions of his civilian Commander in Chief.

I placed General Marshall and his fellow Joint Chiefs of Staff of World War II at the center of an earlier paper I wrote on the soldier and the

statesman in America.[1] In that paper I argued that from the emergence of a professional officer corps as holders of the principal command positions in the United States Army, on through, and especially during, World War II, the record of the soldier's obedient acceptance of the military policy and strategy decisions of the statesman had been admirable, until the relatively recent past. More particularly, from the tenure of Major General George B. McClellan as the first graduate of the United States Military Academy to be Commanding General of the Army, the pattern of military subordination to civilian authority that General Marshall came to represent was immediately established. McClellan, with his grumblings about President Abraham Lincoln behind Lincoln's back, was not Marshall, but nevertheless as long as he was on active duty McClellan publicly acquiesced in the decisions of the Commander in Chief, including the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of 22 September 1862 even though McClellan privately loathed emancipation.

The tradition of exemplary subordination of a professional military leadership to the civil authority, I argued in my earlier paper, once it was firmly established during the Civil War, continued unbroken and reached a special flowering in World War II, only to erode as the post-1945 era carried the United States into military problems for which the historic American way of war had little prepared either soldiers or statesmen. Our historic national approach to war assumed the application of nearly unlimited military means to the unlimited objective of the absolute defeat of our enemies, preferably expressed through their unconditional surrender. When during the Cold War mutual nuclear deterrence between us and our Soviet-bloc rivals made unlimited pursuit of unlimited victory unfeasible on the occasions of our employing armed force, neither the soldier nor the statesman in America felt genuinely comfortable with the consequent waging of limited wars.

The President Harry S. Truman–General of the Army Douglas MacArthur crisis of 1951 over Truman's fighting a war of limited means and limited ends in Korea proved to be a foreshadowing of more continuous decline of the tradition of military subordination from the Vietnam War onward. The frustrations of Vietnam left the American military determined that never again would they allow that tradition to bind them into waging war in a manner they perceived as incompatible with the achievement of any military victory at all, let alone a clear-cut triumph in the historic fashion. This military determination reached one culmination in the interventions of General Colin L. Powell as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff into policymaking beyond the customary

1. Russell F. Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," *Journal of Military History* 57 (Special Issue, October 1993): 27–58.

purview of the military, to preempt from the President himself and other civilian leaders the decisions that might have prolonged the Persian Gulf War or brought about military actions in Bosnia in circumstances not favored by General Powell.[2]

Attempting to account for the deterioration of civil-military relations at the highest level immediately brings to mind the decline of the pressure toward a united civil-military leadership that prevailed during the Second World War and the Cold War; the decline in the proportion of civilian leaders who have had some military experience and a measure of military understanding; the consequent decline of military leaders' respect for their civilian superiors, aggravated when the President himself can be perceived as a draft dodger; and related to the latter, a drift of the military toward increased political partisanship of the Republican and conservative persuasions; and with that phenomenon related also to the increased sense of separation from, and even moral superiority over, the civil society felt by the military partly because of the end of the draft and the enhanced divergence between military and civilian values stimulated by the abandonment of selective service.[3]

On the occasion of this lecture, however, while paying tribute to the kind of respect for the principle of civilian supremacy that General Marshall represented, it is appropriate for the military historian to probe more deeply into the discussion of how civil-military relationships have changed since his day. The argument of this particular military historian will be, in fact, that notwithstanding the sterling qualities of General Marshall himself, the relations between the soldier and the statesman today differ less from their long-term historical qualities than we have tended to believe.

In my earlier consideration of civil-military relations from McClellan to Powell, I emphasized a tradition of military acceptance of civilian supremacy that appeared to have grown precarious since the Truman-MacArthur crisis and especially since the Vietnam War. I continue to

2. Powell spoke forth on still-germinating policy issues in an op-ed piece, "Why Generals Get Nervous," *New York Times,* 8 October 1992, A-35, and in "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Winter 1992–93): 32–42. See also Michael R. Gordon, "Powell Delivers a Resounding No on Using Limited Force in Bosnia," *New York Times,* 28 September 1992, A-1, 5.

