

TOWARD A MORE PERFECT UNION IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

by

GENERAL EDWARD C. MEYER, US ARMY

Let us recall by way of introduction that following World War II and until very recently, the predominance of military power enjoyed by the United States and its allies was such that it would have required the most feeble-minded kind of professional leadership on our part to lose a major engagement. Certainly that is not my opinion of the men who have occupied the responsible positions of leadership—on the contrary, we have been blessed with officers of great dedication, quality, and vision. I am simply saying that, regardless of the qualifications they brought to the performance of their office, only a madman would have challenged them because of the leverage the free world possessed in its ability to harness violence.

Our recent predecessors in arms have had to accommodate to major change in their way of fighting war. Nuclear weapons, intercontinental ballistic missiles, the development by the Soviets of their own form of violent blitzkrieg, and the commitment to coalition warfare by the free nations of the Western alliance made it clear that the advantages bestowed on the US and her allies by geography were disappearing. Time was no longer in the allies' favor. The potential for a "come as you are" war in Europe was clear, and the alliance began to respond. But our current solutions are grounded in the confident existence of military leverage of some sort. As we scan today the spectrum of violence, can we identify clear advantage or leverage anywhere, whether in strategic nuclear, tactical nuclear, or conventional capabilities?

We are in an era in which old solutions grounded in the confidence of overwhelming military superiority must be rethought. We no longer have the luxury of relying on raw strength to the neglect of the brain. The military professional needs rejuvenation!

We are not the only group so affected, though I do not claim to be expert in other fields. Clearly, the economic world is facing many challenges as well, and some very basic research and evaluation are called for there. In the diplomatic world, each day is less and less amenable to easy cataloging, demanding greater insight and professionalism on the part of the diplomatic corps. In short, my perception is that across the board there are urgent demands for professionals of every calling to return home, to dabble less, to give the most thoughtful and considered attention to their own responsibilities.

So far as the military professional is concerned, he is a loyal servant of his country and its ideals. His stewardship is exercised by becoming expert in the art of war: theoretical war, war preparation, war avoidance, the conduct of war, and the termination of war. This is the special expertise we bring to the nation. And correctly understanding the risks of not taking appropriate action, we fashion for consideration recommended courses of action in terms of strategies and force levels. What happens at that point is dependent upon the elected representatives of the people.

They bring to the deliberative process a different set of perspectives. Charged as they are with establishing national goals and priorities responsive to their constituents, the

military's activities must be responsive to their direction. Furthermore, the temporal frame of reference of our elected representatives may differ considerably from the military's, because their hold on the reins of power is theirs by loan, subject to periodic recall.

Both the civil and the military sectors bring to the dialogue a common concern for the welfare of the nation and a willingness, indeed obligation, to express their convictions forthrightly.

Packaging all these various inputs together is the substance of civil-military relations. Packaging it well is the forging of a more perfect union.

One example of that relationship—certainly not a perfect union—might be General MacArthur's confrontation with President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930's over cuts in the defense budget. Convinced that the country's safety was at stake, MacArthur exploded forth with this remarkable caveat:

When we lose the next war, and an American boy, lying in the mud with an enemy bayonet through his belly and an enemy foot on his dying throat, spits out his last curse, I want the name not to be MacArthur, but Roosevelt.

The President was livid. "You must not talk that way to the President," he roared. MacArthur tendered an oral resignation as Chief of Staff and turned toward the door. As he reached the door, President Roosevelt recanted: "Don't be foolish Douglas; you and the [Director of the] budget must get together on this."

Some accommodation was made. Yet the dead at Pearl Harbor, at Bataan and Corregidor, at Kasserine Pass, could testify that the US did not really "get together on this" until well after it was deeply embroiled in World War II.

An instance in which a more perfect union was formed is seen in General Sir John Hackett's book, *The Third World War*.

Having read or read of this work, you know that the Western alliance took action in the time frame 1978 to 1984 to close a "critical window" in comparative conventional force capabilities, thereby avoiding defeat in August 1985 and opening the door to the internal collapse of the Soviet Colonial Empire.

Morton Halperin, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, cynically suggests a contrary conclusion in his *Washington Post* review of General Hackett's book:

The Central Front remained quiet for some 30 years until we started taking the advice of the generals. Then deterrence failed and in 1985 war and destruction came. Perhaps the real lesson, however unintended, is there.

