

# Paradoxes of Professionalism

Risa Brooks

## Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States

In 2009, President Barack Obama ordered a comprehensive review of the United States' strategy for the war in Afghanistan that revealed some troubling dynamics in the country's civil-military relations. During the review, top military leaders, including the commander of the International Security Assistance Force led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, pushed for "a fully resourced counterinsurgency" and a controversial new troop commitment, arguing that it was the best available option.<sup>1</sup> Accounts of the review reveal, however, that U.S. military leaders seemed to underplay the political and strategic constraints that mitigated against a successful counterinsurgency, and that they were impervious to other options that might better advance Obama's overarching goal of preventing foreign terrorists from attacking the United States.<sup>2</sup> They also seemed dismayed by public perceptions that their appeals for support for their preferred plans from allies in Congress and the press, as well as in public commentary, were boxing in the president.<sup>3</sup> In 2019, McChrystal reflected that perhaps he should have avoided controversy and proceeded with fewer troops, but that he had no other choice than to advocate for the deployment of more forces. As he framed it, while the war in Afghanistan was the civilian leadership's responsibility, as a "technician," he needed the additional troops to achieve his operational objectives.<sup>4</sup> McChrystal's comments are striking, revealing how narrowly he conceived of

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1. Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), p. 178.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 236; Mark Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars: The Military's Undeclared War against America's Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), p. 251; and Sharifullah Dorani, *America in Afghanistan: Foreign Policy and Decision Making from Bush to Obama to Trump* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), p. 107.

3. Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 247.

4. See Gen. Stanley McChrystal, "General Stanley McChrystal on Military Leadership and Policy-making," interview by Thomas Krasnican and Nick Paraiso, *Thank You for Your Service*, podcast, March 5, 2019, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/general-stanley-mcchrystal/id1441805414?i=1000431127618>.

his role in the strategic assessment process and his obligations to ensure the United States' strategic and political success in the war.

Ten years after the review, U.S. civil-military relations are once again displaying some concerning features, this time relating to civilian control of the military and partisan politics under President Donald Trump. Trump has ceded a remarkable degree of operational autonomy to U.S. military commanders and sanctioned a significant reduction in transparency in the conduct of the United States' armed conflicts, raising serious questions about the adequacy of civilian oversight and control of military activity in his administration. Trump also often casts the military as his political ally, suggesting that the military backs him in electoral politics. His actions include direct references to service members voting for him and use of the military as a backdrop in partisan speeches and settings.<sup>5</sup> For their part, U.S. military leaders lack an effective approach for responding to these actions and, as a result, risk enabling the military's politicization. Leaders in the military are also facing problems related to its apolitical stance in U.S. politics more broadly. Surveys reveal that a significant number of military personnel do not believe that they should be apolitical or nonpartisan.<sup>6</sup>

These controversies reveal the limitations of contemporary norms of military professionalism. To be sure, these norms serve the military well in some respects, establishing a baseline for its commitment to nonpartisanship, principled deference to civilian authority, and a capacity for operational and tactical excellence. Prevailing conceptions of military professionalism, however, are underdeveloped and unable to meet contemporary challenges to civil-military relations. Particularly concerning are how these norms shape how military leaders engage with civilians in strategic assessment, assure civilian control of military activity, and respond to challenges to the military's apolitical ethos.

I explore these limitations of contemporary norms of military professionalism through an examination of Samuel Huntington's book *The Soldier and the State*. This seminal study, in particular Huntington's "objective control" model,<sup>7</sup> has greatly influenced scholarship on civil-military relations for more

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5. These actions elicited considerable commentary. See, for example, Philip Carter, "The Military Is Not a Political Prop," *New York Times*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/opinion/trump-military-political-prop.html>.

6. Heidi Urben, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What Is Proper: Army Officers' Attitudes after Two Long Wars," *Orbis*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Summer 2013), p. 360, [doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2013.05.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2013.05.010).

7. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1957).

than six decades.<sup>8</sup> According to Huntington, objective control requires a clearly defined division of responsibility between the military and the civilian leadership. The military focuses on cultivating expertise in the “management of violence” and avoids the civilian preserve of partisan politics and policy decisionmaking. Civilian political leaders, in turn, respect the military’s operational autonomy in the country’s armed conflicts. This approach, Huntington contended, was ideal because it ensured both military deference to civilian authority and the country’s military effectiveness in war.

Huntington’s objective control approach underpins an influential set of norms that shape how U.S. officers are socialized to their roles as professionals.<sup>9</sup> As Maj. Gen. William Rapp, a former commandant of the United States Military Academy and U.S. Army War College, put it: “Huntington’s 1957 *The Soldier and the State* has defined civil-military relations for generations of military professionals. Soldiers have been raised on Huntingtonian logic and the separation of spheres of influence since their time as junior lieutenants.”<sup>10</sup> These norms constitute the bedrock conception of military professionalism within the U.S. military.

Despite the immense scholarly and normative influence of Huntington’s objective control model, however, the time has come to reconsider whether the approach represents a sound basis for military professionalism in the contemporary era, for two reasons. First, Huntington’s norms contain intrinsic weaknesses and fundamental contradictions that have important behavioral implications. Second, these weaknesses have become increasingly consequential in recent years, for at least four reasons. First, as stated earlier, military personnel are demonstrating greater receptivity toward engaging in partisan and political activity. Second, Americans increasingly view the military through a partisan lens, creating pressures on the military to behave in partisan ways. In addition, politicians may be more willing than in the past to challenge the convention of maintaining an apolitical and nonpartisan military. Third, some policymakers and politicians are embracing Huntington’s objective control

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8. Peter D. Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 149–178, doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X9602300203; Peter D. Feaver, “Civil-Military Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2 (June 1999), pp. 211–241; Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, eds., *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

9. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.

10. William E. Rapp, “Civil-Military Relations: The Role of Military Leaders in Strategy Making,” *Parameters*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Autumn 2015), p. 1.

model, with negative consequences for civilian oversight of military activity in the country's armed conflicts. Fourth, Huntington's model influences civil-military relations in ways inimical to the country's strategic effectiveness, especially in conflicts where the political, strategic, and tactical levels of military activity cannot be easily divided into the separate spheres on which objective control is premised. Ensuring strategic effectiveness in the United States' armed conflicts requires a better appreciation among scholars, analysts, and military leaders of the weaknesses of contemporary norms of military professionalism.

The article begins by describing Huntington's objective control model. Next, it situates *The Soldier and the State* in the intellectual context in which Huntington was writing in the 1950s. The article then describes and analyzes three paradoxes in Huntington's model, arguing that it potentially generates tensions among military officers regarding their engagement in political activity; in how they conceive of their roles in assuring civilian control of military activity; and in how they understand their responsibilities in strategic assessment. In the penultimate section, the relevance of these paradoxes for contemporary U.S. civil-military relations is discussed. The article concludes with a call for scholars and practitioners to conceptualize a new framework for military professionalism.

### *Huntington's Norms of Military Professionalism*

In developing the objective control approach, Huntington sought to address a central dilemma of civil-military relations: how to ensure civilian control of the military while maintaining its effectiveness in armed conflict.<sup>11</sup> He proposed a clear division of labor and domains of authority between political and military leaders that both sides would respect. Civilian leaders would decide when and how to use force in international relations, and military leaders would plan and execute military operations pursuant to civilians' goals. This division of labor would influence the military's professionalism. Isolated from politics, military officers would become experts in the "management of violence" and cultivate an apolitical ethos that would ensure their deference to civilian authority.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Feaver, "Civil-Military Relations."

12. Huntington contended that the military profession comprises only the officer corps. For divergent views, see the articles in *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2011), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-62.pdf>.

The objective control model makes several key assumptions and arguments, with four important implications for understanding the norms it supports. First, the model assumes that the civilian and military spheres of activity are easily discernable.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, a clear line exists between what constitutes political versus military activity. A division of labor and authority is both possible and desirable in civil-military relations.