3. Michael C. Desch offers a comprehensive theory of the effects of external and internal threats on civilian control, suggesting among other, complex conclusions that a high external threat environment tends to enhance civilian control; "Soldiers, States, and Structures: The End of the Cold War and Weakening U.S. Civilian Control," *Armed Forces and Society* 24 (Spring 1998): 389–405. For further efforts to develop a theory of civil-military relations in addition to Desch's, see Peter D. Feaver, "Crisis as Shirking: An Agency Theory Explanation of the Souring of American Civil-Military Relations," ibid., 407–34; Cori Dauber, "The Practice of Argument: Reading the Condition of Civil-Military Relations," ibid., 435–46.

believe that the historical analysis I offered then was accurate, but my subsequent reflections have persuaded me that it was unfortunately incomplete. My earlier discussion neglected, I think, a deep-seated and long-standing military distrust of civilians' judgments on military issues that always existed as a flaw in the American system of civilian control, in spite of apparent harmony.

Military loyalty to the Constitution of the United States has almost always been strong enough to override misgivings about the civilian leadership, but an underlying deficit in mutual trust and confidence has always made civil-military cooperation in forming policy and strategy less complete and less effective than it ought to have been. The most desirable civil-military relations in a democracy are not simply those in which civilian leadership almost always prevails. The most desirable civil-military relations are those in which there is a nearly altogether candid exchange of ideas between the soldier and the statesman, along with a consequent founding of policy and strategy upon a real meeting of minds. Only the former, lesser ideal has been realized most of the time in American history. The meeting of the minds has been relatively rare. In that circumstance, furthermore, there has always lurked the danger that when external threats are not so demanding of unity as those of the Second World War and the Cold War, and when other factors making for military respect of civilians are as low as they have been in the 1990s, then the underlying shortage of mutual confidence may rise to the surface in an apparent crisis of civil-military relations. That is where I believe we are now. But we can better understand where we are now with a further examination of the long-term problems.

It remains true that the study of relations between the American civilian government and the professional military command can best begin with the American Civil War, because it was during that war that the highest levels of the military officer corps first met generally acceptable criteria of professionalism. Major General and Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, Commanding General of the Army from 5 July 1841 and at the beginning of the Civil War until 1 November 1861, often behaved as a model of the professional soldier, and he was a military commander of exceptional ability as well; but because he often also behaved as a political general—most notably when he was the Whig party's presidential candidate in 1852—he is best regarded as a transitional figure.[4] His successor, General McClellan, was a more complete

4. For dates, "Commanders of the Army since 1775," "Scott, Winfield," Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, From Its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*, 2 vols. (Washington: GPO, 1903), 1: 17, 780.

professional, even though he also became a candidate for the presidency, as a Democrat in 1864, but only when he was no longer on active duty.

Instead McClellan has become notorious for his private carping, particularly to his wife, Ellen Marcy McClellan. He believed he could not trust the President to keep military secrets, so he shared as little of his planning as possible with Lincoln. He scorned the President's judgment in military matters anyway. From 1 November 1861, when he succeeded Winfield Scott, to 11 March 1862, McClellan was General in Chief of the United States Army as well as commanding general of the Army of the Potomac. His uncommunicativeness toward Lincoln also had much to do with his early removal from the former position, following which the President and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton attempted to substitute themselves for a General in Chief, in effect to assume a military professional's role. By military standards they did not do badly—they almost succeeded in laying a trap for Major General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson during his Valley Campaign—and, of course, they did not conceal information from themselves, which was an advantage over dealing with McClellan. But they recognized their limitations, and long before the final relief of McClellan from field command they filled the post of General in Chief with Major General Henry Wager Halleck, beginning 23 July 1862. Halleck proved to be an improvement over McClellan as far as communications between the soldier and the statesmen were concerned, but under him there remained less mutual confidence and understanding than could be hoped for.[5]

Halleck was the country's leading military scholar, author of the first comprehensive American textbook on the art of war, *Elements of Military Art and Science,* first published in 1846.[6] His professional scholarship did not rest lightly upon him, and the improvement he brought to the highest level of civil-military relations was limited by a pretentiousness, even pomposity, that accompanied his sense of self-worth. These qualities consistently intervened to prevent thoroughly candid discussion when the soldier Halleck conferred with the statesmen Lincoln and Stanton.