Halperin misreads history. Certainly the absence of war on the central NATO front for 30 years is not due to silent generals. May I suggest that a preponderant allied nuclear capability played a role. The "critical window"—a period of political, military, and economic vulnerability—is real. The lessons for the future advanced by General Hackett are twofold: First, that the military, recognizing a threat, should offer an *affordable package* of options which responds to the threat, not man for man or tank for tank, but in a fashion peculiarly suited to the alliance and its natural advantages (e.g., electronics, antitank weapons, and terrain). Second, the civil government should support that program of improvement *over an extended time*. In the book, a more perfect union between the civil and military sectors was forged.

Such a union of interests is relatively easy to achieve in a country where power grows out of the barrel of a gun, where a monopoly of coercive power is turned inward upon its citizens for the state's self-preservation. As the historian John Alden claims:

... leaders of Attila's ilk were doubtless nothing better than the principal ruffian of some restless gang who excelled his fellow rascals in savagery or subtlety, who forced

the quiet and defenseless to purchase their safety by frequent contribution.

EVOLUTION OF MILITARY-CIVILIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Happily, we have passed that primitive stage of development and have entered into a period of separation of powers in which the coercive power rests with the state for the benefit of its citizens and the maintenance of national sovereignty. The fortunate situations in Great Britain and the United States are not of course universal. Many nations have not yet satisfactorily answered the question of the poet Juvenal: "Who is to guard the guards themselves?"

The question has not been one lightly addressed by our countrymen. The occurrence of a Cromwell, the posturing of a McClellan or a Hooker, and the lure of a MacArthur have invited our periodic return to this question. The novel *Seven Days In May*, the film *Doctor Strangelove*, and the perception of a monolithic military-industrial complex are contemporary occasions for renewed public interest in the potential threat of the man on horseback—in the guise of a military personality. *Skepticism of the military is both a hallmark and a bulwark of a free society*. Why else did Wellington rail so against a broadening of the British professional military education system as embodied in the staff college?

By God! If there is a mutiny in the Army—and in all probability we shall have one—you'll see that these newfangled school masters will be at the bottom of it.

We in America borrowed heavily from the British, clearly attempting to construct the same successful sense of responsibility toward the established order on the part of the officer class by arbitrarily defining our officers as gentlemen. It was a clear appeal to their loyalty through their ego, linking their social status to the established constitutional order. (Perhaps George III should have given gentleman status to the American colonist. Who can envision gentlemen joining an armed rabble at the bridge in Lexington?)

However, few officers in America find their status as gentlemen the principal guarantor of their loyalty to country. It is the deeper commitment to the Constitution which internalizes our support for civilian control. This does not mean that we quietly march to a fool's grave. Inevitably, military chiefs and political leaders have different views on issues affecting the security of their country. Within limits, disagreement between the two is healthy. There is a "military mind"—a term all too often used in a pejorative sense. In the same sense that there is a legal mind, a medical mind, an ecological mind, a business mind, so too the nation deserves the benefits of a military mind, which serves the people by providing its particular perspective.

In the formative days of our nationhood, we had several models of military-civilian relationships on which to pattern our own. One of these was the Spanish: In the mission period from 1769 to 1823, the Spanish Government in the New World was represented by a military officer posted in Monterey. In the Spanish colonies, the military came first, and only when matters were well in hand did they surrender authority to the civilian government. Even then, the military remained in the wings, seeing it as their right and duty to step in and set things straight when they believed civilian government had gone astray.

An entirely different model existed in the New England colonies, where, despite hostile attacks on the established order from many quarters, there was insistence on military subordination to civil government. This persuasion was rooted in the finest British tradition, one reinforced by negative ancestral memories of Oliver Cromwell. The 17th-century writings of the Englishmen John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon maintained that standing armies constituted the gravest of threats to the preservation of freedom: "Armies," they said, "are a remedy almost worse than the disease . . . a state sometimes recovers out of a convulsion and gains new vigor by it, but much oftener expires in it." George Washington's great-grandfather fled

Great Britain to escape Cromwell's clutches. Louis XIV, the "Grand Monarch of France," turned his experimental standing army ferociously upon his own loyal Huguenots, to the lasting impoverishment of France. The dragoons he quartered so brutally in Protestant homes to enforce religious conversion and education remained a searing memory among thousands of refugees who managed to escape to the colonies.

