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The Political-Military Rivalry for Operational Control in U.S. Military Actions: A Soldier's Perspective

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FOREWORD

In our technologically correct military, it has been common practice over the past 20-30 years to celebrate at every turn the marvels of modern military communications. By the time the Vietnam War finally ground to a halt in early 1975, the use of communications satellites and airborne platforms to relay secure voice communications over global distances had become routine, and military publicists were ecstatic in proclaiming to the world this exciting new technological capability.

Incompletely appreciated at the time, however, was the fact that the circuits used to connect the Pentagon with far-flung operational commands could also be used to connect the White House with those commands. This revolutionary development, making it feasible for the President sitting in the Oval Office to give orders to an operational commander on the other side of the globe in real time, carries with it both perils and opportunities.

The following monograph by retired Colonel Lloyd J. Matthews, U.S. Army, presents a soldier's perspective of the operational implications of instant access to the battlefield by civilian leaders in Washington. It also suggests steps that might be taken to assure constructive collaboration between military and civil authorities, leaving each group to make its own essential contribution to success in the nation's military undertakings around the world.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

COLONEL LLOYD J. MATTHEWS, USA Ret., graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1954 and was commissioned in the Infantry. He has an M.A. degree from Harvard University and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Virginia, and is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College and the Army War College. Overseas tours included Germany and Vietnam, while following retirement he served as a project manager in Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In Vietnam, he was the militia advisor in Tay Ninh Province, the senior advisor to Task Force Killer operating out of Bien Hoa, a staff officer in the J-3 section of the Military Assistance and Advisory Command in Saigon, and the Senior Aide-de-Camp to COMUSMACV. In subsequent assignments, he was commander of a basic combat training battalion at Ft. Ord, California; editor of *Parameters*, the U.S. Army War College Quarterly, at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; and the Associate Dean of the Military Academy at West Point, New York, from which position he retired in 1984. He is the editor of five books published by Pergamon-Brassey's: *Assessing the Vietnam War* (1987), *The Parameters of War* (1987), *The Challenge of Military Leadership* (1989), *The Parameters of Military Ethics* (1989), and *Newsmen and National Defense* (1991), the first four having been co-edited with Dale Brown. Additionally, he is the author of some 60 articles, features, and reviews on military topics, in such journals as *Parameters*, *ARMY* Magazine, and *Military Review*. The present paper is an updated and greatly expanded version of a short piece by Colonel Matthews titled "The Politician As Operational Commander," appearing in *ARMY* Magazine, March 1996, pages 29-36.

THE POLITICAL-MILITARY RIVALRY FOR OPERATIONAL CONTROL IN U.S. MILITARY ACTIONS: A SOLDIER'S PERSPECTIVE

> At around 0400, Ambassador Dick Sneider appeared in the War Room . . . . He took my chair beside [General Richard Stilwell, who] was on the phone to Morris Brady, the task force commander. The Ambassador reached up to take the phone from Stilwell's hand, obviously eager to speak to Brady himself. I saw the muscles in Stilwell's arm clench, then go rigid. The harder Sneider tugged, the more firmly Stilwell gripped the phone. Finally, the General won this ludicrous tug-of-war with the Ambassador. Stilwell replaced the receiver and smiled at the Ambassador. "Dick," Stilwell said, "was there something you wanted me to ask General Brady?" Sneider was visibly ruffled. "Well," he muttered, "the *President* asked me to be his personal representative in this operation. And I . . ." "Certainly," Stilwell said, still smiling. "I'll be happy to relay any of the President's questions to *my* field commanders." The Ambassador got the message.
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> —United Nations Command Chief of Staff Major General John Singlaub, August 21, 1976, prior to start of PAUL BUNYAN, the US-ROK tree-cutting operation in the Korean DMZ.[1]

Introduction.

Discussion of the deep involvement of civilian leaders today in operational and even tactical matters formerly the exclusive preserve of the soldier is now the hackneyed staple of international security affairs textbooks.[2] Facilitated by the revolution in communications technology that has made possible instant secure voice contact with forces scattered throughout the world, sobered by fears of sudden escalation from local dustup to wider confrontation having global reverberations, and driven by a need to contain adverse political fallout from overseas military

ventures seen as both risky and controversial, civilians in positions of authority over the military have been increasingly disposed during delicate moments to seize the marshal's baton themselves and bark orders directly to servicemen on the scene. In doing so, they have given rise to a new addition to the soldier's compendium of command post humor: "If you want to direct troops in battle, don't be a general, be a politician."

But in truth, far from seeing these new developments as funny, professional soldiers view them with a mixture of profound alarm, resentment, frustration, and resignation—and legitimately so. On one hand, under Article II, Section 2, the President as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, acting directly or through his civilian seconds, has absolute constitutional authority to intervene in U.S. military operations at any level in any way he or she sees fit. This is the overriding reality and the bedrock axiom from which all discussion must begin.

On the other hand, warfighting is an extremely complex and dangerous activity, requiring for its successful execution a professional class of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who have made it their career's work to master the art and science of war. In this hostile world, where other nations have it within their capability to grievously injure if not destroy us as a nation and people, the simple imperative of survival demands that we entrust our fighting to those among us best qualified to do the job. We ignore this axiom at our peril.

What are we to do, then, when these two enshrined axioms of national defense come to a direct clash—when those with the constitutional authority propose to take over the fighting from those with the professional expertise? In the epigraph at the head of this paper, describing how Ambassador Sneider and General Stilwell literally arm-wrestled to determine who should grasp the instrument of command, we observe in brilliantly etched microcosm the larger struggle that will always beset soldier and civilian

during military operations and crises of the information age. Must we continue to resort to arm- wrestling or other questionable expedients that will be noticed in this paper? Or are there not more acceptable approaches to resolving this bedeviling issue?

There are indeed some reasonable and potentially useful steps that can be taken to enhance the mechanisms whereby soldiers and political authorities divide the nation's warmaking responsibilities, leaving each group to perform its own essential function in an optimal manner. But before turning to these, let us examine, in varying degrees of detail, several representative instances of civilian involvement in tactical and operational matters during the post-Korean War period.

Case Examples.

Two days before the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by CIA-sponsored Cuban exiles on April 17, 1961, President John F. Kennedy phoned CIA Director Richard Bissell and told him to cut down substantially on the number of B-26s that were assigned to destroy Castro's small air force. The bombing contingent was reduced in number from 16 to 6 B-26s, and, as a result, less than half of the Cuban aircraft were destroyed. The next day, the President forbade a second airstrike designed to eliminate those aircraft that escaped the first strike.[3] This remnant thus survived to bombard the invasion force itself. Military leaders believed that the drastic cut-back in carefully planned bomber support doomed any prospect for success of the invasion.[4]

During the Berlin crisis in August 1961, provoked by the Soviet decision to erect the Berlin Wall dividing East from West, the President decided to send the 1st Battle Group of the 8th Infantry Division over the autobahn from West Germany into the city as a gesture of U.S. resolve. Mindful of the potential for hostilities and even nuclear escalation, the President interested himself in the minutest details of

the movement planning, at one point even requesting a biography of the colonel who was to command the convoy. Unwilling to rely on status reports received through the military chain, the President directed his military assistant, Chester Clifton, to set up a direct telephone connection between the White House and the moving convoy.[5]

Orwin Talbott, a retired Army lieutenant general who was executive officer to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Lyman Lemnitzer at the time of the Berlin crisis, here describes the "blessings" of the modern communications available to the various commanders:

> As the crisis broke, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, then Director of the Joint Staff Lieutenant General Earle G. Wheeler, and several others assembled in General Lemnitzer's office. As one might imagine, the wires were busy. During this time the Berlin commander was Major General Al Watson. His immediate boss was General Clyde Eddleman, Commander in Chief, U.S. Army Europe. General Eddleman picked up the phone and said he wanted to talk to General Watson. The response was that President John F. Kennedy was talking to General Watson. General Eddleman replied that he wanted to talk to Watson as soon as the President was finished. The response to General Eddleman was that Secretary McNamara wanted to talk to General Watson, followed by General Lemnitzer. With some exasperation Eddleman said "OK," but stressed that he wanted to talk to Watson as soon as General Lemnitzer was finished. The operator said, "Sorry, General Norstad (Supreme Allied Commander, Europe) is next in line." General Eddleman could not even talk to his own immediate subordinate![6]

Then there was the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. Here is a high-ranking military insider's perspective on how the U.S. naval blockade was conducted:

> We put our naval vessels out on picket—no more ships coming into Cuba. They would be challenged on the high seas regardless of flag, and they'd be searched, and if they had anything that falls under war materiel they will be turned around or they will

> be sunk. So we set it up. And there was control in detail, so there was a phone from the Secretary of Defense's office right to the deck of the damn destroyer on patrol in this blockade. So the first ship comes up to the blockade line [but steams on through, ignoring orders to heave to]. So they just looked at each other, these people who were now learning to "manage crises" and run wars. . . . Our signal caller had said, "Don't shoot . . . no, let him go, let him go." . . . That was our naval blockade. And that's the way it was run under the kind of civilian control we had.[7]