Lieutenant General (from 25 July 1866, General) Ulysses S. Grant, General in Chief from 9 March 1864 to 4 March 1869, brought a refreshing change to the soldier-statesman relationship, but it did not endure

5. "Commanders of the Army since 1775," "McClellan, George Brinton," "Halleck, Henry Wager," ibid., 17, 656, 491.

6. Henry Wager Halleck, *Elements of Military Art and Science, or, Course of Instruction in Strategy, Fortification, Tactics of Battle &c Embracing the Duties of Staff, Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, and Engineers, Adapted to the Use of Volunteers and Militia* (New York: D. Appleton, 1846). There are Second and Third Editions, both *with Critical Notes on the Mexican and Crimean Wars* (New York: D. Appleton, 1859; London: D. Appleton and Co., 1862).

much beyond his tenure. A straightforward man with few pretensions of any kind, Grant certainly did not claim to be a military scholar. His genius for command was a product mainly of clear-eyed native intelligence, even of common sense, not primarily of more specialized professional attainments. He was, therefore, glad to communicate with his civilian superiors with candor and without condescension. But Grant was almost *sui generis*.[7]

Even his closest wartime coadjutor, William Tecumseh Sherman, when he succeeded Grant as General in Chief did not continue Grant's open relations with the statesmen. Sherman was so uneasy in his dealings with them that from October 1874 to March 1876 he removed the headquarters of the Army from Washington to St. Louis to absent himself from immediate contact with Secretary of War William W. Belknap.[8] Sherman's long-run influence was all the more in the spirit of Halleck rather than of Grant in that while nurturing officer professionalism, a major concern of Sherman's in the course of which he fostered the post–West Point school system, Sherman made a protégé of Colonel, 4th Artillery, and Brevet Major General Emory Upton.[9] His attention captured by Upton's outstanding Civil War record and Upton's postwar leadership in tactical reform to try to cope with rifled firepower, Sherman sponsored the round-the-world journey of observation of foreign armies out of which came Upton's books, *The Armies of Asia and Europe* and *The Military Policy of the United States*.[10] Although Sherman could not have foreseen the full results of his encouragement of Upton, there has been no single influence on the relations of the soldier and the statesman in America more destructive than Upton's, and the influence is not dead

7. "Commanders of the Army since 1775," Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army,* 1: 17, for dates as General in Chief; "Grant, Ulysses Simpson," ibid., 70, for date of four-star rank.

8. John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 385–88, particularly 388 for dates; Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman: Fighting Prophet* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932), 615, 622 (the latter page erroneously giving 1875 as the date of the return). Sherman, having been promoted to lieutenant general effective 25 July 1866, became a full general 4 March 1869, formally becoming General in Chief on 8 March; "Sherman, William Tecumseh," Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army,* 1: 882, the date of accession to command appearing in "Commanders of the Army since 1775," ibid., 17.

9. "Upton, Emory," Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army,* 1: 978–79; for Upton as a protégé of Sherman, see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Upton and the Army* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 75–77.

10. Emory Upton, *The Armies of Asia and Europe* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1878); Emory Upton, *The Military Policy of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1904); on the world tour, see Ambrose, *Upton and the Army,* 87; Marszalek, *Sherman,* 442.

even now. Its tendency has been to aggravate and perpetuate a deep distrust been the military and civilian leadership.[11]

