



On May 19, 2009, President Barack Obama met with new U.S. Commander for Afghanistan Lieutenant General Stanley A. McChrystal in Oval Office (White House/Pete Souza)

Civil-Military Relations in Transitions

Behavior of Senior Military Officers

By Charles D. Allen

On Inauguration Day 2017, President Donald Trump inherited from President Barack Obama's administration the current cohort of uniformed military leaders at the most senior levels across the Department of

Defense (DOD). Over the previous 2 years, President Obama had selected an impressive group of military officers. This process included the emplacement of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and of the Vice Chairman by the end of fiscal year 2015, and of each of the Service chiefs by October 2016.¹ Over the course of President Obama's second term, these senior officers engaged with both executive

and legislative branches of the U.S. Government in the exercise of civil-military relations (CMR). At times, the relationship was contentious as the President formulated policies and strategies for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Likewise, military leaders advocated for relief from sequestration measures based on the Budget Control Act of 2011.²

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There have been continuing challenges to two aspects of CMR—providing best military advice and presenting dissenting opinions—in the 21st century. Such challenges support historian Richard Kohn’s list of myths regarding CMR:

- “Everything is fine in the relationship.”
- “Civil-military control is safe, sound, and inviolate—No coup, no problem.”
- “There exists a clear bright line between military and civilian responsibilities.”
- “The military is non-partisan and apolitical”; “The military is political and politicized.”
- “There is a covenant between the military and the American people.”
- “Civilian control is understood by both sides in the relationship and the American people.”³

Current civil-military relations are challenged by the strategic uncertainty and fiscal austerity that affect the national military strategy and complicate its execution in such areas as readiness, force structure, and modernization of the joint force. The current cohort of senior officers must now continue to ensure the Nation’s security in a time of divisive domestic politics and dutifully serve a new administration.

This article examines the behavior of our most senior military officers and reviews their impacts on CMR as they transitioned out of their senior leadership positions. It examines this behavior in a historical perspective. It describes how formerly privileged and private conversations may have become stridently public. It then considers how this more public role may affect CMR. This analysis is based on congressional testimony, press conferences, and media engagements, as well as news reports and journalist accounts of senior military leaders’ statements.

U.S. History of Civil-Military Tensions

From the inception of this nation, our military has struggled to find the proper balance of CMR. As commander of the

fledgling U.S. Army, General George Washington addressed his officers in Newburgh, New York, to quell the Newburgh Conspiracy.⁴ When the Congress of the Confederation considered rescinding its commitment for back pay and pensions, officers threatened to disobey orders to disband the standing Continental Army. Some proposed a mutinous march on the capital to demand their due. Washington’s March 1783 speech at the New Windsor Cantonment reminded these disgruntled officers of their professional obligation to the civilian leaders of the Nation. Seven months later, in his final speech as the military commander in chief, Washington reinforced the principle of the military’s subordination to the new government and its Congress. He modeled this principled behavior by resigning his military commission in December 1783.⁵

At the onset of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln wrestled with two problems. First, he needed a strategy to defeat the Southern secessionists (he refused to acknowledge “the Confederacy”) in order to preserve the Union. Second, he needed to find the general who would execute such strategy and defeat the secessionist forces. For a time, that officer was General George B. McClellan, who had served as the General-in-Chief for the Union Army and then commanded the Army of the Potomac. After President Lincoln had devised a strategy, McClellan did not agree with it and failed to aggressively engage the enemy. Upon his relief from command, McClellan actively challenged the President while in uniform. He then became Lincoln’s Democratic political rival in the election campaign of 1864, pledging to end the war through negotiations with the Confederate States of America.

Arguably, General George C. Marshall serves as the exemplar of proper military behavior in CMR. As Chief of Staff of the Army at the start of World War II until its conclusion, he established a relationship built on confidence and trust with Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman—as well as with Congress. While candidly blunt in his

advice to civilian leaders,⁶ Marshall clearly understood and respected their constitutional authority.⁷ As historian Mark Stoler’s book title asserts, Marshall was the “Soldier-Statesman for the American Century,” having continued his postwar service to the Nation as Secretary of State and then Secretary of Defense. Even with his formidable reputation, Marshall’s professional advice was overruled by U.S. Presidents on at least three important issues: advocating for a cross-Channel invasion of Europe in 1942–1943, shifting the U.S. war effort to the Pacific rather than “Germany first,” and, as Secretary of State, opposing the recognition of the state of Israel in favor of establishing a United Nations trusteeship.