The "signal caller," as various sources make clear, was none other than President John F. Kennedy himself.[8]

During the Vietnam War, as the North Vietnamese siege of Khe Sanh unfolded in the early spring of 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson kept an elaborate scale model of the battle area in the White House Situation Room, receiving daily updates and following progress with rapt attention. President Johnson became notorious among the military for his micromanagement of the bombing campaign against North Vietnam: "I won't let those Air Force generals bomb the smallest outhouse north of the 17th parallel without checking with me," he boasted.[9] Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts describe the President's supervision of the air war as follows:

> For most of the war, targets were doled out abstemiously and with detailed personal attention. . . . LBJ and McNamara also regulated the pace of escalation personally by minimizing autonomy . . ., discouraging the development of comprehensive campaign plans, and refusing to accept bombing proposals in more than weekly targeting packages.[10]

President Johnson's strategy of graduated response for the bombing campaign ran counter to the advice of the Joint Chiefs who—correctly, as it turned out—argued that the slow squeeze and frequent pauses would simply give the North Vietnamese time, opportunity, and breathing spells to build and repair their air defenses and implement other countermeasures.[11]

President Johnson found time to involve himself in the details of other tactical activities beside those of the Vietnam War. During the *Pueblo* incident of January 23, 1968, when a U.S. Navy intelligence-gathering vessel and its crew were seized by North Korea, the President reportedly got on the radio and issued orders to the tail gunner in a U.S. bomber.[12]

By the time the marathon struggle in Vietnam finally played out in April 1975, however, Lyndon Johnson and his successor as president, Richard Nixon, had long since departed the scene, leaving the humiliating pull-out from Saigon to be managed by President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.[13] In stark contrast with Operation EAGLE PULL, the near-exemplary helicopter evacuation of 287 personnel from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on April 12, Operation FREQUENT WIND, the Saigon evacuation falling at the end of April, was marked by tragic bungling.[14] It was tragic not just for hundreds of compromised South Vietnamese collaborators, promised a safe exit but who in fact were left behind to the tender mercies of their North Vietnamese conquerors. It was tragic too for a humbled America, whose helter-skelter departure reminded an onlooking world of a lover caught in flagrante delicto and chased naked out a second-story window, trailing socks, skivvies, and shoes with an enraged husband in hot pursuit. Truly, it was not America's finest hour.

That mere tragedy did not turn to outright disaster owed mainly to the initiative and heroics of a small group of military men, mainly from the Defense Attachè Office, "who played roles all out of proportion to their junior ranks and modest numbers."[15] Their job was made infinitely tougher by the fact that their prudent preparations were actively opposed by the head of the U.S. country team, Ambassador Graham Martin, and thus for the most part had to be undertaken surreptitiously.

As the noose tightened around Saigon in mid-April, learning that the Deputy DAO, Brigadier General Richard

Baughn, USAF, had transmitted to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, a frank statement of the grim realities of the situation, Martin fired him on the spot and sent him packing out of country.[16] The Ambassador was fearful that if American preparations to withdraw their official presence became known, it would incite a general panic in Saigon and a sudden collapse of the already rapidly weakening South Vietnamese ground defenses around the capital. No one familiar with the desperately deteriorating circumstances could deny the dilemma faced by the Ambassador, but by suppressing candid analysis and reportage of the situation even within official ranks, and by refusing to undertake timely, realistic, and flexible planning measures for the inevitable evacuation, the Ambassador courted disaster.[17]

An orderly exodus of people from Vietnam had begun well before FREQUENT WIND, with some 44,000 having been flown out by Air Force fixed-wing aircraft from Tan San Nhut airport as recently as April 21-28.[18] But FREQUENT WIND, the emergency evacuation of Saigon itself, did not itself begin until 10:52 a.m. Saigon time on April 29, focussing first on extracting American and Vietnamese personnel from the DAO compound on Tan Son Nhut airbase. Since the runway at Tan Son Nhut soon became unusable, some 4,870 evacuees were taken by helicopter to offshore ships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, closing by 8:40 p.m.[19] This part of the evacuation, planned by U.S. military personnel of the DAO, went smoothly.

Meanwhile, helicopter evacuation of the Embassy in downtown Saigon commenced at 5:50 p.m. on April 29 and continued through the early morning hours of April 30. Planning for this part of the Saigon evacuation was the responsibility of the Embassy, and it did not go smoothly. The intention was to evacuate some 100-300 persons from the Embassy proper, but an ever-growing mass of people, most originally slated for extraction from Tan Son Nhut but unable to reach their departure point owing to incipient chaos in the streets of Saigon, descended instead upon the Embassy grounds, clamoring for rescue.[20] Between 5:00 and

9:00 p.m. on April 29, a contingent of 130 Marines was helicoptered in from the DAO compound for crowd control. Serendipitously, a six-man military MIA negotiation team was sent from the DAO compound to the Embassy during the morning of April 29, the initial intention being to retain the team in Saigon after the American evacuation. This team volunteered to organize and implement the unanticipated Marine helicopter evacuation of the Embassy grounds, and the Deputy Ambassador eagerly accepted their offer.[21] One member of the team was then-Captain Stuart Herrington, USA, who remained at his impromptu post until the last evacuee departed. His book *Peace With Honor? An American Reports on Vietnam, 1973-75* should be required reading for every American embassy planner tasked with writing emergency evacuation procedures.

Employing a helicopter landing pad atop the Embassy building and for a time a make-shift pad in the Embassy parking lot, the team supervised a mass evacuation, using Marine CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters to ferry evacuees to off-shore ships. By midnight of April 29, a large portion of the 2,098 ultimately evacuated had already been lifted out, while the remainder of the pressing crowd, numbering some 1,100, were given frequent solemn assurances of evacuation and allowed through the gate into the main Embassy compound to await their turn.[22]

Ambassador Martin, having received a direct order from the President to depart, was evacuated at 4:58 a.m., April 30, leaving only a few State Department personnel, the military evacuation team, the Marine security contingent, and a 420-person remnant of the waiting refugees, now huddled patiently in disciplined groups.[23]

At this point, only six more helicopter lifts were required to complete the evacuation. The lifts were available and sufficient time remained. But word arrived that "the President had personally ordered cancellation of all further lifts" except for Americans. Despite the evacuation team's repeated outraged protests, which were carried to the point

of outright defiance, no one in authority over the Marines, who controlled the helicopters, would buck the presidential order. The remaining team members, including Captain Herrington, reluctantly boarded choppers and were lifted from the Embassy roof at 5:30 a.m. April 30. The last members of the Marine security force cleared at 7:46 a.m., leaving to their fates the pathetic group of 420 betrayed refugees, including more than a dozen Embassy staff members of America's special ally, South Korea.[24] A little after 11:00 a.m., a communist T-54 tank bearing a huge Viet Cong flag crashed through the elaborate wrought-iron gates of the Presidential Palace grounds, symbolically writing finis to the Republic of Vietnam.[25]

The evacuation of Saigon was orchestrated from the Situation Room of the White House, principally in the person of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, acting in the name of the President. The messages to the implementers on the scene are remarkable for their detailed specificity as to number of helicopters permitted, number of lifts, who could be lifted, timing, etc.[26] Here, for example, is a message received in Saigon at 3:15 p.m., April 30, relayed by CINCPAC:

> I have been directed to send you the following message from the President: "On the basis of the reported total of 726 evacuees, CINCPAC is authorized to send 19 helicopters and no more. The President expects Ambassador Martin to be on the last helicopter." [For Your Information:] The Secretary of Defense wishes the last lift no later than 0345. . . .[27]

This sort of rigid micromanagement from afar, expressed in absolutes and leaving no room for the exercise of tactical discretion by on-scene military professionals, is very likely to lead to bad decisions, as it did here. Only the professional on the scene can sense, evaluate, and respond in a timely manner to the multiple variables that enter sound decisionmaking in a breaking crisis.

During the evening of April 28, 1995, the 20th anniversary of America's last days in Vietnam, TV's Discovery

Channel broadcast a brilliantly evocative documentary titled "The Fall of Saigon," featuring high-quality footage of those last days and hours, plus interviews with most of the principals, including now-Colonel Stuart Herrington. Dr. Henry Kissinger was one of the viewers.[28] Stung, apparently, by the film's graphic depiction of America's betrayal of 420 friends and allies, a contrite Dr. Kissinger contacted Colonel Herrington and made arrangements to meet him in New York, saying he owed it to the colonel to explain what happened. During his conversations with Colonel Herrington, Dr. Kissinger revealed that his first knowledge of the 420 refugees left stranded in the Embassy courtyard came only when he saw the Discovery Channel documentary, 20 years after the event! He said he had been shocked at what he learned, stoutly avowing that had he known the number awaiting departure was manageable, it is virtually certain that an order would have been sent to get them out.[29]

During an address on May 2, 1996, at the U.S. Army War College, Dr. Kissinger spoke with deep feeling and obvious sincerity of his determination from the beginning of the Saigon exodus to evacuate as many Vietnamese refugees as possible. Thus his plea of ignorance as to the true state of affairs during the morning hours of April 30, 1975, rings with absolute truth. Furthermore, we know from other accounts that the status reports being reported by the Embassy up the chain to the White House as late as 7:30 p.m. on April 29 contained unvarying estimates of 2000 awaiting evacuation, a figure that seemed to remain constant regardless of the growing numbers being reported as already evacuated.[30] As a result, the White House may well have gotten the impression of a bottomless pit of waiting refugees.