In Upton's message to soldiers, all political considerations and realities became subordinate to military effectiveness. Upton came to perceive civilian control of the military as the root cause of the military deficiencies of the United States, the lack of preparedness for war and the consequent heavy casualties and expenses that had deeply troubled him during the Civil War. He argued that the Congress of the United States ought to adopt what he took to be the example of the German Reichstag and Bundestag and the Prussian Landtag by voting the appropriations requests of the military up or down (presumably up) without questioning details. Uninformed civilian members of Congress should not attempt to understand the specifics of military administration and preparation. Similarly, the President ought to regard his role as commander in chief of the armed forces as simply ceremonial, and he and the civilian service secretaries ought to leave military command completely to the professionals. As Upton grew increasingly aware that such prescriptions were altogether unlikely to win acceptance, his animus came to extend from civilian control to democracy itself. It was democracy that prevented the United States from attaining the military effectiveness of the German Empire.[12]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Upton's influence had spread through much of the Army officer corps, and criticism of civilian control and sometimes of democracy as well had grown commonplace in the Army. It is not difficult to understand why Emory Upton should have become so influential. He spoke to the frustrations of an officer corps whose possibilities for promotion and accomplishment were circumscribed by a rigid seniority system whose effects were aggravated by low budgets from the end of the Civil War to the war with Spain in 1898. Upton's own frustration—born of his increasing acknowledgment that not even minor military reforms were likely, let alone the drastic overhaul of American military institutions that he advocated—nourished more and more bitterness as he worked on the manuscript of *The Military Policy of the United States*. More and more also, he suffered from excruciatingly painful headaches, which may well have been psychosomatic in origin. Concerned that his pain was impairing his performance of his duties, at his quarters at the Presidio of San Francisco, Upton shot himself in the head with his Colt .45 pistol on 15 March 1881. His mar-

11. For an appraisal more sympathetic to Upton, see David Fitzpatrick, "Emory Upton: The Misunderstood Reformer" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997).

12. For representative views, see Upton, *Military Policy,* xii, 256–61; on the President, 287–93; on civilian control, 97–135. For unfavorable comparisons of the American and German systems, Upton, *Armies of Asia and Europe,* 317–23. For further commentary, see Ambrose, *Upton and the Army,* 97–135.

tyrdom may well have enhanced the appeal of his ideas to other professional soldiers trammeled within what appeared to be a stagnating Army.[13]

Upton's manuscript was unfinished, but his executor, Henry A. du Pont—until his resignation on 1 March 1875 captain and brevet lieutenant colonel, 5th Artillery—saw that it circulated widely among the principal officers of the Army.[14] Its ideas, therefore, were already well known among the soldiers when the statesman Elihu Root brought about publication of the edited manuscript by the Government Printing Office in 1904 to add impetus to his efforts to reform the Army for its new responsibilities to American world power following the war with Spain. Root's arranging publication involves a paradox, of course. While Upton's *Military Policy* is a solidly informative book, the first systematic military history of the United States, its message regarding civil-military relations contradicted Root's own efforts to reconcile a more effective military with more effective civilian control.[15]

Emory Upton had injected a poison into American civil-military relations. Those soldiers whom he influenced did not ordinarily offer open challenges to civilian supremacy. But General Upton's legacy has been one of American soldiers more distrustful than before of statesmen, doubting that they can communicate meaningfully with their civilian superiors, doubting that those superiors can properly understand professional military considerations—for Upton had used historical examples to urge that civilian political leaders cannot so understand.

It is worth emphasizing that the era of Emory Upton was one of low international threats, while the North American Indians, Reconstruction in the South, and labor unrest represented domestic threats of considerable dimensions. Upton and his influence give credence to the proposition that civil-military harmony tends to decline under those conditions. So, for that matter, do the similar discontents of naval officers chafing at a slow rate of promotion in a neglected, obsolescent fleet until a foreign policy reorientation toward world power helped precipitate the creation

13. For the dissemination of Upton's ideas, see Ambrose, *Upton and the Army,* 141–59; Jack C. Lane, *Armed Progressive: General Leonard Wood* (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1978), 150–52, 173–74, 228. For Upton's death, Ambrose, *Upton and the Army,* 148; Ambrose suggests that he may have pulled the trigger on 14 March, but Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army,* 1: 979, gives the fifteenth as the date of death.