If Marshall is the exemplar, then General Douglas MacArthur, also a former Army Chief of Staff, provides the counter-example of inappropriate civil-military behavior. As a national hero and savior of the Pacific theater in World War II, MacArthur was called upon to reverse the 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea as the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, and Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. Feeling constrained by President Truman on his strategy and operations, MacArthur chided “temporary occupants of the White House,”⁸ who, he claimed, ignored his military savvy. MacArthur violated direct guidance from the President by speaking out to the press and threatening offensive operations against Chinese forces. In his diary, Truman wrote, “This looks like the last straw. Rank insubordination,” culminating the series of confrontations over the 5-year relationship with MacArthur.⁹ After his relief from command and forced retirement, MacArthur addressed a rare joint session of Congress to deliver his farewell address in which he set forth the risks of political indecision and Presidential restraints in the Korean campaign, which he claimed prevented decisive military operations.¹⁰ Like McClellan in the prior century, MacArthur was insubordinate toward his commander in chief and entertained presidential aspirations. He certainly did not intend to “just fade away.”¹¹



Supreme Allied Commander General Douglas MacArthur signs Instrument of Surrender on board USS *Missouri*, Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945 (U.S. Army Signal Corps)

Evolution of Theory

For military officers, the detailed analysis of military campaigns and the performance of the generals and admirals who lead them is part of their professional studies. The cases of the four generals—Washington, McClellan, Marshall, and MacArthur—are familiar to Army officers. Perhaps more important for their education in the profession of arms is the study of civil-military relations. World War II and the Korean War have provided the context for theories and prescriptive models of civil-military relations proffered by Samuel Huntington¹² and Morris Janowitz.¹³ While military leaders seem to embrace Huntington’s

“principle of objective civilian control,” civilian leaders rarely simply assign missions, provide resources to the military, and then defer planning and execution to military professionals. Implicit in this principle is loyalty to the commander in chief and Secretary of Defense, exemplified by military leaders who “stay on message.”

Huntington, however, asks a question that continues to complicate CMR: “What is the proper course of professional behavior when called before a congressional committee and invited to criticize the President’s recommendations?”¹⁴ Equally challenging is Janowitz’s call for military leaders to

become political agents who exert their outsize influence on the national policy formulation and strategic decisionmaking. He boldly asserts that military leaders “must make the management of an effective military force compatible with participation in political and administrative schemes.”¹⁵

Contemporary political scientists have tended to challenge the precepts of the earlier predominant theories. Eliot Cohen argues that, in practice for democracies, there is subjective control of the military aligned with the principle of civilian control—what he calls “an unequal dialogue” between the head of state and the most senior uniformed military leader.¹⁶ Peter

Feaver reframes CMR as a principal-agent relationship in which principal civilian leaders have limited knowledge and expertise on the employment of military power and thus must engage with and manage their uniformed military agents.¹⁷ This management requires monitoring and taking action to ensure the behaviors of military leaders support goals of civilian political leaders rather than pursue their parochial military interests. In the 21st century, the theories of Cohen and Feaver are more pragmatic for U.S. CMR. Indeed, the actions of civilian leaders performing as principals have recently led to the forced retirements and firing of several senior military officers.¹⁸ Two of the most prominent cases were General David McKiernan and General Stanley McChrystal, who both served as commanding generals of U.S. forces in Afghanistan for an operational theater of war.¹⁹

Patricia Shields recently approached CMR theory from a public administration perspective. She focuses on three areas that are informative for military professionals, political scientists, and military sociologists. Specifically, Shields examines “(1) the relationship between civilian elites and military leaders; (2) military leaders and their profession; [and] (3) military institution and society.”²⁰ In this analysis, civilian elites are those executive branch leaders who are the civilian Service secretaries and the Presidents’ Secretaries of Defense.

DOD civil-military relations are enabled by dialogue, debate, and eventual consensus that conveys the best military advice of its senior leaders—the Secretary of Defense and CJCS—to the Nation’s commander in chief and chief executive, the President of the United States. The interactions among executive branch leaders and uniformed senior officers are only two legs of the CMR trinity. Embedded in our constitutional form of a democratic government is the tension between the commander in chief’s charge to lead the Armed Forces and the congressional responsibility to provide funds to resource our military. Additionally, Congress has the constitutional responsibility to provide legislative oversight of the military.

Roles and Functions

The President, of course, is the commander in chief of the U.S. military. Accordingly, the military leaders are the chiefs of the Armed Services, including the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Chief of Staff of the Army, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Chairman, who serves as the principal military advisor to the President and Secretary of Defense. Another powerful group of civilian elites is comprised of Members of Congress, especially those from committees that provide oversight—the Senate Armed Services Committee and House Armed Services Committee (SASC and HASC, respectively)—along with those Members who are responsible for resourcing decisions through their respective congressional defense appropriations committees.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have substantially different roles from warfighting commanders.²¹ Combatant commanders are charged with developing and executing military strategies to support national policy and security strategy in their assigned regions and functions. Accordingly, they develop short-term plans to address defense issues; they also design theater campaign plans to support national security interests. They, however, have no direct roles in developing military budgets. In contrast, Service chiefs assist Service secretaries in fulfilling their responsibilities for the Title 10 U.S. Code functions of the Armed Forces. Among other responsibilities, they must man, train, and equip forces provided to the combatant commanders. In effect, they are responsible for the long-term health and well-being of their respective Services. While the JCS support the short-term needs of combatant commanders, they must remain focused on mid- and long-term capabilities of U.S. military forces. The four roles specified in Title 10 require the Chairman, as the senior member of the Joint Staff, to assess, advise, direct, and execute national defense policies and plans. Service chiefs have parallel roles for their military organizations.