But Dr. Kissinger's explanation for the tragic gaffe, even if true, begs the issue. The critical question is not whether in making tactical decisions from Washington he acted on bad information, but whether he should have risked making such decisions in the first place, knowing as he did that

there were responsible professionals on the ground who would have good information based on the testimony of their own eyes. No matter how swift and efficient communications technology may become, and no matter how much data the sensors of the information age battle zone may gather, the professional at the scene of a military action will always be better equipped to direct it than a political functionary on the other side of the globe, because only the man at the scene can deal in real time with the inevitable friction, of which Dr. Kissinger's misinformation is a prime Clausewitzian example. Nowhere in Dr. Kissinger's remarks does he betray the faintest glimmer of suspicion that the instruments of human conflict are best controlled and applied by those trained to do so, working from the site of the conflict itself.

Twelve days after the fall of Saigon, in the early afternoon of May 12, 1975, a gunboat of the Khmer Rouge government of Cambodia intercepted the U.S. container ship SS *Mayaguez* some 50 miles off the Cambodian coast, removing the crew and taking the ship to enforced anchorage off Koh Tang, a tiny island in Cambodian coastal waters. This act of petty aggression set off a chain of events that quickly escalated to a major crisis, severely testing the ability of the United States to mount a coordinated military response with quickly assembled come-as-you-are forces.

The extreme time urgency sprang from President Gerald Ford's legitimate determination that crew members be rescued before being spirited inland, where they could be held to serve as pawns for political extortion in protracted hostage negotiations.

A colorful account of the resulting operation has been provided by retired Major General John Singlaub in his memoir *Hazardous Duty*:

> After the civilian ship was seized by Cambodian Communists in the Gulf of Siam, the rescue attempt had been micromanaged from Washington. At one point, Air Force fighter-bomber pilots orbiting the island where the *Mayaguez* crew

> was held by the Khmer Rouge were startled to hear the distinctive, Mittel-Europa murmur of Henry Kissinger in their earphones. The White House had used a command override channel to deal directly with the operation's air support. In so doing, Kissinger bypassed the entire local command structure and fouled up the operation. The operational commander, Lt. General John J. Burns, USAF, had been about to order the Marine helicopters not to land on an island held by the Khmer Rouge, but his radio channel to the operational aircraft was blocked by the Flash Override from Washington. The Marines landed and suffered heavy casualties.[31]

Though this portrayal of Dr. Kissinger's alleged crippling preemption of the military command channel makes tasty grist for the soldier's mill, in fact it never happened, and there are other inaccuracies as well.[32] However, we can take little comfort knowing the account is inaccurate, since the essential truth—the mischief in attempts by political authorities to micromanage delicate tactical operations from great distances—was bodied forth dramatically by the actual events surrounding the *Mayaguez* incident.

To gain a full and accurate picture of those events, we are fortunate to have at hand a recent book by Dr. John F. Guilmartin, Jr. (Lieutenant Colonel, USAF Ret.), titled *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang*, a masterly reconstruction of the tangled and often chaotic progression of decisions and actions collectively comprising this very short war.[33] This book should be high on the reading lists of all the nation's war colleges, command and staff colleges, and political science departments that study how military and political authorities interact to shape and implement the nation's response to short-notice military crises.

Though there was deep involvement by the White House throughout the *Mayaguez* operation, we shall focus here upon two particularly egregious examples where disaster was only narrowly averted.

If safe and timely retrieval of the ship's crew was a main operational goal, then locating the crew became the overriding mission of intelligence. This was to be no easy task, however, since "intelligence" consisted mostly of fleeting aerial observations as the crew was shuttled back and forth among several locations within the four-day period.[34]

In the late afternoon of May 13, the crew was landed on Koh Tang and marched toward the interior of the island. Orders were thereupon relayed from the White House by National Security Adviser Brent Scowcraft "to sink anything coming off Koh Tang." At dawn the next morning, a fishing boat was observed making a run from the island toward the mainland, but a wary Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger at the Pentagon prudently stalled implementation of the White House's sink-on-sight order. It is good that he did, for as it turned out the fishing boat was carrying the *Mayaguez* crew.[35]

Since it could not be ruled out that part of the crew remained on Koh Tang, a Marine assault on the island was ordered, with initial elements of the small force, transported in Air Force helicopters, landing at 0600 hours on the 15th. A vicious struggle on the beach with an entrenched company-size enemy force ensued.

Meanwhile, in an extraordinary illustration of the fortunes of war, the guided missile destroyer USS *Henry B. Wilson* intercepted a fishing boat enroute from the mainland to Koh Tang. It was carrying the *Mayaguez* crew! This good news was immediately flashed to the White House, and a jubilant President Gerald Ford ordered a cessation of offensive operations and disengagement from Koh Tang forthwith.[36]

As all soldiers know, daylight disengagement by a force locked in close combat with the enemy is one of the most perilous maneuvers known to war, and the perils are enormously magnified when the disengaging force must be evacuated by helicopters from an open beach commanded by

enemy fire. The President's cessation and disengagement order came at the awkwardest possible moment, since the first assault wave was hanging on by its fingernails and the second wave had not yet arrived to reinforce. Had the President's order been executed, disaster would have resulted because, with the second wave aborted, the assault forces already hunkered down on the beach would have been extracted without cover.

Protests by tactical operatives on-scene were instant, loud, and profane. At some point up the chain, a courageous soul had the guts to countermand the order, allowing the second assault wave to proceed and thus laying the basis for a successful deliberate extraction of the Koh Tang assault force in the face of Khmer Rouge resistance that remained fierce, determined, and disciplined to the end.[37]

White House orders to sink any boat leaving Koh Tang and, later, to cease fire and disengage forces were perhaps defensible from the perspective of a political leader far removed from the scene, but not so to those further down the chain charged with execution. That serious misadventure was averted in both cases is attributable to the courage of those who chose to evade or disobey presidential orders. As a matter of standard operational procedure, of course, we cannot hold global war-waging success hostage to the willingness of subordinates to defy unwise presidential orders, nor should we attempt to. The better approach lies in expressing guidance from the National Command Authorities to the operational commander in broad politico-strategic terms, allowing him flexibility to translate such guidance into concrete tactical initiatives based on realities prevailing down where the bullet meets the bone.

On June 20, 1976, a U.S. Navy vessel steamed to a position offshore from Lebanon to conduct an emergency evacuation of Americans, who were endangered by the deteriorating security situation in Beirut. Professor Richard Ned Lebow, attributing his information to military officers present in the National Military Command Center

in the Pentagon at the time of the evacuation, provides the following account:

> Sitting in the [NMCC], microphone in hand, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld personally supervised the movements of the launch dispatched to shore to carry the waiting Americans to safety. . . . Off in a corner, a passed-over Army major, who had served in Lebanon, was desperately trying to attract the attention of someone on center stage. Finally, he blurted out, "You can't do that!" Rumsfeld looked up from this microphone and all eyes turned toward the major, who explained that he knew this particular harbor like the back of his hand and that the course Rumsfeld had directed the launch to follow was very dangerous at low tide. The major was invited to come up front and join the secretary, who parroted the major's instructions to the bosun nominally in command of the launch.[38]

As entertaining as the foregoing story is, it apparently never happened. Colonel Vincent Dambrauskas, who was in charge of communications in the NMCC at the time, has written that though he was indeed tasked to set up secure voice communications between the NMCC and the bosun on the launch, the best he could do with existing technology was to provide a link between the NMCC and the flagship of the Sixth Fleet, standing further out to sea. According to Dambrauskas, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements used the link to speak with Sixth Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Harry Train, but their conversation consisted of amenities and weather talk, not operational matters.[39] The episode is still relevant to our topic, however, because it shows that the prevailing impulse to establish communications between Washington and the critical tactical echelon during a military crisis was thwarted not for lack of intent, but for lack of technical capability. Capabilities are dramatically more sophisticated today.[40]

Let us return now to the subject of PAUL BUNYAN, the U.S.-Republic of Korea tree-cutting operation of August 21, 1976, alluded to in the epigraph of this paper.[41] Provoca-

tions by North Koreans along the demilitarized zone had become routine, and tensions were running high. The United Nations Command sent a detachment into the neutral zone to cut off the lower branches of a poplar tree that were blocking visibility between UNC checkpoints. Two U.S. Army officers in the detachment—Captain Arthur Bonifas and 1st Lieutenant Mark Barrett—were suddenly attacked and brutally clubbed to death by North Korean soldiers.[42]

The UNC decided upon a carefully measured but firm response—Operation PAUL BUNYAN—in which a composite U.S.-ROK force of battalion size would enter the neutral zone and remove the tree. The plan was prepared by General Stilwell's own headquarters and submitted to the Pentagon as an expression of General Stilwell's final design to be implemented by him, rather than a mere proposal to be fine-tuned and remotely controlled from Washington. The plan was then sold to the National Command Authorities by Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Admiral James Holloway. With President Gerald Ford in the middle of an election campaign against challenger Jimmy Carter, whose platform called for the withdrawal of U.S. ground combat troops from Korea, there was understandable nervousness among Administration officials over the impending operation.