14. On du Pont, see Ambrose, *Upton and the Army,* 153; for du Pont's retirement, "Du Pont, Henry Algernon," Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army,* 1: 390. Upton's ideas were also circulated through the biography by Peter Smith Michie, *The Life and Letters of Emory Upton, Colonel of the Fourth Regiment of Artillery and Brevet Major-General, U.S. Army* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1885).

15. For Root and Upton's manuscript, see Ambrose, *Upton and the Army,* 155–56; Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root,* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1938), 1: 242.

of the New Navy.[16] With that foreign policy reorientation, American activity in international affairs took up the course that would lead to the two World Wars and the Cold War, the era of the most "challenging international threat environment"[17] in American history, and the era also of the most sustained absence of evident civil-military friction in our history.

Still, lack of fully candid communication continued to afflict the relations of soldiers and statesman despite the surface harmony. Though General John J. Pershing became commanding general of the World War I American Expeditionary Forces largely because of his exemplary acceptance of frustrating civilian restraints during his Mexican Punitive Expedition, he nearly kicked over the traces by advocating continued fighting in order to punish Germany when President Woodrow Wilson was about to achieve the Armistice.[18] The low-level military budgets of the years between the World Wars temporarily brought the gap in civil-military understanding closer to the surface. Even the Navy, much more generously dealt with than the Army in the interwar years, had to feel troubled lest the Washington Naval Treaty of 6 February 1922 should render it incapable of winning the climactic battle in the western Pacific that both it and the Imperial Japanese Navy foresaw as the culmination of a likely Pacific Ocean war. In planning for that same likely war, neither armed service felt sufficient confidence in military relations with the statesmen to be able to speak candidly of the indefensibility of the Philippine Islands; not even George C. Marshall, after he became Chief of Staff of the Army on 1 September 1939, felt that the climate of civil-military relations permitted a frank statement to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that a policy of challenging Japan to war, while it was surely the President's policy-making prerogative, would mean an initial military disaster in the Philippine archipelago.[19]

16. Peter Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (New York: Free Press, 1972), especially 277–312, 315–24; George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890–1990* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1–2, 11–18.

17. Michael C. Desch, "A Historian's Fallacies: A Reply to Bacevich," *Armed Forces and Society* 24 (Summer 1998): 590. In this article, pp. 589–94, Desch responded to a criticism of his original theoretical article: Andrew J. Bacevich, "Absent History: A Comment on Dauber, Desch, and Feaver," *Armed Forces and Society* 24 (Spring 1998): 447–53.

18. David F. Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917–1918* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 156–58; Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 220–22.

19. The judgment regarding Marshall's motives is the present writer's own. For detailed treatment of the issues, see Louis Morton, *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years,* a volume in the series United States Army in World War II (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1962), 34–44,

In World War II's subsequent climate of intense international threats, a dialogue of greater candor between the soldier and the statesman could be achieved, all the more because the preeminent professional military spokesman was General Marshall. Even that statement does not mean, however, that the dialogue was altogether open. Rather, it meant that often during the war the military chieftains bit their tongues and accepted dutifully politico-strategic and organizational decisions by President Roosevelt with which in fact they disagreed. The most conspicuous strategic instance was General Marshall's acquiescence in the repeated postponement of the cross-Channel invasion of Europe in favor of strategic sideshows. The most conspicuous organizational instance was the armed services' acquiescence in divided command in the Pacific, between the Pacific Ocean Areas under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and the Southwest Pacific Area under General Douglas MacArthur. Neither Army nor Navy liked such divided command, but the rivalry between them that militated against a better solution helped to persuade both to yield to the President's less than satisfactory political compromise of the command arrangements.[20]

The World War II pattern mainly continued during the Cold War years of similarly intense international threats. In spite of interservice turf battles over missions and budgets, the general pattern was one of the military's swallowing discontents in deference to the constitutional principle of civilian control and to the dangers that challenging the principle might pose in the midst of the rivalry with the Soviet Union.