The military leaders of the JCS have a formidable depth and breadth of

experience. Through three decades of uniformed service, they have commanded successfully at every level in both operational and institutional settings. Many have served as commanders of either combatant or subunified commands during the war on terror. They have served as leaders of key organizations within their Services and in powerful staff positions in the Pentagon. Their past performances are scrutinized for Presidential appointment and congressional confirmation before they become members of the Joint Staff. An explicit consideration in their vetting is assurance that they will not only provide best military advice to the chief executive but also convey their candid assessments to Congress, even when not in accord with the other Joint Chiefs and, importantly, when their counsel is different from the President’s inclination.

U.S. Civil-Military Tensions

Considerable evidence currently supports Kohn’s challenges to CMR myths, especially “Everything is fine in the relationship.” In February 2003, Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki, under direct questioning by Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) of the SASC, responded that “several hundred thousand soldiers” would be needed to provide security following major combat operations in Iraq.²² This statement suggested flaws in the strategy endorsed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Though Shinseki completed his full term as Army chief, he was effectively marginalized by Secretary Rumsfeld as punishment for being off message. At the end of his tenure, Shinseki provided the Secretary a “Personal For” memorandum that explained the intent behind his response to Senator Levin and the SASC.²³ The Secretary was noticeably absent from Shinseki’s retirement ceremony. Had Rumsfeld attended, he would have heard Shinseki’s farewell caution to “beware the 12-division strategy for a 10-division force Army,”²⁴ which pointed out the Secretary’s strategy-resource mismatch.

Service chiefs provide manned, equipped, and trained forces to the combatant commanders. Accordingly,



From left, former Service chiefs General Raymond T. Odierno, USA, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, USN, General Mark A. Welsh III, USAF, and General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. (USMC), testified before Senate Armed Services Committee on effect of Budget Control Act of 2011 and sequestration on national security, January 28, 2015 (U.S. Navy/Julianne F. Metzger)

Shinseki was responsible for supporting multiple theaters during his tenure, especially for that of General Tommy Franks. For the major combat operations of the 21st century, General Franks headed U.S. Central Command for the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As a combatant commander leading the main warfighting headquarters, Franks became frustrated with his Pentagon-based colleagues and derided the Service chiefs as “Title 10 Rear Echelon M**F**s.”²⁵ Regarded as a hero following the speedy takedown of the Taliban and the Saddam Hussein regime, Franks retired in July 2003. During the 2004 Presidential campaign, he actively endorsed President George W. Bush at the Republican National Convention.²⁶

Although not a Service chief, General David McKiernan was well respected as an Army leader. He had served as the land component commander for the 2003

invasion of Iraq, then as the commanding general of United States Army Europe. From that position, he was selected to lead the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization effort as the Commander, International Security Assistance Forces, and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan. When the U.S. war strategy in Afghanistan changed under the Obama administration, McKiernan disagreed with its implementation. When challenged and asked to retire quietly, McKiernan reportedly replied, “You’re going to have to fire me.”²⁷ So he became the first U.S. general officer fired from an active theater of war since MacArthur in Korea. In his retirement ceremony, McKiernan’s message to his military profession claimed that “What counts the most are reputation and . . . decisions based on missions and taking care of troops and their families.” His farewell speech clearly acknowledged Huntington’s principle of civilian control:

“I’m a soldier and I live in a democracy and I work for political leaders. And when my political leaders tell me it’s time to go, I must go.”²⁸

As military leaders seek to provide the capability and capacity to perform explicitly assigned missions, a strategy-to-resource mismatch has persisted. Accordingly, defense officials have sought to gain sufficient resources to conduct the spectrum of assigned missions or to be relieved of specific missions in order to have sufficient resources to fulfill their responsibilities. Presently, defense leaders are persistently struggling to satisfy the requirements of the Budget Control Act of 2011, which threatens cuts to defense spending by enforcing budget caps if national debt reduction measures are not taken.²⁹ Faced with the very real prospects of budgetary sequestrations in 2013, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a memorandum to Congress urging it to

Table. Previous Joint Chiefs of Staff Positions and Assignments

Officer	Position	Key Assignments
General Martin E. Dempsey, USA	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (October 2011–September 2015)	Army Chief of Staff U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command
Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr., USN	Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (August 2011–July 2015)	U.S. Northern Command Director, Strategic Plans and Policy (Joint Staff)
General Raymond T. Odierno, USA	Chief of Staff, Army (September 2011–August 2015)	U.S. Joint Forces Command U.S. Forces–Iraq Assistant to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., USMC	Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps (October 2014–October 2015)	Commander, International Security Assistance Forces U.S. Forces–Afghanistan Assistant Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps
Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, USN	Chief of Naval Operations (September 2011–September 2015)	Vice Chief of Naval Operations U.S. Fleet Forces Command U.S. Pacific Command
General Mark A. Welsh III, USAF	Chief of Staff, Air Force (August 2012–June 2016)	U.S. Air Forces Europe Associate Director, Central Intelligence Agency
General Frank J. Grass, USA	Chief of National Guard Bureau (September 2012–August 2016)	Deputy Commander, U.S. Northern Command Deputy Director, National Guard Bureau