Anticipating such nervousness, and fearing a disaster if the White House "began issuing and countermanding orders to American and Korean ground and air units," General Stilwell took certain "unorthodox" measures regarding communications just prior to the operation. He told his chief of staff, Major General John Singlaub, who has related the story in his book *Hazardous* Duty, to make certain that the secure telephone line from the NMCC in the Pentagon to Stilwell in Korea terminated in his headquarters War Room. In Singlaub's account, he called in the UNC communications officer (J-6) and gave him the following order:

> Under absolutely no circumstances whatever will you allow any direct communication from a higher headquarters to bypass this room and contact the corps, division, or task force itself. . . . Tell them our communications system out here is incompatible with theirs. Tell them they've got a four channel and we've got a two channel—whatever. Just don't allow any contact with our field forces other than from this headquarters.[43]

That was an incredibly tough position for a colonel J-6 to be put in, and, in Singlaub's dramatic telling, the colonel's mettle was soon tested. Less than half an hour later the Pentagon called requesting direct communication with the task force commander. The J-6 stalled. Soon a Washington query came in for the task force commander, asking how old the tree was. The J-6 stalled. Twenty-five minutes later a Pentagon lieutenant general in charge of worldwide military communications called, personally demanding that the J-6 open a line to the task force. The J-6 stalled. Less than a quarter hour later, a senior civilian engineer who had designed the secure-voice communications system itself called with technical advice on how to link up the supposedly incompatible channels. The J-6 stalled.[44]

Meanwhile, sheltered from distractions and interference from on high, the task force commander and his team executed the tactical mission successfully and quickly withdrew.[45] The North Koreans, surprised by the swift efficiency of the maneuver and cowed by the highly visible arsenal of UNC troops poised and at the ready, mustered no resistance worth the name. Operation PAUL BUNYAN, under General Stilwell's firm and able direction, obtained the redress sought and made its point to the North Koreans, all without serious negative international repercussions.

In late October 1990, as Central Command in Saudi Arabia was urgently laying plans for Operation DESERT STORM to evict the Iraqi Republican Guards from Kuwait, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney in Washington grew restive and hatched some ideas of his own. Deciding to come up with "something bolder" in the way of an offensive plan,

he had personnel on the Joint Staff formalize his ideas and then actually briefed them to President Bush before they were ever revealed to General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander on the ground responsible for planning and executing the operation. Cheney's plan: drop the 82nd Airborne Division on top of missile-launching sites near the far western edge of Iraq; then have the Division link up with elements of the 101st Air Assault Division and 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and hightail it eastwards to threaten Baghdad. As General Schwarzkopf pointed out to JCS Chairman Colin Powell, Cheney's plan was logistically insupportable, and it was finally derailed.[46]

Another recent instance of untoward intrusion by a civilian official in operational matters came during the Somalian humanitarian and "peacekeeping" operation of 1993. Finding that U.S. forces were stirring up a hornet's nest in attempts to pacify the capital city Mogadishu and corral clan warlord Mohamed Aideed, and discovering they had seriously underestimated the size and weaponry of Aideed's militia, the U.S. Quick Reaction Force commander Major General Thomas M. Montgomery sent Central Command "an urgent plea for additional firepower, including tanks." The final whittled-down request was for only four tanks and 14 Bradley fighting vehicles, but no uniformed official in the chain could dispatch even this incremental reinforcement on his own authority. With General Powell's favorable endorsement, the request made its way to Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, who promptly denied it.[47]

As fortune and circumstance dictated, disaster followed. In a fierce battle near the Bakara market area of Mogadishu during Sunday night of October 3-4, undergunned Army Rangers suffered 13 KIAs (later revised to 18), 75 wounded, and one missing. Two Army Blackhawk helicopters were shot down. Somalis danced in the streets flaunting sticks with impaled body parts of slain U.S. soldiers. A rueful Secretary Aspin explained: "I made that decision as best I could with the information . . . I had at the time. Had I

known . . . what I knew after the events of Sunday, I would have made a very different decision."[48]

I am sure he would have, because Secretary Aspin was an honorable man who served his country long and loyally in the Congress and at Defense. But his mea culpa, like that of Henry Kissinger after the Saigon evacuation, begged the issue. His fault lay not in making a bad decision, though surely it was that, but rather in insisting upon deciding the issue in the first place. He should have entrusted the decision—involving a piddling 18 vehicles—to the military commander on the ground and his uniformed bosses who alone could sense the danger of the developing tactical situation. Secretaries of Defense are not tacticians. They are not qualified to second-guess ground commanders by deciding when armor should be withheld from troops subject to hostile fire in tactical engagements.[49]

To bring our survey of case examples up to the present, we find things are continuing pretty much as usual. In the late fall of 1997, during the frenzied run-up to Operation DESERT THUNDER—the proposed U.S. response to Saddam Hussein for obstructing U.N. Nuclear-chemical-biological inspections in Iraq—the modus operandi was reminiscent of that employed by President Johnson and Secretary McNamara during the Vietnam War. In settling upon targets for the aerial bombardment campaign, it was reported that civilian bureaucrats "are even telling the military planners which windows the Tomahawk cruise missiles are to fly into."[50]

General Schwarzkopf's pungent postscript to the Cheney initiative prior to DESERT STORM pretty well captures the aspect of contemporary civil-military relations developed thus far in this article: "Put a civilian in charge of professional military men and before long he's no longer satisfied with setting policy but wants to outgeneral the generals."[51] All professional soldiers will instinctively share in General Schwarzkopf's lament, but I can assure them that they have not yet seen the worst. As the battlefield

becomes fully "wired" in accordance with the digitization associated with Force XXI, and as helmetized two-way voice communications are gradually extended to each member of the infantry squad, the day will come eventually when the President of the United States, sitting in the Oval Office, will speak to a combat infantryman in his foxhole during the heat of battle somewhere along the distant edges of the globe. It is doubtful in the extreme whether such conversations will advance the cause of U.S. military success, but that they will occur is a certainty.

What is more important for us to understand, however, is that during moments of perceived crisis, presidents and their seconds will continue to reserve the right to bypass the military chain of command and intercede directly at the critical point, regardless of where it falls. Robert McNamara was exaggerating less than we'd like to believe when, after Cuba, he said, "There is no longer any such thing as strategy, only crisis management."[52] The time for wringing of hands and agonizing over this fact of politico-military life is now long past. Our aim henceforth should be to understand the phenomenon and then to devise ways within the system to minimize its pernicious effects.

The Paramountcy of Politics.

From the political leader's point of view, war serves at the altar of politics, so that he has not only a right but an obligation to intervene in military operations whenever he feels such is necessary to assure a military result consonant with the government's political aims. From the soldier's point of view, the impulse of civilian officials to intervene in military operations violates three sacrosanct principles for the successful conduct of war: (1) adherence to the military chain of command, whereby a common order reflecting the commander's intent flows downward to all units, thus assuring unity of command and effort; (2) professional execution, whereby force is applied only by those trained and qualified to do so; and (3) decentralization, whereby

latitude is extended to the lower-echelon commander, who alone sees and can adjust for conditions at the cutting edge.

The soldier understands—at least he *ought* to understand—the paramountcy of the nation's political aims—but he asks that he be consulted in devising the strategy for any military contribution to the accomplishment of those political aims and that he be the shaper and executor of any military tactics and operations undertaken to accomplish that military strategy. Only thus, he argues, can war be conducted successfully while preventing unnecessary loss of soldiers' lives and destruction of military equipment.

With respect then to who is entitled to call the military's shots when the balloon is going up, the obvious key to reconciling the disparate views of the soldier and his civilian masters lies in engendering a high level of confidence on the part of the civilian leadership in the soldier's political savvy. A president must be confident, first, that the military field commander is fully attuned to the political aims of any contemplated military action. He must be confident, second, that the commander will exert the degree of control over his forces necessary to ensure that attainment of the political objectives is never compromised. Even with a president who possesses such confidence, there can be no assurance of course that he or his underlings will never get in the soldier's knickers. But certainly the soldier's best chance for autonomy on the battlefield lies in convincing the occupant of the Oval Office that the military is fully sensitive to the political objectives of the approaching military action and will tailor its actions in strict accordance with that understanding.