Still, the Cold War imposed somewhat lesser pressures for a united civil-military front than had World War II, and it became a time of the gradual fraying of the appearance of civil-military harmony and of the gradual revelation of the limits of dialogue and the Uptonian soldier's intractable distrust of the statesman that had always shadowed apparent harmony. The President Harry S. Truman–General of the Army Douglas MacArthur crisis was in large part a product of MacArthur's peculiarly self-centered vision of the world, but it was also a portent of danger in a new era during which political circumstances were likely to impel the statesmen to wage war with limited means in pursuit of limited objectives, rather than in the pursuit of near-total victory that had become the American habit in the Civil War and through the World Wars, and that

97–101; Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations,* a volume in the series United States Army in World War II (Washington: Historical Division, United States Army, 1950), 412–52; Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines,* a volume in the series United States Army in World War II (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1953), 11–13, 48, 50.

20. On unified versus divided command in the Pacific, see especially Morton, *Strategy and Command,* 361–63.

the American soldier found congenial. While MacArthur's effort to widen the Korean War into a more general Asian conflict met the opposition of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as of the President, there was enough sympathy among the military for his desire to break free from the Korean War's limitations of means and ends to aggravate severely the military's deep-seated distrust of civilian leadership. Since the Truman-MacArthur controversy, the soldier and the statesman have never quite returned to their apparent harmony of World War II.

Discontents over sharing nuclear roles and over the widespread military perception, particularly in the Army, that post-1945 American strategy depended too much on nuclear weapons helped keep the tensions raised by the MacArthur episode from simmering down completely in the decade immediately following the Korean War, but it was, of course, the Vietnam War that, in the 1960s and early 1970s, led the way to the civil-military rift that the end of the Cold War later permitted to become an open sore. The Vietnam War repeated the tensions of the Korean War between the statesman's belief that political conditions decreed fighting with limited means for limited ends and the soldier's reluctance—shared with much of the American public—to depart from a historic American way of war that sought the total destruction of the enemy's armed forces and thus total victory.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the soldiers could turn their attentions from Vietnam back to the Cold War, despite its perils a more satisfactory prospect, especially for the Army, which could contemplate the possibility of reliving its glory days of 1944–45 in a World War II–style conflict in Europe, a possibility enhanced as the increased budgets of the Ronald Reagan administration and various other factors made a European war increasingly seem winnable. Once the Cold War ended at the close of the 1980s, however, the so-called Vietnam syndrome that had festered among the soldiers for more than two decades could rise to the surface of civil-military relations to trouble the waters for all to see, now that the absence of a superpower enemy removed pressure to maintain outward harmony. The soldier's old Uptonian distrust of the statesman, the lasting undercurrent of American civil-military relations, could express itself more freely than it had since 1939, or even since 1898.

The expression came most dramatically in the words and actions of General Colin L. Powell as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Powell wrote publicly and conspicuously in the op-ed pages of the *New York Times* and in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs* to preempt policy-making on intervention in Bosnia at a time when the policy of the George H. W. Bush administration was still in the process of being formed. If the General did so with the acquiescence of the statesman, he nevertheless was trespassing in the domain of statecraft by claiming

primacy for military considerations that should have been subordinate.[21] During the Persian Gulf War, Powell first resisted the decision for a military response to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, again by claiming priority for military considerations over those of policy, then was instrumental in cutting the war so short that the defeat of Iraq was less complete than it might have been, and the chances of using that defeat to enhance political stability in the Middle East became much reduced.[22]

While General Powell provided the most visible evidence of a new willingness by the soldier to challenge civilian supremacy, however, he was alone mainly in the public nature of part of his dissent. In governmental deliberations on the use of force from the Vietnam War onward, there has been a persistent resistance by the soldier to the statesman reflective of distrust and not to be found with similar consistency earlier in American history.