pass a budget rather than emplace temporary spending measures through another continuing resolution.³⁰ When sequestration was enacted for a period in 2013, Congress subsequently passed Bipartisan Budget Acts in 2013 and 2015 to delay defense cuts in 2-year increments. JCS members advised congressional leaders to allow military professionals to determine how defense cuts would be applied, rather than applying them by arbitrary and indiscriminate legislation.

Forums to Observe Behavior

As Joint Chiefs transition out of their positions, CMR can be influenced not only by these leaders' accomplishments but also by their conduct immediately upon retirement. Several forums provide an opportunity to observe CMR during senior military officer and Presidential transitions. Pentagon press briefings and issued statements are routine communications; they are now used with greater frequency to inform the U.S. public about military activities. They also provide real-time updates on existing crises or emerging concerns of political or international interest involving the U.S. military. DOD officials also engage with think tanks on policies and strategies still under development.³¹ These sessions are used to inform civilian elites who are outside of government and active contributors to

the national security debate and policy development.

Other important forums are the Service-related professional meetings and symposiums used by senior officers to advocate on the behalf of the military. Service secretaries and chiefs of the Armed Forces provide keynote speeches at such gatherings to connect with and garner support from myriad stakeholders who wield great influence with U.S. Government representatives on defense issues and with the American people.³² Graduation speeches at Service academies and senior-level colleges also provide opportunities for senior military leaders to set expectations of newly commissioned officers, to affirm institutional values with members of the profession of arms, and to announce policy initiatives.³³

Likewise, DOD communicates with selected audiences through official publications such as *Joint Force Quarterly* (under the auspices of CJCS and the National Defense University) and Service-related magazines such as *ARMY*. Other publications include influential scholarly journals such as *Orbis* and *Foreign Policy*. Similarly, newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* garner immediate attention from a diverse and informed readership.

The more formal and official civil-military venue is congressional testimony, whether for the annual budget

or oversight hearings. These routine, legally mandated senior military leader testimonies generally reflect the military's compliance with Presidential priorities as presented in the defense portion of the Federal budget request. Similar to the budgetary hearings are readiness hearings from the force providers and updates on current activities from the combatant commanders. Oversight hearings address functional concerns (that is, acquisition programs) or items of special interest to Congress (such as the effectiveness of operational strategies in a regional theater).

While each forum is available and used frequently, of special interest and potential controversy are the farewell addresses of senior military leaders as they transition out of their prominent positions into retirement. The purpose of such statements may be to reinforce current policies, strategies, and priorities; to inform and heighten awareness and compel action on an unresolved issue; to provide a glide path to the successor; or to "clear the deck" of contentious issues for the next Service chief or Chairman. The aforementioned historical farewell addresses by Generals George Washington, Douglas MacArthur, Eric Shinseki, and David McKiernan provide such examples.

The following discussion of the behavior of transitioning senior leaders is based on materials available

approximately 1 year prior to the leaders' nominal release from Active-duty service at the end of the fiscal year in September. It traces a sequence of key events and reflects a consistent battle rhythm. In August, JCS members submit their Service budget requests for 1 year later. In October, Service chiefs begin the new fiscal year in engagements with their Service associations' annual meetings. For the following months, Services and the Joint Staff work the defense planning, programming, and budgeting processes within the executive branch, which then becomes part of the President's budget submission to Congress in early February. From March through June, senior defense officials and military officers appear in hearings before congressional committees. Senior military leader transitions are completed with changes of responsibility and retirement ceremonies in the summer months, which may include graduation speeches, final press and media interviews, and publication of senior military leaders' essays.

Contemporary Issues for Civil-Military Relations

Throughout the second Obama administration, several defense issues persisted and remained subject to the advice of the senior military leaders of JCS. The table lists the last cohort, their positions, and key assignments that serve as the foundation for their expertise. Among the enduring defense requirements are developing an effective National Defense Strategy supported by National Military Strategy to protect and advance U.S. national security interests.³⁴ Development of such strategic documents has influenced the conduct of ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially after the declared end of combat operations in those theaters. The resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaeda as well as the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (IS)³⁵ have complicated the U.S. desire to rebalance its military forces to the Pacific as outlined in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance.³⁶ Likewise, these policy documents have influenced the U.S. response to the messy aftermath

of the promising Arab Spring and the resulting lack of effective governance and security in the Middle East region. The complexity of the strategic environment challenges the Nation's ability to counter threats effectively and to develop strategies with identified risks.