To illustrate the overriding importance of civilian confidence in the military's political acumen, we return now to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, involving a naval blockade designed to halt the Soviet Union's further buildup of strategic offensive missiles and bombers in Cuba. A derisive portrait of the manner in which the blockade unfolded, recorded by a senior military observer close to the

situation, was presented earlier in this paper as an eye-catching example of the deep involvement of civilian leaders in the minute details of a military operation. Indeed it was that, but the portrait seriously distorts what actually happened, and the contemptuous attitude expressed by the observer is in fact symptomatic of the military's political naivete that was largely responsible for civilian micro-management of the blockade in the first place.

On Sunday, October 21, 1962, Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, briefed the National Security Council on the formal protocol for conducting the blockade: each vessel approaching the blockade line would be told to halt for boarding and inspection; if there was no response, a shot would be fired across the bow; if that induced no response, a shot would be fired into the rudder to disable but not to sink. The plan was cut and dried, laid out in precise naval detail.[53] Though the plan, with some refinement, was approved for implementation, it is clear from the record that the Navy and the President had different agendas, different preoccupations, different perspectives, different priorities.

With a quarantine area of some one million square miles, with five navigable channels to cover, with a fleet of some 180 naval ships to direct, and with the infinitely variable cargoes that incoming vessels would be carrying, the U.S. Navy was faced with an incredibly complex and difficult military task. To execute that task successfully and with consistency of effects along the entire circumference of the enormous quarantine area required detailed planning and precise execution. As Admiral Anderson well understood, such a task could be undertaken efficiently only by reliance on the full panoply of naval doctrine, regulations, and operating routines, plus sound discipline and skilled seamanship.

The President, while approving the blockade plan, was entirely indifferent to the Navy's felt need to adhere literally to its doctrinal script in executing the plan. Mindful that the

imposition of a blockade is an act of war, the President was focussed rather on achieving the broad *aim* of the blockade—persuading the Soviet Union to halt the introduction of strategic missiles and bombers into Cuba—without thereby provoking the Soviets into acts of reprisal that could quickly escalate to nuclear war. To achieve that aim, the President was quite prepared for the script to be altered at will—to let a Soviet ship through here and there, to wait for a particular cargo, to delay imposition so as to give the Soviets more time to think, to reduce the radius of the quarantine area so as to give Chairman Khrushchev more time to signal his ship captains, etc. Such presidential ad hocing may have been, in the words of one Navy admiral, "a hell of a way to run a blockade," but it was reasonable given the President's aims.[54]

One can legitimately ask, "OK, but why didn't the President simply explain the sensitive situation to the Navy and let it ad hoc its own script in ministering to the President's political concerns?" That brings us to the famous confrontation between Secretary of Defense McNamara and Admiral Anderson during the late evening of October 24, 1962, the day the quarantine was to become effective. And it brings us once again to the question of confidence. This fascinating confrontation between a high-ranking civilian official and naval officer represented a pivotal moment in the history of military-civil relations in this country. The account following is based principally upon Graham Allison's book *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1971).

President Kennedy was worried that the Navy, already restive over the controls imposed on how the blockade was to be executed, might "blunder into an incident." McNamara was closely attuned to the President's worries and resolved to press the Navy for additional information on its modus operandi. Confronting Admiral Anderson, McNamara minced no words: "Precisely what would the Navy do when the first interception occurred?" Admiral Anderson told him that he had already covered that same ground before the

National Security Council, and that further explanation was unnecessary.

This answer angered McNamara, who proceeded to lecture the admiral on the political realities: It was not the President's design to shoot Russians but rather to deliver a political signal to Chairman Khrushchev. He did not want to push the Soviet leader into a corner; he did not want to humiliate him; he did not want to risk provoking him into a nuclear reprisal. Executing a blockade is an act of war, one that involved the risk of sinking a Soviet vessel. The sole purpose of taking such a risk would be to achieve a political objective. But rather than allow it to come to that extreme end, we must persuade Chairman Khrushchev to pull back. He must not be "goaded into retaliation."

Getting the feeling that his lecture did not sink in, McNamara resumed his detailed questioning. Whereupon Admiral Anderson picked up the *Manual of Naval Regulations*, waved it in McNamara's face, and shouted, "It's all in there!" McNamara retorted, "I don't give a damn what John Paul Jones would have done. I want to know what you are going to do, now!" The confrontation ended finally with the two men still at loggerheads. The Admiral said simply, "Now Mr. Secretary, if you and your deputy will go back to your offices, the Navy will run the blockade."[55]

Wow! Within less than a year, McNamara, acting through his deputy Roswell Gilpatric and with President Kennedy's approval, removed Admiral Anderson from his post.[56] I believe all military men will admire Admiral Anderson's courage (he also defied McNamara by testifying to Congress against the Tactical Fighter-Experimental) and will respect him for his vigorous and forthright defense of the principle that only those in uniform issue combat orders to others in uniform. Yet, I'm not so sure they will respect his judgment in this instance.

It is true that McNamara approached Admiral Anderson in an abrasive, provoking manner, and perhaps in any other circumstance the Admiral would have been justified in

bearding the lion in his den. But too much was at stake here. This one brief episode confronted Admiral Anderson with what was probably the acid test of his entire career. It is apparent that he never grasped the enormous importance of orchestrating the blockade with the higher purpose and flexible, manipulative finesse that the President demanded, or at least he never gave McNamara the satisfaction of hearing him indicate that he grasped it. As a result, the Secretary's confidence in Admiral Anderson was shattered completely. The Admiral was effectively shoved aside and lost all chance of seeing the Navy run its own show.

Georges Clemenceau, France's great World War I leader, once quipped that "war is too serious a thing to be entrusted to the military."[57] In describing Under Secretary of State George Ball's attitude as to who should run the blockade of Cuba in 1962, Elie Abel wrote: "Like McNamara, [Ball] felt the situation was far too serious to be left in the hands of the Navy professionals."[58] Eerie, isn't it, how this particular bone of contention between politician and the brass keeps recurring, down to including almost identical language?

The President was vindicated in his gingerly approach to threatening force against Soviet naval vessels on the high seas. For on Sunday, October 28, Chairman Khrushchev announced publicly that he was removing the missiles, and the crisis was defused. Though historians have since debated whether the United States and the Soviet Union were in fact approaching the brink of nuclear war during the crisis as the President feared, the post-Cold War opening of classified sources in Russia, the United States, and Cuba has revealed substantial evidence that the dangers, even as perceived by the President, were seriously underestimated at the time. We have learned, for example, that at the height of the crisis the Soviets had 162 nuclear warheads on the island—the CIA was reporting zero!—and that two days after the blockade was implemented, warheads in Cuba "were moved from their storage sites to positions closer to their delivery vehicles in anticipation of a U.S. invasion" (an invasion was in fact being planned, and 180,000 American

troops were assembled in southeastern U.S. ports).[59] With the possibility of nuclear war staring him in the face, and with a military leader in charge who obdurately refused to come aboard in spirit and in fact, President Kennedy was justified in donning the cap of the Commander-in-Chief and asserting his authority to make decisions on interceptions during the crisis hours.[60]

To sum up this section—and what follows cannot be expressed too emphatically—the first and foremost requirement for the soldier, if he is ever to achieve operational autonomy, is to convince his political masters that he understands the political aims behind the contemplated military action and that he will conduct the military action in a manner calculated to achieve those aims.

Additional Measures Toward Autonomy.

I will be the first to concede that even with a military leadership possessing unparalleled political sophistication—George C. Marshall and Colin Powell come to mind—and even though the political leadership reposes enormous confidence in the military's sensitivity to the political implications of the contemplated military action, there will still be instances where civilian officials with Napoleon complexes and micromanaging mentalities are prompted to seize the reins of operational control. Under our form of government, this is a reality that soldiers will simply have to accept. But there are other modest measures within the soldier's means that cumulatively will encourage the political leader to remain within his proper sphere. These measures are discussed below:

- *Understand the universal human desire for control*. The impulse to control runs deep in human nature, and the higher the stakes the stronger the impulse, whether one wears the uniform or mufti. The military professionals who complained of the White House's micromanagement of the Saigon evacuation are from the same generation that

stacked five echelons of command helicopters over small tactical engagements in Vietnam.[61] To understand our civilian masters as a precondition for influencing them, we must first understand ourselves and work to avoid unseemly hypocrisy.