This resistance has centered on the soldier's development of a virtual fetish of the idea that no military mission should be undertaken unless its objectives are clearly defined. This idea is a segment of the Vietnam syndrome, the military conviction that American soldiers should never again allow themselves to be placed in an unwinnable predicament like that of Vietnam, with the syndrome including the further judgment that what made Vietnam unwinnable was largely the absence of clear objectives to define what winning or losing meant. In fact, the purpose of the Vietnam War had been clear enough. It was stated in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288 of 17 March 1964 as maintaining an independent, noncommunist South Vietnam.[23] It was developing a military strategy to achieve that purpose that never came to a clear focus. Surely such a deficiency was the soldier's fault at least as much as the statesman's.

Nevertheless, the notion that the absence of a clear objective for military action was crucial for America's undoing in Vietnam has become practically a fixed article of military belief, and it has shaped the soldier's distrust of the statesman's leadership on subsequent occasions for the possible employment of military force. When the 1982–84 deployment of

21. See note 2 above.

22. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995), 33–34, 36, 129–31, for Powell's reluctance to use force; 396, 415, 422–23, 426 on his eagerness for a cease-fire; Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 7, for the first issue, 403–5 on the second.

23. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975,* 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 116, citing (p. 117) Summary Record of National Security Council Meeting, 17 March 1964, Box 1, NSC Meetings File, National Security File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

Marines in Lebanon climaxed catastrophically in the 23 October 1983 bombing of Marine headquarters, the military largely took the lesson to be that failure had again followed upon lack of a definite mission for the intervention in the first place. But the Reagan administration's objective had been plain enough: to create a sovereign Lebanon secure within its borders without civil war or foreign occupation. Because this objective, however, did not readily fit the American soldier's predisposition to apply overwhelming force if force is used at all, in pursuit of a decisive military victory, the military leadership had dragged its feet in shaping and carrying out the intervention, ending up ironically with insufficient force for the Marines involved to protect themselves, let alone to begin to attain the initial, not-unclear objective.[24]

Operation Just Cause, the intervention in Panama of 20–28 December 1989, displayed fewer soldier-statesman tensions, but for the dubious reason that the Bush administration turned over almost completely to the military, particularly to General Powell and to General Maxwell Thurman of Southern Command, the translation of policy objectives into military missions. The policy objectives were to protect American lives in Panama; to restore democratic government there; to protect the integrity of the treaties regulating the Panama Canal; and to apprehend the Panamanian President, Manuel Antonio Noriega Morena, for criminal proceedings against him. In support of these objectives, the administration assured the military freedom to employ overwhelming force in the historically preferred fashion. To do so was easy, of course, against an utterly overmatched opponent. Unfortunately, such military means were less than fully suitable to the political objectives, particularly the one having to do with the restoration of democracy, which lost something in military translation. The version of democracy that Just Cause bestowed upon Panama was all too plainly manufactured in the U.S.A., the new regime being formally installed at a United States military headquarters with the Stars and Stripes prominently displayed. Such auspices could not bode well for permanent Panamanian acceptance.[25]

24. F. G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force: The New American Way of War* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996), 42–56, especially 47–50. For a detailed discussion of civil-military relations regarding Lebanon before 1983, see Raymond Tanter, *Who's at the Helm? Lessons of Lebanon* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990). Hoffman's book is a cogent critique of recent military strategy and policy; it has strongly influenced this essay.

25. Hoffman, *Decisive Force,* "The Storming of Panama: Preferred Paradigm Tested," 61–76, especially 65–66, and on installing the new Panamanian government, 70–71; Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991); Bruce W. Watson and Peter G. Tsouras, eds., *Operation Just Cause: The U.S. Intervention in Panama* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991).

For Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the Persian Gulf War of 2 August 1990–28 February 1991, the Bush administration similarly allocated to the military the tailoring of policy objectives to military means, provided that Iraqi forces were driven from Kuwait, an enterprise that in itself prompted misgivings on the part of General Powell. The latter proviso aside, the military received enough of a free hand that civil-military tensions were again obscured. The military leaders, having made an icon of the idea that clarity of objectives is indispensable to successful military action, reasoned in the aftermath that because the military action successfully drove Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait, the objectives must have been clear. In truth, such was scarcely the case, as the failure to seize opportunities to destroy the Republican Guard, which was a principal prop of Saddam's entire regime; the haste to end all fighting in order to minimize casualties regardless of such larger policy purposes as stabilizing the region and assuring against a repetition of Iraqi adventurism; and the dangers to regional safety and American interests that still persist because Saddam retains both power in Iraq and weapons of mass destruction all make evident.[26]