The current venue of choice for transitioning senior military leaders to go "on the record" appears to be published articles and interviews. General Martin Dempsey chose *Joint Force Quarterly* to convey his parting message.³⁷ In a final interview, he sought to educate and inform members of the profession of arms about the inevitability of friction within civil-military relations—friction that complicates national security decisionmaking for strategic-level issues.³⁸ Dempsey embraced his role to provide the President with information and best advice on issues that may extend beyond the military domain. As the senior military advisor, he sought to make a compelling case for senior military leaders' role in the assessment of threats. He advised military leaders to work effectively with other elements of the executive branch in employing the instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to protect U.S. national security interests. In doing so, he would recommend prioritization and specify resourcing requirements for defense capabilities.

In an August 2015 interview with *Defense News* prior to his September retirement, Admiral Greenert focused on two main points.³⁹ First, he noted that congressional difficulties with passing budgets and the resulting use of continuing resolutions are having an adverse impact on naval readiness. Accordingly, the uncertainty of funding for training and maintenance as well as investments for modernization would affect not only current capacities but also future capabilities. Second, while acknowledging the security challenges of potential acts of terrorism by ISIL and al Qaeda, Greenert expressed concern about the potential threats of Russia and China that would require strong U.S. naval capabilities to counter.

Perhaps the most contentious recent civil-military issue arose among the

executive and legislative branches and Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno. In August 2015, his declaration that "this is no time to cut the U.S. Army" appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*.⁴⁰ Consistent with his previous statements, Odierno identified global missions that require Army capabilities and the resourcing challenges that "have brought the nation to an important inflection point."⁴¹ An adamant advocate for Army force structure and sufficient force manning levels to accomplish missions of the national military strategy, Odierno contended that "[d]ecisions made in Washington . . . must be based on the world as it is, and not the world as we wish it to be."⁴² Those Washington decisions on policy and military strategies are made within the executive branch, and decisions on resourcing and oversight rules reside within the legislative branch. Odierno had frequent interactions with both. After Odierno's retirement, Army Secretary John McHugh was more direct in criticizing Congress at the October 2015 convention of the Association of the U.S. Army. He addressed the Army's need to get "beyond budget caps, continuing resolutions, and the uncertainty they foster."⁴³

In the last month of his tenure as Air Force Chief of Staff, *Defense News* interviewed General Mark Welsh.⁴⁴ Like Admiral Greenert, he expressed concern about the dim prospects of a timely defense budget and the ensuing impact of the Budget Control Act on modernization programs that would provide future capabilities to the Air Force. While pessimistic about the stability of the Federal budget process, Welsh stated that the majority of Air Force interactions with Congress were "very positive" and that "we don't have to agree."⁴⁵ Moreover, like General Dempsey, he noted that "our job is to provide the best military advice we can give. . . . I have no issue with debate and disagreement with Congress. That is part of the system."⁴⁶

The most nuanced transitional remarks came from Marine Corps Commandant General Joseph F. Dunford. He had been nominated to succeed General Dempsey as Chairman



President Abraham Lincoln and General George B. McClellan at Antietam, Maryland, October 3, 1862 (LOC/Alexander Gardner)

of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Perhaps the most striking test of civil-military relations occurs when civilian policy decisions appear to challenge a military Service's core identity and directly affect the Service's mission readiness. Such was the assessment of General Dunford in his report to Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus in the Marine leader's recommendation to exclude women from some combat positions within the Marine Corps.⁴⁷ Dunford's best military advice was presented with full knowledge that Mabus would not seek an exemption for the Marine Corps and that Secretary of Defense Ash Carter had made public his support for full gender integration of the military. When Secretary Carter announced the decision in December 2015, freshly appointed CJCS Dunford

accepted his new responsibility: "As the senior military advisor and the senior uniformed member, it's my job now to assist the secretary with full implementation to make sure that we do it in a way that maintains our combat effectiveness, maintains the health and welfare of our troops and takes advantage of the talent of all the men and women that we have in uniform. So we are getting after that now."⁴⁸ As he transitioned to the role of CJCS, Dunford embraced Carter's decision after rendering professional advice to the contrary

In these senior leaders' transitional statements, four themes have emerged: requirements for military preparedness, capabilities to execute contingency operations, the covenant to sustain the all-volunteer force, and obligation for stewardship of the military profession.

Understandably, points of friction are inherent in civil-military relations. Friction is evident in formal statements and unofficial leaks across agencies of the executive branch. Friction may arise when senior military leaders' assessments of threats and risks are different from those of civilian leaders. It may be the case that the "best military advice" is considered but not accepted by their civilian leaders. In such cases, military leaders may speak out to provide pushback on current policies and strategies. They may seek to influence and potentially shape the discourse on emerging policies and strategies. Or, in the absence of clear policy guidance, they may press for decisions. In any event, they must advocate for resources commensurate with missions and established priorities of their civilian leaders.

Public and scholarly discourse commonly cite the tensions in civil-military relations, which often involve issues of authority, autonomy, and accountability. Authority is established in legal documents such as the Constitution of the United States; Title 10, U.S. Code; and policy directives within the executive branch. As leaders in the profession of arms in accordance with the Huntingtonian constructs of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness, senior military leaders expect autonomy in their conduct of military operations. However, senior military leaders' authority and autonomy must come with accountability to the American people and their elected officials. Accordingly, trust and confidence are essential elements for developing effective and healthy CMR.