Second, objective control promotes a modal form of interaction in the advisory process between political and military leaders. The model implies that clear boundaries in the content and format of exchanges between the sides are essential to ensure military effectiveness.<sup>14</sup> Civilian leaders provide guidance to military leaders about their objectives in armed conflicts, and military leaders provide advice about military options. In the Huntingtonian conception, relations between civilians and the military in advisory processes are therefore essentially transactional, rather than collaborative.

Third, objective control assumes that separation between a liberal society (e.g., the United States) and the military is both necessary and beneficial for military professionalism, and therefore for the country to thrive. In Huntington's view, military professionals exhibit a distinctive "military mind,"<sup>15</sup> and therefore possess a worldview and disposition intrinsically distinct from their civilian counterparts.<sup>16</sup> The merging of civilian and military identities and values inherent in the concept of the citizen-soldier was anathema to his conception of professionalism.<sup>17</sup> To be a military professional was to exist apart from society, not just physically but also psychologically and ideologically.

Fourth, Huntington's apolitical professionalism requires the military to ab-

13. Cohen, *Supreme Command*; and Hew Strachan, "Making Strategy: Civil-Military Relations after Iraq," *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn 2006), p. 67, doi.org/10.1080/00396330600905510.

14. James Golby and Mara Karlin, "Why 'Best Military Advice' Is Bad for the Military—and Worse for Civilians," *Orbis*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Winter 2018), pp. 137–153, doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2017.11.010; Janine Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (March 2013), pp. 129–145, doi.org/10.1111/psq.12006; and R.D. Hooker Jr. and Joseph J. Collins, "From the Chairman: An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (July 2015), pp. 2–13, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-78/Article/607296/from-the-chairman-an-interview-with-martin-e-dempsey/>.

15. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 90.

16. See also Michael C. Desch, "Hartz, Huntington, and the Liberal Tradition in America: The Clash with Military Realism," pp. 91–111; and Darrell W. Driver, "The Military Mind: A Reassessment of the Ideological Roots of American Military Professionalism," pp. 172–193, both in Nielsen and Snider, *American Civil-Military Relations*.

17. Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960); and Andrew J. Bacevich, "Whose Army?" in David M. Kennedy, ed., *The Modern American Military* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

stain from all that is “political.” “The antithesis of objective control is military participation in politics,” Huntington argued, and civil-military relations are at their best when the military remains “politically sterile and neutral.”<sup>18</sup> Importantly, Huntington’s model does not distinguish among politics’ many aspects and types of activity. In practical terms, the ban on military involvement in politics extends from partisan behavior to public advocacy of military activity and policies pertaining to the armed forces. It also includes military leaders’ intellectual engagement with how political factors might bear on the efficacy of strategy or the conduct of war;<sup>19</sup> Huntington required “the separation of political from military considerations during the professional officer’s analytical processes.”<sup>20</sup>

Together, the core assumptions and arguments of Huntington’s objective control model support a distinctive normative framework governing military officers’ beliefs and actions within their own domain and in their relations with civilians. Those norms involve both proscriptions and prescriptions, especially for the officer corps: officers should refrain from anything remotely political in their activities and thought processes; they should focus on cultivating military expertise and protect their autonomy to do so; they do (and should) retain a singular worldview and values system as military professionals, which necessarily separates them from their civilian counterparts in other state institutions and in society; and, especially as they assume senior leadership roles, they should readily offer politics-free assessments of military options after civilians provide them with definitive guidance about their goals in international conflicts.

### *Huntington’s Norms in Context*

It is the nature of a norm that it seems natural and inevitable to those in thrall to it. Rather than viewed as a social construct or a theory (that could be disproved), standards of conduct and beliefs are seen as aptly reflecting reality or constituting objective truths. Huntingtonian norms, in this sense, may seem to their adherents to flow from the intrinsic nature of civil-military relations. Yet,

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18. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 83–84.

19. Carsten F. Roennfeldt, “Wider Officer Competence: The Importance of Politics and Practical Wisdom,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January 2019), pp. 59–77, doi.org/10.1177/0095327X17737498.