In short, in both Panama and Kuwait mutual distrust between the soldier and the statesman was blurred over by the statesman's deferring to the soldier, ultimately on policy issues as well as in strategy, operations, and tactics. The result has been to undermine clarity of objectives that the military claim is a sine qua non, and thus to wage successful military actions without similarly successful attainment of policy aims.

It is time for the military historian to weigh in with his own professional judgments. His first call should be for soldiers and statesmen both, but especially the soldiers, to discard the pernicious dogma that complete clarity of objectives must precede any military action. The dogma is pernicious because it disregards the inherently destabilizing impact of any military action upon the politics, society, and culture of the area to which it is applied. Therefore any application of force necessarily creates a situation different from the one that provoked it, and objectives accordingly have to be readjusted to the different situation. The use of military force is not simply the pursuit of policy objectives by other means. Force generates its own momentum, which rearranges the objectives. A classic case in point lies at the very center of the American political-military experience. President Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War found that his objective of saving the Union was enlarged by the conditions intrinsic to applying force to add to it the objective of eliminating slavery in the South.

26. For persuasive analyses, see Hoffman, *Decisive Force*, "Desert Storm: Preferred Paradigm Validated," 77–98; Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, especially 464–70, 473–77.

A second warning from the military historian must be that the American soldier's historic preference for employing overwhelming force, if force be employed at all, aggravates the tendency for military force to generate its own momentum, disarranging the initial conditions for using force and the clarity of the initial objectives. The more overwhelming the amount of force applied, the greater the likelihood of precipitating unforeseen consequences that will alter the original purposes. As much clarity of objectives as possible must remain a desideratum of the use of force, as long as we acknowledge the precarious quality of all objectives in war; but for that reason the American soldier must abandon his historic insistence on invoking overwhelming force upon all occasions in an uncomplicated quest for decisive victory. At the end of the twentieth century, the United States, as a century-long great power, should have compiled more than enough experience with the complexity of military objectives and means so that it is past time to develop a new American way of war, free from insistence on total force and unlimited victory.

Third, to go on insisting that overwhelming force should be used on all occasions for force, with the corollary that objectives must not only be completely clear but assuredly attainable, and with minimal casualties at that, is too likely to become a prescription for no use of force at all—particularly on the very occasions when the most vital policy interests are at stake. It was indeed easy enough in 1989 to employ overwhelming force in Panama; but because subsequently in Bosnia the geographic arena as well as a tangled web of politics made it difficult to perceive what kind of available force could be applied overwhelmingly there, the United States delayed unconscionably long before employing any force at all, to mitigate the bloodbath and to provide foundations for restored stability.

After all, in which of the most important military actions of our history has success been assured from the outset? If George Washingon and the Continental Congress had awaited the possession of overwhelming force and assured success, there would have been no American Revolution and no independent United States. While the North had larger resources than the South in 1861, if Lincoln had awaited overwhelming force and certain success, there would have been no Civil War, and the disruption of the Union would soon have been an accomplished fact. And is it not because in 1991 the United States, even enjoying overwhelming force, was unwilling to accept the risks of unforeseen consequences that Saddam Hussein remains a peril today? And because since 1991 we have been unwilling to strike at him with any species of force that might entail more than the smallest risks to American lives, finding a way to deal with his persistent defiance of efforts to eliminate his nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons has posed an apparently insoluble quandary.

Finally, what are we to do about the long-standing distrust and consequently constrained communication between the soldier and the statesman in America? For this question, the military historian can offer no ready answer. A tension between democratic politics and professional military values is inherent in any democrary. But need the tension be so insidious a plague in the United States as the release from World War and Cold War pressures for apparent civil-military harmony has revealed it to be? Must the American soldier still cling to the attitudes of Emory Upton?

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