- *Don't confuse requests for information with control*. During military crises, even the most empowering civilian leader will require and deserves to be kept informed. Retired Army Colonel Vincent Dambrauskas, who was the communications officer in the NMCC during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, tells the story of how the number of charts in the briefing room grew exponentially in the days following the war's commencement. Secretary of Defense Schlesinger was being besieged with requests for detailed information from the NSC, State, Congress, and the press, and his only recourse was military communication channels.[62] Major General William L. Nash, who commanded Task Force Eagle in Bosnia from December 1995 to November 1996, told me that though his headquarters received frequent requests for information from Stateside, "Secretary of Defense William Perry and his team at DoD as well as the White House were scrupulous at avoiding interference in how I did my job."[63]

- *Don't play games with communications*. Cute manipulation of communications, such as cutting the lines to higher headquarters, are not the Holy Grail for command autonomy. On May 17, 1940, during the German invasion of France, General Heinz Guderian at corps forward used wire instead of radio to communicate with his staff at corps main, thus preventing higher headquarters from monitoring and possibly countermanding his continued advance.[64]

It was in a somewhat similar vein that a gutsy General Stilwell and his equally gutsy chief of staff General Singlaub thwarted efforts by the NMCC to extend its communications all the way down to task force level during the Korean DMZ tree-cutting operation. But in the long run, such artful dodges are antithetical to sound military

discipline and will boomerang on those who employ them. The better solution lies in acculturating all officials at the political-military interface to recognize, acknowledge, and accept as standard procedure a communications set-up in which White House-to-theater communications go no further than the desk of the theater commander himself. He or his second can themselves field questions or respond to requests from officials on the east side of the Potomac.

During the planning for Operation DESERT STORM in the Persian Gulf, for example, JCS Chairman Colin Powell's briefing of the NCA carefully stipulated that communications from the White House would extend no further than to General Norman Schwarzkof's headquarters in Riyadh. The arrangement was thus known and accepted from the outset, and there were few apparent problems.[65] Obviously, it helps to have a strong and respected JCS chairman to carry this news to the top.

- *Assign only the finest officers to work with political authorities*. The uniformed services should assign only the most carefully selected personnel to such critical government entities as the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of the JCS Chairman, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs in the Department of State, and National Security Council. It is within and through such offices that military officers can carry on the process of educating and acculturating their civilian associates in the protocol of military command and control. Gradually, their influence can percolate to the highest councils of government. Selection criteria for such personnel must not rest upon professional qualifications alone, though they of course are essential. Great weight must also be assigned to fortitude and professional integrity. The sweet allure of pleasing one's civilian masters at the highest levels is extraordinarily powerful, and it is therefore vital that our uniformed agents at such levels be strong and clear-minded enough to perform their essential military function without being co-opted. Yes, we want them to understand the

political aims of military endeavor; but we do not want them to become politicians.

- *Educate the military's civilian masters*. Related to the prior point, the Office of the JCS Chairman should implement a systematic, top-quality program of briefings, orientations, mini-courses, etc. for new civilian appointees to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the staff of the NSC, the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs at State, and key billets in the White House and elsewhere that are likely to have a voice in wartime strategy or crisis management. Gold engraved invitations signed by the Chairman himself should be on the desk of each appointee as soon after each presidential election as circumstances will permit, or as soon during the presidential term as replacements for departing incumbents are identified. The program should be headed up by a savvy, hand-picked flag officer who knows how to wield influence, and the Chairman should actively support him. Briefings and orientations could be presented by the Joint Staff, while course-length offerings could be presented at such sites as National Defense University. In selecting and obtaining attendees, the Chairman should be aggressive and aim as high as possible: if an appointee of the stature of Zbigniew Brzezinski or Anthony Lake could be induced to attend, so much the better. Service roles, missions, capabilities, etc. would of course be part of the material presented, but primary emphasis would be upon organization for war, contingency planning, and especially command and control protocol.

With respect to command and control, heavy emphasis would fall on lessons learned in such military actions as those discussed in this paper. Following every presidential election, a tribe of successful but now jobless young campaigners finds its way into government, often in surprisingly powerful positions connected with national defense. They are green and disconcertingly inexperienced, so that the military can only gain by indoctrinating as many as possible on how they can best help the soldier carry out

his unique professional responsibilities. Through such vigorously active indoctrination, the military could expect over time to reduce undue interference by civilian officials in operational matters. At a minimum, the military could assure that if civilian officials did continue to interfere, they were doing it by design and with a clearer understanding of potential costs.

- *Don't exaggerate instances of civilian interference*. In official report, memoir, and anecdote, the soldier should assiduously avoid exaggerating the degree of civilian intrusion in tactical and operational matters that occurred in specific cases. In researching this paper, I have been surprised to discover how often particularly colorful or dramatic published accounts of civilian involvement turn out to have little if any basis in fact. Goodness knows that such involvement has been disturbing enough even when confined within the strict boundaries of truth. To take matters beyond the truth is not simply dishonest; it unnecessarily inflames feelings on both sides of the great divide and jeopardizes chances for mutual accommodation.

- *Vindicate operational independence*. When political leaders do heed the soldier's wishes for professional autonomy and give him a long tether in conducting military operations, it is absolutely essential that he deliver. Nothing is so likely to jeopardize our civilian leaders' confidence in the military's capacity for operational independence than spectacular failure.

For example, the embarrassing outcome of DESERT ONE, the high-risk mission of April 24-25, 1980, to rescue American hostages in Teheran, tarred the reputation of the entire U.S. military establishment for years and doubtless contributed to the defeat of President Jimmy Carter in the fall elections of the same year. The mission was aborted by the on-scene commander at the initial staging point in Iran because insufficient operational helicopters arrived to support the impending assault at the Embassy. That disappointment was then greatly compounded by a fiery

collision between a C-130 refueling aircraft and a RD-53D helicopter during the hectic minutes before evacuation, killing eight crew members, wounding five, and necessitating abandonment on Iranian soil of six helicopters.

The Operation Review Group, a joint panel of flag-level officers commissioned by the JCS to conduct a thorough post-mortem of the disaster, found that "command and control arrangements . . . from the NCA through the JCS to the commander of the Joint Task Force were ideal," but then went on to censure the mission planning, coordination, and training as executed by the military professionals themselves.[66] Though the mission team—volunteers and brave men all—did seem to be dogged by bad luck, luck as an element of friction can and must be accommodated by flexible planning. It cannot be demanded by political leaders that our armed forces win every battle, but it can be asked that they at least succeed in joining battle and that if they go down it be with their pride and professional competence unchallenged.

• *Involve civilians in creative collaboration*. The military, perhaps of all professional callings, is most vulnerable to having its responsibilities usurped by political leaders. Most such leaders, with happy memories of childhood deeds of soldierly derring-do—assaulting snow forts with snowballs, chasing Indians on broomstick horses, and perhaps even recalling some actual brief military service during their early adulthood—take it as a given that the art of waging war comes naturally to them. Thus, as we have seen, such men as Lyndon Johnson and Henry Kissinger, closeted over 9000 miles from the scene of battle, chose to make critical tactical decisions. Would Lyndon Johnson have presumed to motor to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, stride into an operating room, snatch the scalpel from the surgeon's hand, and proceed to display his superior surgical skill by conducting a snazzy quadruple heart by-pass operation? Hardly. Most callings are spared this sort of professional humiliation by the political leader.

If there is a solution for the military, it lies in part in shifting the center of gravity of political participation from the command aspect to the planning aspect of operations. By bringing our civilian masters into the planning phase as full collaborators, we harvest several advantages. First, the collaborative process enables the military to shape the strategic and operational design through presentation of compelling professional analysis. Second, the consultative nature of the collaborative process caters to the political authorities' felt need to participate and express their own martial instincts; the confidence gained from having personally satisfied themselves that the operation is on a sound footing will enhance prospects for the military's grant of full operational independence. Finally, and most important, collaboration will enable the military to comprehend fully the political aims of the military action.

- *Capitalize on rules of engagement*. The military must insist on clear, precise rules of engagement that accomplish the political goals without placing the soldier on the ground in an untenable position. "Rules of Engagement" is often a pejorative term in military parlance because such rules amount to detailed lists of Do's and Don't's, cramping the soldier's style and often subjecting him to greater danger than would be the case if he could apply force with less discrimination. But rules of engagement, negotiated with the political authorities in advance, are one price the military pays for greater operational and tactical autonomy. In their absence, particularly in warfare touching a civilian populace, there would be a huge compulsion on the part of civilian leaders to involve themselves directly in tactical minutiae during military operations. By aggressively working with civilian leaders prior to an operation to shape rules mutually agreeable to both constituencies, the soldier can call his own shots during the military action, working within boundaries that he himself has helped draw.

- *The military, principally through the voice of the JCS Chairman, must speak out*. Despite our very best efforts to

devise mechanisms for the proper sharing of warmaking responsibilities between the uniformed and civilian sectors, there will come times when the soldier's only recourse is to speak up loudly and clearly. At such moments, he must be prepared to do his duty. President Lyndon Johnson largely distrusted the Joint Chiefs, his statutory military advisers ("The generals . . . know only two words— spend and bomb"), and no military officer was regularly invited to the infamous Tuesday Luncheons at the White House until late 1967, more than two years after the introduction of U.S ground forces in Vietnam.[67] This was an incredibly glaring snub because it was at these meetings that North Vietnamese targets for air strikes were decided.