The reaction to English regular troops in the colonies in peacetime was virulent. It is not surprising, then, that the colonies, faced with the growing arbitrariness of English rule (specifically the Quartering Act), recalled the writings of Trenchard and Gordon, there finding grist for their political tracts; nor is it surprising that our Declaration of Independence contained accusations that King George III, among other "injuries and usurpation," kept "among us in times of peace standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures," which sought to make "the military independent of and superior to the civil power."

American anti-militarism continued throughout the Revolution, reflected in the suspicion of lengthy enlistment periods and the reluctance of many of the state assemblies to relinquish control over their militias to the central government. Civil-military tensions were ever present. While the Continental Congress left strategy to the generals, its sporadic and uneven support caused Washington to write Congress with some bitterness:

I see such distrust and jealousy of military power that the Commander in Chief has not an opportunity, even by recommendation, to give (his officers) the least assurance of reward for the most essential services.

Finally, in 1784, after independence was won and the British withdrawal complete, the issues of how to deal with a now purely American military force were raised again. In the course of debate in the Continental Congress, concern ran deep that a standing Army in time of peace was inconsistent with

the principle of a republican form of government and a threat to individual liberty.

Our new nation's civilian leaders dealt with the military in two ways. First, they pursued a policy of extirpation, reducing the Continental Army to a total of 80 officers and men stationed at Fort Pitt and West Point, with "no officer to remain in service above the grade of Captain." Reduction of the regular force was coupled with a call for 700 militia to garrison the western frontier. While the growing frontier threat compelled an early increase in the regular force, the peacetime Army throughout American history, until 1945, was kept at minimum levels. This policy derived partly from the blessings of geography, partly from ideological suspicion of military force, and partly from an unwarranted optimism concerning the effectiveness of the militia.

Second, the Constitutional Convention distributed power over the military so that

General Edward C. Meyer became the Chief of Staff, US Army on 22 June 1979. Prior to his promotion and the assumption of his new duties, he had been the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans since 1976. A graduate of the US Military Academy, Class of 1951, General Meyer holds a master's degree from George Washington University and is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College and the National War College. Among his overseas assignments, General Meyer has served as Battalion Commander and Deputy Brigade Commander, 1st Cavalry Division, US Army Pacific-Vietnam, in 1965-66; Brigade Commander, and later Chief of Staff, 1st Cavalry Division, US Army Pacific-Vietnam, in 1969-70; Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, US Army Europe and Seventh Army, 1973-74; and Commanding General, 3d Infantry Division (Mech), Wurzburg, Germany, in 1974-75. He also was Assistant Division Commander, 82d Airborne Division, in 1971-72; Deputy Commandant of the US Army War College in 1972-73; and Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans in 1975-76. Earlier this year, then-Lieutenant General Meyer was selected to be the 1979 Kermit Roosevelt Lecturer, representing the US Army in an annual exchange program with the British Army dedicated to furthering British-American friendship, understanding, and cooperation. This article has been adapted from General Meyer's May 1979 presentations in the United Kingdom.



control could not be consolidated in a "principal ruffian." The President was made Commander in Chief with the power to appoint officers and presumably supervise operations. The state governments controlled their militias; while Congress was given the power to declare war, ratify treaties, approve the appointment of military officers, determine the structure and functions of the armed forces, and control their funds.

Even this authority was bounded, for Congress, with the "whole power of raising Armies," was forbidden to appropriate "money for support of an Army for any longer period than two years, a precaution which is a great and real security against the keeping of troops without evident necessity."

In addition, unlike many armies which pledge loyalty to the incumbent national leadership, the United States Army is pledged to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution. Despite the explicit constraints of the Constitution, there have been numerous views historically with respect to the boundary between civil and military roles.

On one end of the spectrum was "Fighting Joe" Hooker, a military intriguer, who boldly talked of the need for a military dictatorship during the course of the American Civil War. In January 1863, Abraham Lincoln placed him at the head of the Army of the Potomac, penning a letter with this remarkable observation:

I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of you recently saying that both the Army and Government needed a dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those Generals who gain success, can set up a dictator. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship.

Hooker did not long command the Army of the Potomac.

Both General Lee of the Confederacy and General Sherman of the Union were posed at the other end of the spectrum. It is reported that, in Lee's case, he extended his non-

involvement in the political sphere to the point of not informing Jefferson Davis of the advisability of moving the Confederate capital, even when Lee was fully aware of existing danger to its safety. Lee ruled its disposition to be a strictly political issue!