Implications for U.S. Civil-Military Relations

This article traces the evolution of civil-military relations through selected cases in U.S. history that have served as the foundation of several theories and frameworks (for example, Huntington, Janowitz, Cohen, and Feaver). It has examined transitional behavior of the cohort of senior military leaders in the final term of the Obama administration. This review has illustrated aspects of civil-military relations and provided themes for consideration. In view of current tensions and the consequences of inappropriate behavior of some senior uniformed leaders, continuing education is essential to ensure senior military leaders do not unduly complicate and impair U.S. CMR.

The JCS members noted here have progressed through careers shaped greatly by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Accordingly, they have served in diverse joint assignments, have spent time in the Pentagon observing the interaction between senior civilian and uniformed defense leaders, and have participated in professional development programs that include analysis of civil-military relations. Perhaps most important, they have witnessed contentious and problematic civil-military relations behavior in the 21st

century as documented in the works of journalist Bob Woodward and of former Defense Secretaries such as Rumsfeld, Robert Gates, and Leon Panetta.⁴⁹

The current JCS membership is the second complete cohort of senior uniformed officers in the 8 years of the Obama administration. They have observed the successes and challenges of CMR over periods of stress and turmoil with deliberations on the surge in Afghanistan, the declared end of combat operations in two theaters of war, and the shifting of strategic priorities. Arguably, JCS leaders have taken those lessons to heart. An assessment of CMR expectations from the Ronald Reagan era still seems applicable, even 30 years since passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act: "In keeping with their military culture, the Joint Chiefs preferred clearly defined organizational roles and lines of authority. What they often got . . . were vague directives, lax assignments of authority, and contradictory behavior from the President and his subordinates."⁵⁰

Through it all, these officers gained the credibility and trust of President Obama based on their past performances and established effective working relationships with civilian leaders. While anecdotal reports of strained relations between the White House and the Pentagon surfaced, the behavior of this cohort of senior military officials was appropriate. Vigorous discussions and exchanges enabled them to provide the best military advice to civilian leaders as they determined policy objectives and approved plans as well as evaluated specific courses of action to address strategic issues. President Obama selected and nominated each of these officers, and their appointments were confirmed by the Senate. As such, their prior performance and reputation established a baseline of trust and confidence with the civilian masters in the executive and legislative branches of our governments. An example of such Presidential trust was offered by General Dempsey: "As it came around to me, I would say, 'I am here as your military advisor, and that is not a military issue.' And the President would say, 'Yes. But you are here and I want

your view on the strategic issue that has national security implications."⁵¹

The greatest area of contention in civil-military relations may be the interaction between Congress in its resourcing and oversight roles and the Pentagon as it seeks autonomy to act within the expertise and jurisdictions allotted to the military profession.⁵² While military leaders have protected communications with their commander in chief, exchanges with Congress are generally public and "on the record." These are inherently political—and potentially partisan. So direct evidence of military dissent with Presidential decisions and policies in congressional engagements is not readily available.

Congressional hearings may in some cases challenge Presidential policies rather than assess the effectiveness of military operations. This kind of partisanship has also led to delays in considering Presidential appointees, impacting civilian appointees more than military ones. For example, former Under Secretary of the Army Brad Carson withdrew from consideration as Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness after waiting a year for Senate approval. Additionally, the approval of Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning took 6 months, as the Senate delayed to consider presidential remarks on an unrelated subject.⁵³

Military leaders continue to call for congressional action to pass a timely Federal budget in order to avoid the Budget Control Act of 2011 sequestration cuts and preclude reliance on temporary spending measures of a continuing resolution. They also seek authorization and appropriations for defense programs for weapons system acquisitions; they likewise rely on the Base Realignment and Closure process to deal with excess infrastructure and to use Federal funding more effectively. Although some scholars express concern about apparent conflicts between Congress and Pentagon leaders, General Dempsey offers a valuable perspective: "Our entire system is built on the premise that we require friction to move [forward]. . . . I would advise future leaders that friction and disagreement in

decisionmaking is not a negative. . . . In general the person at the table with the most persuasive arguments tends to prevail in those environments.”⁵⁴

Historian Steven Rearden asserts that the most important task of the CJCS is to manage CMR through the transition of civilian leadership.⁵⁵ Transitions almost always include appointments of new Secretaries of Defense, Secretaries of the Armed Services, and changes in leadership within Congress. Following congressional elections, majority leadership for the SASC and HASC often shifts. Notably, Presidential appointees to senior defense positions and those elected to Congress (currently fewer than one in five) have limited military experience and thereby rely on the assessments provided by their military advisors. Arguably, trust and confidence may be extended initially to senior military leaders, but they are continually tested throughout the CMR.