In his memoirs, President Gerald Ford relates the remarkable story of how, at a critical White House strategy session during the height of the *Mayaguez* crisis, the young White House photographer David Kennerly, hovering at the edge of the august assemblage, brashly interrupted proceedings to question whether the ship hijackers had in fact acted as agents of the Cambodian government. After a stunned silence within the group, Ford saw the wisdom behind the question and decided against the contemplated retaliatory B-52 strikes on the Cambodian mainland.[68] If a lowly 30-year-old White House photographer can summon the courage to inject himself in discussions of a military action like the *Mayaguez* affair, then surely we are entitled to expect the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—who by law is the President's chief military adviser—to have insisted upon attending White House meetings where techniques for waging the war in Vietnam were being devised.

General Earle Wheeler, JCS Chairman at the time, should have clamored at the gates of the White House and rattled every cage in Washington if necessary, standing fully prepared to accept any adverse consequences. For many senior officers, the greatest test of courage falls not on the crimson fields of military battle, but rather within the genteel suites of bureaucratic strife.[69] The military's

strongest bulwark against usurpation by civilian authority is a strong, respected—and morally courageous—Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Conclusion.

To bring into bolder relief the main points developed in the foregoing discussion, let us eavesdrop on an imaginary conversation between a contemporary General and Politician, both avowed Clausewitzians:

Politician. War is fought not for its own sake, but for the sake of political ends.

General. Yes, but you must first articulate those ends clearly so that we can be certain they are obtainable by military means.

Politician. Fair enough, but in waging war and taking other military actions you must accept such controls as are necessary to avoid jeopardizing attainment of the political ends.

General. Agreed, but you must not place controls on my manner of waging war that jeopardize the military success on which attainment of the political ends depends.

Politician. True, but with the marvels of modern communications I can impose controls in real-time during the battle itself, reconciling military means with political ends in my own personal superintendence.

General. That's a dubious solution because you are not trained in the art and science of war, and even if you were you could not achieve from a distant remove the intimate situational awareness of the battle that tactical and operational success requires.

Politician. Then what do you propose?

General. I propose three measures. First, institutionalize a planning process that provides for early exhaustive orientation of the operational commander by appropriate

political authority on the political goals of the contemplated military action. Second, institutionalize in the planning process collaborative procedures whereby the political sector provides input to the theater plan, particularly on aspects with politically sensitive implications.[70] Third, as part of standard command and control protocol, establish that the communication link between the NCA and theater extends no lower than the operational commander himself, and that its purpose is for keeping the NCA informed. If, in exceptional circumstances, directions are passed from the NCA to the operational commander, the latter is always understood to have flexibility to adjust such directions in the light of tactical conditions at the moment of implementation.

Politician. And what if the National Command Authorities lack confidence in the operational commander's willingness or capacity to conduct the operation with sufficient attention to political imperatives?

General. Then the President should fire the commander and appoint a new one—one who can fight like hell but who demonstrates his understanding that military action is always undertaken for political ends.

ENDNOTES

1. John K. Singlaub with Malcolm McConnell, *Hazardous Duty: An American Soldier in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Summit Books, 1991, p. 376.

2. See, e.g., Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, pp. 285-288; Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, pp. 9-11; and especially Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1971. For a brief historical review of U.S. Presidents in the exercise of their prerogative to command troops in the field, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, New York: Vintage Books, 1957, pp. 184-186.

3. Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963*, New York: Edward Burlingame, 1991, pp. 114-117. The sole surviving copy of a scathing CIA Inspector General's critique of the Bay of Pigs invasion was released in 1998, having spent 36 years locked in the safe of the CIA director. Titled "The Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation," the 150-page report suggests that the failure of the operation was the result of the agency's own massive ineptitude. The report is publicly available on the web site of the National Security Archive (http://www.seas.gwu.edu/nsarchive.). See Tim Weiner, "C.I.A. Bares Its Bungling in Report on Bay of Pigs Invasion," *New York Times*, February 22, 1998, p. NE 6.

4. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*, p. 9.

5. *Ibid*., pp. 9-10; see also Beschloss, pp. 284-85; and Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, pp. 586-587, 594.

6. Orwin C. Talbott, Letter to Editor, ARMY Magazine, May 1996, p. 3.

7. This account is that of General David Burchinal, USAF, quoted by Marc Trachtenberg, "The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Security*, Vol. 10, Summer 1985, p. 156, note 52.

8. Beschloss, pp. 504-507; Lebow, p. 285.

9. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power*, New York: New American Library, 1966, p. 539.

10. Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1979, p. 137. See also *The Pentagon Papers*, Senator Gravel Edition, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971, III, p. 344.

11. Betts, pp. 11, 27-28; Gelb and Betts, pp. 135-139.

12. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero,* New York: Bantam Books, 1992, p. 368. I have been unable to find independent confirmation of this episode. When I asked General Schwarzkopf about his source, he explained as follows:

> . . . Bantam and I did hire fact checkers who went through every fact mentioned in the book to be sure they could verify them with a minimum of two sources. To the best of my recollection, the Johnson story was verified during a search of press archives, but

> I am unable to give you any more specific information regarding its origin. It may well have been anecdotal and then picked up by the press.

(letter to author, dated January 7, 1998.) I also consulted Colonel Bert Walker, USAF Ret., who was the communications officer for the NMCC in the mid-1970s, and who during the time of the *Pueblo* crisis was a communications officer in Fifth Air Force Headquarters in Fuchu, Japan, the likely communications node for any call patched through from the NMCC to an aircraft in flight off the coast of Korea. Colonel Walker told me that in his position he'd have learned of such a call had it been made, and he never heard of it. Furthermore, in all his experience, he never heard of a NMCC call to an aircraft commander which was then relayed by intercom to a crewman. Though the episode was technically possible, he believes it never happened. (author's telephone interviews with Colonel Walker, March 12 and 18, 1998.)

13. The account of the Saigon evacuation given below is based principally upon the following sources: John F. Guilmartin, Jr., *A Very Short War: The* Mayaguez *and the Battle of Koh Tang*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995; Stuart A. Herrington, *Peace With Honor? An American Reports on Vietnam, 1973-75*, Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983; Urey Patrick, *U.S. Marine Corps Participation in the Emergency Evacuations of Phnom Penh and Saigon: Operations Eagle Pull and Frequent Wind*, Report CNS 1098, Washington, DC: Center for Naval Analyses, Marine Corps Operations Analysis Group, June 1977; David Butler, *The Fall of Saigon: Scenes from the Sudden End of a Long War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985; Thomas G. Tobin, Arthur E. Laehr, and John F. Hilgenberg, *Last Flight from Saigon*, U.S. Air Force Southeast Asia Monograph Series, Vol. IV, Monograph 6, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978; Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal*, New York: Harper & Row, 1979; Discovery Channel, *The Fall of Saigon*, Video Cassette, VHS 24537, Bethesda, MD: Discovery Communications, 1995 [U.S. Army War College Library call no. VIDEO DS 558.2 .F15 1995]; and author's interviews of Colonel Stuart A. Herrington, USA, Carlisle Barracks, PA, December 18, 1997, and March 4, 1998. There is no effort here to provide a complete account of the Saigon evacuation. The focus rather is upon the pitfalls of remote control of a breaking politico-military crisis.

14. Guilmartin, p. 16.

15. *Ibid*., p. 17.

16. *Ibid*., p. 19.

17. Herrington, pp. 170-75. See also Ford, pp. 252-53.

18. Patrick, p. xvi.

19. *Ibid*., pp. xvi, xix.

20. Herrington, pp. 216-219; Patrick, p. xviii.

21. Herrington, p. 218.

22. *Ibid*., p. 225; Patrick, p. xix. There is apparent conflict between the evacuation numbers of Herrington and Patrick.

23. Patrick, p. xviii; Herrington, pp. 226-227.

24. Herrington, pp. 226-229; Patrick, p. xviii.

25. Butler, pp. 459-60.

26. See, e.g., Butler, pp. 444-447; Patrick, p. B-88; Guilmartin, pp. 23, 195, note 81; Herrington, p. 227; Kissinger address; Discovery Channel documentary; and Ford, p. 256.

27. Butler, p. 444.

28. Also, Dr. Kissinger appeared several times in the Discovery Channel documentary, commenting from his 1975 perspective in Washington.

29. Author's interview of Colonel Stuart Herrington, December 18, 1997, and March 4, 1998; see also Dr. Kissinger's remarks at the beginning of his address at the U.S. Army War College on May 2, 1996.