General Emory Upton, who with others was enamored of the logic and efficiency of the autonomous German war machine, expressed the view that democracy is ill-equipped to maintain an effective Army without definite strictures on civilian control:

Statesmen are responsible for the creation and organization of our resources, and, as in the case of the President, may further be responsible for their management or mismanagement. Soldiers . . . can alone be held responsible for the control and direction of our armies in the field.

This theme, an absolutist concept of war, was rejected by General John M. Schofield, who defined the political responsibility of the representatives of the people as extending even into the selection of how war is to be fought:

Differing choices of military means could alter the scope and the nature and intent of war, and therefore the ultimate choice of even military means must reside with the civilians.

In the years between World War I and World War II, the military profession exercised little political influence or power in the United States. While cognizant enough of the Army's existence when needed for internal riot control, the executive branch was generally ignorant of the military force at its disposal and quite content with the Army's dispersion into small, isolated garrisons. There was no central military budget in those days, a single federal budget coming into primitive being not until 1929. For the most part, monies were parceled out in hundreds of individual appropriations by a multitude of separate congressional committees, with no central overview of the whole.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS SINCE WORLD WAR II

World War II and its aftermath introduced several quantum changes into established civil-military relationships, changes whose dimensions we do not yet fully appreciate. Such changes were particularly significant in the areas of national policy determination, resource allocation, and operations. A major cause for such changes lies in the existence of nuclear weapons, whose vast destructive power has lent Talleyrand's (or Clemenceau's—the true authorship is obscure) remark great legitimacy: "War is too important to be left to the generals." The effect of such changes is observed in the tight controls on nuclear employment, as well as in situational involvements well below the threshold of nuclear war. A second major cause for the recent modifications in civil-military relationships is the state of quasi-war we have found ourselves in since 1945. Never before in history has the US maintained on a permanent footing an armed force of its current size and capability, a reality certain to disturb the traditional contours of civil-military relations.

The significance of not phasing down our forces has created extraordinary civil-political responsibilities for members of the military in economic, social, and political factors in their deliberations. Conversely, expanded civilian participation has occurred in what were heretofore purely the military's concerns. According to some observers, such penetration of each other's traditional domains by the military and civilian sectors has tended to fuse—perhaps "blur" is the better term—traditional civil-military roles, leading to the creation of potentially unhealthy uniformities of view. Such uniformities or consensuses could be unhealthy in the sense that they fail to represent a creative synthesis of the two distinct constituencies—military and civilian—with the result that sufficiently various points of view might not receive a hearing. Examples of expanded participation in military affairs by civilian authorities would include the following:

- Much of the significant theoretical development of military strategy since World War II has been penned by civilian, not military, theorists.

- Because of advancing technology and its heavy impact on policymaking and decisions concerning resource allocation, physical scientists and engineers have increasing entry and clout in defense forums previously dominated by military experts.

- The creation of a centralized Defense Department has placed civilians firmly in control of recommendations to the President concerning most policy and resource allocation issues.

When the armed services were "unified" in 1947 (an act which also created a separate Air Force) the new super cabinet office of the Secretary of Defense was described by its first occupant, James Forrestal, as "probably the biggest cemetery for dead cats in history." His office had no organic power granted it by Congress, and he suffered the frustrations imposed by service recalcitrance, suspicion, and hostility, typified in Admiral King's 1945 testimony: "The needs of the Navy should not be subject to review by individuals who do not have informed responsibility in the premises."

It was not until more than a decade later that the Army and its sister services were brought into a "national defense management structure" by Robert McNamara, who identified these major flaws in the department: There were no means to compare among services the value returned from a dollar's expenditure in one area as opposed to another; and there was no common planning basis for force-structuring the three services, with a resulting potential for major asymmetries and redundancies in service capabilities.

Despite the rhetoric and strife which accompanied the management revolution within the defense establishment, it is an accomplished fact at this point, and the services are persuasively presenting their cases for consideration by Defense Department authorities.

Young officers entering this environment encounter certain hazards. There is the possibility that the impressive titles and offices of the various civilian officials, and the presumption of concomitant intelligence and wisdom, may intimidate young officers, inducing them to hold in silence deeply held convictions born of field experience. There is also a distinct hazard that such officers may lose their professional military perspectives, becoming enamored with the politics and flattered by the opportunity as relatively junior personnel to touch the minds of the "near great." It can be heady stuff. Where recommendations are clearly in the officer's area of expertise, I applaud the frankest exposition. However, I am troubled by the prospect of service-member dabblers advising civilian amateurs, for on occasion things happen too quickly for a bad decision made on sketchy evidence to be subsequently corrected.