20. John Binkley, “Clausewitz and Subjective Civilian Control: An Analysis of Clausewitz’s Views on the Role of the Military Advisor in the Development of National Policy,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2016), p. 251, doi.org/10.1177/0095327X15594450.

viewed in the context of their historical and intellectual origins, Huntington's argument and the norms it supports reflect the academic debates of the era in which Huntington worked and his core assumptions about the nature of professionalism.

Ironically, what scholars now consider the "normal theory" of civil-military relations was viewed as anything but when *The Soldier and the State* was published.<sup>21</sup> At first, the book provoked enormous controversy,<sup>22</sup> in part because of Huntington's laudatory treatment of Prussian civil-military relations, which some considered a glorification of militarism.<sup>23</sup> Also provocative was the book's juxtaposition of what Huntington contended was a conservative military culture with a liberal societal culture and his argument that the former should be the role model for the latter.<sup>24</sup> The book also reflected an iconoclastic view of civil-military relations—at odds with historical apprehensions about a standing military force and fears that the military's professionalization might enhance its political influence.<sup>25</sup>

Far from reflecting a consensus view among military leaders, *The Soldier and the State* sided with one camp in a debate that originated in the first half of the twentieth century about the nature of military professionalism. That debate was encapsulated in the views of two prominent officers, Gen. Emory Upton and Gen. John McCauley Palmer, whose respective adherents were known as Uptonians and Palmerians.<sup>26</sup> Upton, who asserted that the military history of the United States revealed the perils of not developing a standing, professional force, pointed to the merits of the Prussian model of civil-military relations to support his argument that the U.S. military be given authority for military operations. In contrast, as Christopher Wingate explains: "Palmer rejected Upton's conclusions that only full-time regular Army officers could be relied

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21. In *Supreme Command*, Eliot Cohen refers to objective control as the "normal theory" and offers an influential critique of the roles that it confers on civilians. He does not discuss how the approach bears on military professionalism. See Cohen, *Supreme Command*, p. 248.

22. Gary J. Bass, "Should We Worry about Trump's Fawning Admiration of the Military?" *New York Times*, June 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/books/review/samuel-huntington-soldier-state.html>; and Tamar Lewin, "Samuel P. Huntington, 81, Political Scientist, Is Dead," *New York Times*, December 28, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/29/education/29huntington.html>.

23. Joe Holly and Martin Weil, "Samuel Huntington: Political Scientist," *Washington Post*, December 29, 2008.

24. Walter Millis, "Conflicting Forces; Military Mind," *New York Times*, April 28, 1957, <https://www.nytimes.com/1957/04/28/archives/conflicting-forces-military-mind.html>; and Lewin, "Samuel P. Huntington, 81, Political Scientist, Is Dead."

25. Christopher W. Wingate, "Military Professionalism and the Early American Officer Corps, 1789–1796," master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2009, p. 30.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

upon to effectively lead American armies. In the midst of World War II, Palmer argued that giving active-duty professional soldiers a monopoly on military leadership was a dramatic and dangerous departure from American military tradition and that such a monopoly would lead to the establishment of the large standing Army so feared by the founders of the United States. Such a monopoly, said Palmer, would repudiate the type of Army founded by [George] Washington in the early republic, one that relied upon citizen-soldiers closely tied to American society."<sup>27</sup>

Upton's views about military professionalism profoundly influenced scholars in the early twentieth century,<sup>28</sup> and Huntington entered the debate in 1957 squarely in the Uptonian corner.<sup>29</sup> *The Soldier and the State* echoes Upton's themes, and Huntington himself references Upton's influence on his thinking.<sup>30</sup> As Wingate observes, "Huntington's contributions to the historical understanding of the state of professionalism in early America were profound and further developed the theme of the sharp distinction between the military professional and the citizen-soldier of the early republic."<sup>31</sup>

In addition, Huntington's arguments reflected the prevailing understanding of the sociological concept of what a profession was in the era in which Huntington was writing.<sup>32</sup> At that time, scholars conceptualized a set of idealized norms and values of altruism and trust between the professional and the client.<sup>33</sup> Scholars viewed professions positively, given the strong occupational identity, meritocracy, and competency they fostered among their members. As one sociologist put it, "This interpretation represents what might be termed the optimistic view of what professionalism and the process of professionalization of work entails."<sup>34</sup> By the 1970s, however, scholars had begun to see professions in a more nuanced light. Although professions foster norms of

27. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 17; and Bacevich, "Whose Army?"