On Election Day 2016, Lieutenant General Dave Barno, USA (Ret.), and Dr. Nora Bensahel offered sage advice to military leaders for the then-pending transition period of a new Presidential administration: “Don’t assume the new team will continue the processes, policies, and strategies of the last four, eight, or even 12 years.”⁵⁶ Education on CMR for administration officials of President Donald Trump is critical and essential as they transition into positions of solemn responsibility for our national security. This is a period when civil-military gaps may be greatest. Former defense and state department official Rosa Brooks astutely identifies the “more pernicious gap between elite civilian political leaders and elite military leaders: a gap of knowledge, and a gap of trust.”⁵⁷

Civil-military relations are nominally included in the joint and Service professional military education programs. For the Army, civil-military relations are an important part the curriculum at the U.S. Army War College. Under the direction of Generals Dempsey and Odierno during their successive tenures as Army Chief of Staff, CMR sessions were led by scholars such as Feaver, Cohen, and Kohn in the Senior Leader Seminar and Army Strategic Education Program. It is

equally important for civilian officials to learn about CMR. These officials develop policies, craft laws, and ultimately make decisions involving the use of military force. Accordingly, CMR education should be provided to Presidential appointees, the National Security Council Staff, and to members of selected congressional committees. By their very nature, CMR are necessarily dynamic and messy; they should be constantly monitored.

The legacy of the last cohort of JCS members has provided a foundation for their successors. The current cohort, in turn, will, according to their own predilections, shape the future of CMR through engagements with the new Presidential administration. Over the coming years, President Trump will select his own senior military officers for the Joint Staff. They may espouse the unequal dialogue with civilians who are unchallenged in their authority and control of America’s military. Senior military leaders must demonstrate the experience, expertise, and judgment that should be provided with candor to inform the decisions of our national policymakers. An exchange relationship is inherent in such discourse in which senior military officers are the agents who act on the behalf of civilian principals. This relationship must be based on trust and confidence. Trust is necessary to “ensure the responsible use of force in the public interest . . . to prevent arbitrariness, ensure accountability, and safeguard human rights and the rule of law.”⁵⁸ In our democracy, the exchange involves three parties: the chief executive, Members of Congress, and military leaders who serve the Nation. Despite the inevitable tension, balance that facilitates proper CMR is possible. JFQ

Notes

¹ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “The New Chiefs in Town,” *War on the Rocks*, June 30, 2015, available at <<http://warontherocks.com/2015/06/the-new-chiefs-in-town/>>.

² Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011, Pub.L. 112-25, S. 365, 125 Stat. 240, enacted August 2, 2011.

³ See video, “Richard Kohn on Civil-

Military Relations,” posted September 16, 2013, available at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8MDZCOCatw>.

⁴ Richard H. Kohn, “The Inside History of the Newburgh Conspiracy: America and the Coup d’Etat,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (April 1970), 187–220.

⁵ The officers of the Continental Army sent a letter to Congress March 20, 1783, detailing their concerns. See “Washington’s Resignation Speech (Final Draft),” December 23, 1873, Annapolis, MD, available at <<http://maryland-statehouse.blogspot.com/2012/07/george-washington-resigns-speech-returns.html>>.

⁶ Mark A. Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman for the American Century* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne, 1989).

⁷ See the Constitution of the United States of America, Article I, Section 8: “The Congress shall have Power . . . To declare War, To raise and support Armies . . . To provide and maintain a Navy.” Article II, Section 1: “The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.” Article II, Section 2: “The President shall be the Commander in Chief of the Army and the Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States when called into actual service of the United States.”

⁸ This line was offered by the main character in the film *MacArthur*, Universal Pictures, 1977.

⁹ “Diary Entry of President Harry S. Truman, April 6, 1951,” Truman Papers—President’s Secretary’s Files, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, available at <www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/trumanpapers/psf/diaries/index.php?documentVersion=transcript&documentid=st-psf_976232_02>. See also H.W. Brands, *The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Doubleday, 2016).

¹⁰ “General Douglas MacArthur Farewell Address to Congress delivered 19 April 1951,” American Rhetoric Top 100 Speeches, available at <www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/douglasmacarthurfarewelladdress.htm>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

¹³ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).

¹⁴ Huntington, 416.

¹⁵ Janowitz, 418.

¹⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Donald Drechsler and Charles D. Allen, “Why Senior Military Leaders Fail: And

What Can We Learn from Their Mistakes,” *Armed Forces Journal*, July 1, 2009, available at <<http://armedforcesjournal.com/why-senior-military-leaders-fail/>>; Charles D. Allen, “Lessons Not Learned: Civil-Military Disconnect in Afghanistan,” *Armed Forces Journal*, September 1, 2011, available at <<http://armedforcesjournal.com/lessons-not-learned/>>.

¹⁹ Allen, “Lessons Not Learned”; Marybeth P. Ulrich, “The General Stanley McChrystal Affair: A Case Study in Civil-Military Relations,” *Parameters* (Spring 2011), 86–100.