Not only must the case for national defense be argued persuasively within the department, but once it is internally firmed it must undergo the scrutiny of our Office of Management and Budget, where it is rigorously reviewed and its parts are accorded priorities based on politically determined national goals. Finally, the President's decisions undergo public debate in the chambers of the powerful congressional committees, on the floors of the House and Senate, and in the news media.

Occasionally, the military is asked to take a public stand on major issues. The Panama Canal Treaty was one such occasion. Clearly SALT II has been another. The nation wants to know the degree of risk associated with the issue. And where risk is a major public issue, the military judgment is highly respected. But, in general, as professionals we play our role out of the limelight.

The preparation for war is tough, time-consuming, frequently dull work. It involves scanning the horizon for the emerging threat, thoughtfully considering endless alternative solutions, and tenaciously running down hypothetical developments to

their last conceivable implication. The sequence of thinking begins with a vision of how to fight and win the hypothesized conflict, then working backward to those deterrent actions which will prevent its ever occurring.

It is said that in 1916 President Wilson was angered upon discovery that the newly created General Staff had developed contingency plans for war with Germany. Yet there is a presumption that when called upon the military will be ready, regardless of the requirement levied. For example, were you to scan all of the national security guidance in existence on or before the 24th of June 1950 for an indication that the defense of South Korea lay in our national interest, you would have searched in vain. Yet, on the 25th of June, US troops—and shortly thereafter other UN troops—were in fact committed.

The need and the essence of forging a more perfect union lie in understanding lessons which I would like to summarize here:

First, there is the obvious conclusion that the boundary between civil and military authority has been a changeable one; and that increasing sensitivity to perceived threats to our democratic liberties and the emergence of weapons of mass destruction and other technologies have led to increasing controls on the military profession.

Second, in the presence of overwhelmingly superior military and economic means, the job of the professional is easy. In this situation, one hazard is that the professional might passively surrender aspects of his trade to outside "experts" whose judgments—whether better or worse than the military's—could not deflect us from sure victory and therefore cannot be properly appraised. Another hazard is that, lulled into complacency, the military might stray into interests distant from their uniquely defined responsibilities. When the comparative advantage in military capability disappears and the total demands on the national treasury exceed its capability to the extent that choice is necessary, then the demands on the profession are greatest.

Third, we operate in a national environment in which the citizenry is most

preoccupied with the furtherance of its rights, while remaining relatively oblivious to the dimensions of the external threat. The burden of awareness and action is presumed to be taken care of by "them." We are "them."

Fourth, as a profession we work through a civilian government whose executive and legislative branches change periodically, owing to the inevitable elections in which the citizenry grade the government's fulfillment of their expressed needs. The citizenry, however, shunting the responsibility for national defense to others, may not send a clear message on security issues.

The foregoing lessons present the military a serious and challenging problem. Our perception of the national need may clash with the often confused and conflicting messages which percolate from the grass roots of the nation. In an environment of constrained resources, the burden of laying a legitimate basis for defense expenditures is a major professional responsibility.

In summary, then, we are responsive to the nation through its civilian leadership. In fulfilling this responsibility, our major concern is to minimize the degree of risk we assess in recommending force levels to avoid war (deterrence), or, failing that, to prosecute

the war and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Our focus must be on a sensible posture over time, as opposed to the "today" orientation of the politician. We seek to balance our resources among three competing priorities: near-term readiness, mid-term modernization, and long-term sustainability. As an institution continuously responsive to successive administrations, we prepare ourselves to be the man for all seasons. And while there is nothing in our ethic remotely aspiring toward the man on horseback, we argue our positions with the total courage of our convictions, supporting those decisions which our civil superiors ultimately make.

Clearly the military institution in its relation with the civilian sector must be viewed as the man for all seasons, the man who can act:

- Across the spectrum of external threats, both present and future;
- Across the varying priorities of successive political administrations;
- Across the changing mood of our nation in a stormy and unpredictable world.

It is not an easy task. It is one of a higher calling—a calling which I am proud to share with all of you—linked as we are through our common heritage in search of a more perfect union.