29. Adherents of Palmer's view remained—notably, Gen. George Marshall, who based his advocacy for universal military training on Palmer's ideas. Bacevich, "Whose Army?" p. 207; and Wingate, "Military Professionalism and the Early American Officer Corps, 1789–1796," pp. 17–18.

30. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 230–236.

31. Wingate, "Military Professionalism and the Early American Officer Corps, 1789–1796," p. 31.

32. For discussion of the concept of military professionalism in sociology and its origins, see Thomas Crosbie and Meredith Kleykamp, "Fault Lines of the American Military Profession," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 2018), pp. 522, 524, doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X17715437.

33. Julia Evetts, "The Concept of Professionalism: Professional Work, Professional Practice, and Learning," in Stephen Billett, Christian Harteis, and Hans Gruber, eds., *International Handbook of Research in Professional and Practice-Based Learning* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2014), p. 35; and Tony Ingesson, "When the Military Profession Isn't," in Nathan K. Finney and Tyrell O. Mayfield, eds., *Redefining the Modern Military: The Intersection of Profession and Ethics* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 73.

34. Evetts, "The Concept of Professionalism," p. 35.



competence and perform an important social good, as Julia Evetts observes, this generation of researchers contended that they also wielded influence in society and served to protect the market position and elite social status of their members.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, as the sociologist Andrew Abbott later showed, professions jockey for influence; they acquire jurisdictional control over occupational activity through a process of interprofessional competition.<sup>36</sup> This scholarship thus supports a more multifaceted approach to understanding military professionalism than Huntington's conception allows, in which jockeying for influence and efforts to protect status and jurisdictional boundaries are expected. Professions have come to be understood as a more complex phenomenon at odds with Huntington's relatively sanguine view.

Additionally, Huntington's contention that military professionalism requires that officers be apolitical in all respects is questionable. Neither the theory nor the practice of professions requires that their members abstain from political engagement in the comprehensive manner that Huntington prescribes. Some forms of politics are natural to the maintenance and roles of a profession. Inherent in the concept of a profession is that its members serve the client and work to protect and advance its welfare.<sup>37</sup> This requirement negates individually self-interested political activity, but it does not mean that professionals must be apolitical. Indeed, protecting the welfare of society and maintaining the profession's standards and autonomy may necessitate some forms of political engagement and public advocacy. Huntington's argument that professionalism requires abstention from all forms of political engagement is exceptional in this light.

In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars debated the merits of the "apolitical warrior" versus "the soldier-statesman" model. The latter approach contended that the fusion of military considerations with other instruments of national policy rendered infeasible a Huntingtonian-style separation of the civilian and military domains.<sup>38</sup> Writing in 1965, Raymond Barrett argued that rather than thinking about "civil military functions as separate," they could better be conceptualized as "partners in policymaking."<sup>39</sup>

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–40.

36. Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

37. Evetts, "The Concept of Professionalism," p. 32.

38. Jerome Slater, "Apolitical Warrior or Soldier-Statesman: The Military and the Foreign Policy Process in the Post-Vietnam Era," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (November 1977), pp. 101–118, doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X7700400107; Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*; and Gene M. Lyons, "The New Civil-Military Relations," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (March 1961), pp. 53–63, doi.org/10.1017/S0003055400124177.