²⁰ Patricia Shields, “Civilian-Military Relations,” in *Encyclopedia of Public Administration* (forthcoming).

²¹ This section is from Charles D. Allen, “The Pit and the Pendulum: Civil-Military Relations in an Age of Uncertainty,” *Armed Forces Journal*, May 1, 2013, available at <<http://armedforcesjournal.com/the-pit-and-the-pendulum/>>.

²² “Army Chief: Force to Occupy Iraq Massive,” *USA Today*, February 25, 2003, available at <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-02-25-iraq-us_x.htm>.

²³ Eric Shinseki, “Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, Subject: End of Tour Memorandum,” U.S. Army, June 10, 2003.

²⁴ Eric Shinseki, Farewell Address, June 11, 2003, Fort Myer, Virginia.

²⁵ See Andrew Bacevich, “A Modern Major General,” *The New Left Review* 29 (September/October 2004), 123–124.

²⁶ “Remarks by Retired General Tommy Franks to the Republican National Convention,” September 2, 2004, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A57264-2004Sep2.html>.

²⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Pentagon Worries Led to Command Change,” *Washington Post*, August 17, 2009, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/16/AR2009081602304.html>.

²⁸ David McKiernan, Farewell Speech, July 15, 2009, Fort Myer, Virginia.

²⁹ The BCA called for programmed reduction in defense spending of \$487 billion over 10 years and an additional reduction of \$495 billion as motivation to address the national debt.

³⁰ Allen, “Lessons Not Learned,” 18.

³¹ For example, Washington, DC-based think tanks are the Center for a New American Security, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Brookings Institution.

³² Each component has its annual meetings and convention hosted by the Association of the United States Army, Marine Corps League, Navy League of the United States, Air Force Association, and National Guard Association of the United States, respectively.

³³ Senior-level colleges are the Army War College, Naval War College, Air War College, Marine Corps War College, National War College, and Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy (the latter two

are part of the National Defense University).

³⁴ Most recent documents are the *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 6, 2015), *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2012), and *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 2015). See also *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014).

³⁵ Also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Daesh.

³⁶ *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, January 2012.

³⁷ “From the Chairman: An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 78 (3rd Quarter 2015), 2–13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁹ Vago Muradian, “Interview: U.S. Navy’s Adm. Jon Greenert,” *Defense News*, August 31, 2015, available at <www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/leaders/interviews/2015/08/31/interview-adm-jon-greenert-cno-usnavy/71453982/>.

⁴⁰ Raymond T. Odierno, “This Is No Time to Cut the U.S. Army,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2015, available at <www.wsj.com/articles/this-is-no-time-to-cut-the-u-s-army-1439506616>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Kevin Baron, “The U.S. Army’s Biggest Concern Right Now Is Congress,” *Defense One*, October 12, 2015, available at <www.defenseone.com/business/2015/10/us-armys-biggest-concern-right-now-congress/122730/>.

⁴⁴ Valerie Insinna, “U.S. Air Force Gen. Mark Welsh Pessimistic About Defense Budget Outlook,” *Defense News*, June 14, 2016, available at <www.defensenews.com/story/defense/air-space/air-force/2016/06/14/welsh-pessimistic-defense-budget-outlook/85884804/>.

⁴⁵ See video interview with Aaron Mehta, “Defense News TV: Gen. Mark A. Welsh USA,” June 26, 2016, available at <www.defensenews.com/videos/defense-news/tv/2016/06/26/defense-news-tv-gen-mark-a-welsh-usaf-hacking-against-india/86402068/>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Lolita C. Baldor, “Officials: Marine Commandant Recommends Women Be Banned from Some Combat Jobs,” *Marine Times*, September 19, 2015, available at <www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/09/18/officials-marine-commandant-recommends-women-banned-some-combat-job/72421888/>.

⁴⁸ Jim Garamone, “Dunford Says All in Military Will Work to Fully Integrate Women,” DOD News, December 5, 2015, available at <www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/632986/dunford-says-all-in-military-will-

work-to-fully-integrate-women>.

⁴⁹ See Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003) to *Obama’s War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011); Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2011); Robert Gates, *Duty: Memories of a Secretary at War* (New York: Penguin, 2011); and Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

⁵⁰ Steve Rearden, *Council of War: A History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 1942–1991* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2013).

⁵¹ “An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey,” 9.

⁵² Colton C. Campbell and David R. Auerstadt, eds., *Congress and Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

⁵³ Leon Shane III, “McCain Blasts Senator for Blocking Army Secretary Confirmation,” *Military Times*, April 28, 2016, available at <www.militarytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2016/04/28/mccain-blasts-congressman-blocking-army-secretary-confirmation/83661806/>.

⁵⁴ “An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey,” 5.

⁵⁵ Reardon, 424.

⁵⁶ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “The Oversight Gap: The Role of the Military in a Civilian Transition,” *War on the Rocks*, November 8, 2016, available at <<https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/the-oversight-gap-the-role-of-the-military-in-a-civilian-transition/>>.

⁵⁷ Rosa Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 305–306.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 361.