30. Herrington, p. 230.

31. Singlaub, p. 374.

32. I have been unable to discover any substantiation of this account elsewhere in the literature touching the *Mayaguez* episode. Colonel Vincent Dambrauskas, USA Ret., who served as the communications officer for the NMCC during the period 1973-76, and who by coincidence was aboard the USS *Oklahoma City* (flagship of the Seventh Fleet) during the *Mayaguez* operation, characterized communications as follows:

> It was physically impossible to block aircraft communications from Washington. Furthermore, the term Flash Override in

> communications jargon means that a lower precedence AUTODIN written message was preempted (or overridden) by a Flash message. It does not apply to voice communications.

(Letter to author dated January 3, 1998.) The helicopters were Air Force, not Marine. General Burns states that he never had any intention of aborting the Marine assault on Koh Tang. Furthermore, when the Singlaub account of the operation was read to General Burns over the phone by Dr. Guilmartin on December 17, 1997, General Burns replied, "I can't confirm that," meaning according to Dr. Guilmartin that Burns "had no recollection of any such incident." General Burns did allude to Secretary of State Kissinger's involvement in such operational matters as fighter escort for proposed punitive B-52 attacks against Cambodian targets, noting that the Secretary's "demand" for fighter escort would have forced the diversion of USAF tactical airpower based in Thailand (Memorandum for Record by John F. Guilmartin, subj.: "Telephone interview with Lieutenant General John J. Burns, USAF Ret., 17 December 1997," dated December 22, 1997, copies to Lieutenant General John J. Burns and Colonel Lloyd Matthews).

33. In the account that follows, I have relied mainly upon Guilmartin (see note 13), as buttressed by Christopher Jon Lamb, *Belief Systems and Decision Making in the* Mayaguez *Crisis*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989, particularly pp. 79-97, 137-144. See also Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, *Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the* Mayaguez *and Korean Confrontations*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1978, pp. 101-148.

34. Guilmartin, pp. 38, 54-60; Lamb, pp. 137-144.

35. Guilmartin, pp. 55-56.

36. *Ibid*., pp. 99, 107.

37. *Ibid*., p. 111-112, 141-144. Interestingly, during Guilmartin's telephonic interview with General Burns on December 17, 1997, General Burns stated that he himself got the order to abort the second wave reversed. See note 32.

38. Lebow, pp. 286-287.

39. Colonel Vincent Dambrauskas, USA Ret., Letter to editor, ARMY Magazine, May 1996, pp. 3-4.

40. See, e.g., Scott R. Gourley, "Warfighter Signal Support," ARMY Magazine, March 1998, pp. 39-42.

41. For a good brief account of this operation and its context, see Head, Short, and McFarlane, pp. 149-215.

42. The account of the communications wrangle surrounding the tree-cutting operation in the Korean DMZ , as described below, is based upon Singlaub, pp. 371-379.

43. Singlaub, p. 375.

44. On page 375 of *Hazardous Duty*, General Singlaub identifies the UNC command J-6 as Colonel James L. Young, an Army Signal Corps officer. Colonel Young told me that the book's account of his participation is exaggerated. It was General Stilwell who originally told him not to allow communications from Washington to be extended below UNC headquarters. General Singlaub later reiterated this order, but in brief pro forma fashion. Colonel Young expressly denies that the four calls from Washington soon after the operation commenced were fielded by him, though he concedes that such calls might have been taken by Lieutenant General John J. Burns (General Stilwell's Deputy) or some other person in the Command Room. At one point, the White House did come in with a request that it be connected with the task force commander, this call being fielded by Young's deputy USAF Lieutenant Colonel Robert Eubanks, on a line outside the Command Room. Eubanks simply told the caller that he could not connect him with the task force, but that he, Eubanks, would be happy to relay any questions and get back to the caller with answers. The caller posed no objection (author's telephone interview with Colonel Young, March 19, 1998).

45. Despite General Stilwell's best efforts to prevent direct communications between the Pentagon and the DMZ, he was not totally successful. The NMCC maintains a non-secure administrative/ coordination line to 4-star commands for the use of communications "techies," this in addition to the secure line employed for command and operational purposes. The non-secure line had been extended all the way to the tactical site. Stilwell did order this line disconnected, but the disconnection did not occur until after the tree-cutting. Communications personnel in the NMCC actually heard the buzz of the chain-saw as it cut the tree, according to retired Colonel Vincent Dambrauskas' original letter to the editor of ARMY Magazine, dated March 1, 1996. This original letter contains an allusion to NMCC personnel hearing the chain-saw, though the allusion was edited out of the version of his letter appearing in ARMY Magazine, May 1996, p. 4.

46. Schwarzkopf, p. 368.

47. John H. Cushman, Jr., "How Powerful U.S. Units Will Work," *New York Times International*, October 8, 1993, p. A14; Keith B. Richburg, "Aideed's Force May Have Been Underestimated, Officials Concede," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1993, p. A18. See also Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, Ft. McNair, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1995, p. 58. Operations in Somalia occurred under the auspices of the United Nations, employing forces of several nations. Commanders were often dual-hatted, simultaneously holding UN and national billets within parallel chains of command. Colonel Allard does a fine job negotiating the tangled organizational, jurisdictional, and command maze. See particularly pp. 3-20, 55-61.

48. Ruth Marcus and Ann Devroy, "Clinton to Double Force in Somalia," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1993, pp. A1, A20; see also Cushman, p. A14.

49. For Aspin's announced reasons for denying General Montgomery's request for armored reinforcements, see Cushman, p. A14; and Marcus and Devroy, p. A1.

50. These are the words of a high-ranking officer close to the situation, spoken in Carlisle, PA, during the late fall of 1997.

51. Schwarzkopf, p. 368.

52. As quoted by Lebow, p. 291. For an excellent critique of the adverse long-range strategic and policy implications of McNamara's position, see Eliot A. Cohen, "Why We Should Stop Studying the Cuban Missile Crisis," in Benjamin Frankel, ed., *In the National Interest: A 'National Interest' Reader*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990, pp. 49-64 [from *National Interest*, Winter 1985-86].

53. Sorensen, p. 698. A potentially definitive new source concerning the Cuban missile crisis has recently become available—Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [Belknap Imprint], 1997. Unfortunately, there was no tape of the NSC meeting on Sunday, October 21, 1962, but see pp. 178-179, 243.

54. The foregoing account of the naval blockade during the Cuban missile crisis is taken from Allison, pp. 127-132.

55. Allison, pp. 131-132. Allison's version, particularly for McNamara's lecture to Admiral Anderson, relies heavily on Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1966, pp. 154-156. Allison's account of the confrontation, possibly questionable in part

owing to disagreements among witnesses, is nonetheless neatly emblematic of the essential conflict between the soldier—or sailor, in this instance—and his civilian masters.

56. Betts, pp. 10, 69-71; Abel, p. 156.

57. Georges Suarez, *Clemenceau*, Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1933, I, p. 181.

58. Abel, p. 157.

59. See Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van DeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam,* New York: Times Books, 1995, pp. 337-342.

60. Concerning Admiral Anderson's attitude, here is Elie Abel's comment:

> One group [of witnesses] says that Anderson, at a certain point, accused McNamara of 'undue interference in naval matters.' The Admiral . . . says this is not his recollection, adding that he was brought up never to say such a thing even if he felt it."

With regard to Anderson's alleged comment to McNamara concerning the sufficiency of the *Manual of Naval Regulations*, Abel writes: "Anderson says he can't remember putting it that way (p. 156). For a fair and balanced account of Admiral Anderson's career, character, and personality—including his confrontation with Secretary McNamara—see Lawrence Korb, "George Whalen Anderson, Jr., August 1, 1961-August 1, 1963," in *The Chiefs of Naval Operations*, ed. Robert William Love, Jr., Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980, pp. 321-330.

61. See Lloyd J. Matthews, "The Overcontrolling Leader," ARMY Magazine, April 1996, pp. 31-36.

62. Vincent Dambrauskas, letter to author, dated January 3, 1998.

63. Author interviews of Major General Nash, November 24, 1997, and December 16, 1997.

64. Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, tr. Constantine Gibbon, New York: Da Capo, 1996, p. 110.

65. Author's telephone interview of Colonel Bert Walker, USAF Ret., March 12 and 18, 1998.

66. James L. Holloway, *et al.*, *Rescue Mission Report*, Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Special Operation Review Group, August 1980, p. 58, *et passim*; and Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, New York: Random House, 1985, pp. 296-302.

67. Gelb and Betts, p. 137.

68. Ford, pp. 279-280. Kennerly and his wife had grown to be close friends of the Fords, but his chutzpah in this instance remains remarkable.

69. For trenchant accounts of the importance of courage on the part of members of the JCS, see H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*, New York: HarperCollins, 1997, chap. 15; and Lewis Sorley, *Honorable Warrior: General Harold K. Johnson and the Ethics of Command*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998, pp. 222-223.

70. Much of the planning process recommended above is already technically performed, either as standard procedure or *ad hoc*. Still, one gets the feeling that the military is insufficiently assertive, viewing such collaboration as an obligatory chore rather than an opportunity. Unchecked civilian micromanagement of targeting for Operation DESERT THUNDER, discussed earlier, is an example.

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