39. Raymond Barrett, "Partners in Policymaking," *Military Review*, Vol. 45, No. 10 (October 1965), p. 84.

The most prominent critique of Huntington's concept of military professionalism, however, appeared in Morris Janowitz's classic, *The Professional Soldier*. Although agreeing that military officers should avoid partisan activity, Janowitz accepted that other roles for the military in politics were unavoidable and, in some respects, appropriate.<sup>40</sup> Rather than basing military professionalism on a reflexive apoliticism, Janowitz proposed that it could be instilled through the education of officers and supported with what he termed "military honor." Sam Sarkesian and Robert Connor, too, claimed that the military was not an apolitical institution,<sup>41</sup> arguing that it must engage in politics to address issues vital to force structure and internal organization, including scandals in the ranks and deficiencies in military leadership. Sarkesian and Connor maintained that addressing such issues "demands a positive political role for the military profession. Further it requires a broad knowledge of politics and political realities, and a realization that the military profession is both a military and a political institution."<sup>42</sup>

Other scholars ground their criticisms of Huntington's concept of military professionalism in empirical or historical research on U.S. civil-military relations. In 2003, Peter Feaver argued that U.S. civil-military relations during the Cold War did not align with Huntington's predictions. According to Feaver's principal-agent approach, professionalism did not forestall officers' efforts to shirk or act contrary to civilian policy preferences. Politicians' efforts to monitor the military also belie the existence of a neat division of labor.<sup>43</sup> Andrew Bacevich similarly contended that U.S. civil-military relations are characterized more by bargaining than by any easily maintained division of labor between political and military leaders.<sup>44</sup>

An undercurrent in many of these critiques is that Huntington's objective control model, rather than solving key dilemmas and challenges in civilian control and military professionalism, obfuscates them. As a contemporaneous reviewer of *The Soldier and the State* nicely summarized it,

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40. Thomas Donnelly, "Testing the 'Flournoy Hypothesis': Civil-Military Relations in the Post-9/11 Era," in Kori Schake and Jim Mattis, eds., *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2016), pp. 189–218; and Casey Landru, "Evolution of Defining the Army Profession," in Finney and Mayfield, *Redefining the Modern Military*, p. 38.

41. Sam C. Sarkesian and Robert E. Connor Jr., *The U.S. Military Profession into the Twenty-First Century: War, Peace, and Politics* (London: Cass Military Studies, 1999).

42. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

43. Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

44. Bacevich, "Whose Army?"; and Andrew J. Bacevich, "The Paradox of Professionalism: Eisenhower, Ridgway, and the Challenge to Civilian Control, 1953–1955," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1997), pp. 303–333, doi.org/10.2307/2953969.

Huntington wishes away all the “really hard political problems of civil-military relations.”<sup>45</sup>

Thus, past scholarship raises fundamental questions about the implications of Huntington’s concept of objective control for military professionalism—in particular, whether the model fosters abstention by military officers from all political behavior and whether such a goal is desirable. These works underscore that Huntington’s objective control approach is an analytical and normative construct; moreover, as I argue below, the model contains three paradoxes that are potentially problematical for contemporary U.S. civil-military relations.

### *Paradox One: Proscribing Yet Enabling Military Political Activity*

As discussed above, Huntington foresaw that military personnel who focus on developing their technical/tactical expertise would come to view political activity as antithetical to their role and identity. Yet, even though objective control may discourage political behavior by fostering a belief among officers that such activity contravenes their professionalism, Huntingtonian norms enable such behavior in three ways.

#### WHAT IS APOLITICAL BEHAVIOR?

First, the reflexive self-identification of military officers as apolitical can encourage blind spots such that they fail to recognize the political content or impact of their actions. Tautological and ambiguous aspects of Huntington’s argument contribute to this dynamic. Huntington measured the outcome (professionalism) with reference to its purported cause (the absence of political behavior).<sup>46</sup> Thus, by definition, those who see themselves as professionals define away the possibility that their actions might be political. An officer socialized to Huntingtonian norms potentially assumes that, because he is a professional, he is by definition apolitical. He cannot be the former if he is the latter. This tautology alleviates the impulse for self-scrutiny about what it

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45. John C. Wahlke, “The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, Samuel P. Huntington,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 1958), p. 399, doi.org/10.2307/2127050.

46. Peter D. Feaver and Erica Seeler, “Before and After Huntington: The Methodological Maturing of Civil-Military Studies,” in Nielsen and Snider, *American Civil-Military Relations*, p. 82; and Thomas C. Bruneau, “Impediments to the Accurate Conceptualization of Civil-Military Relations,” in Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 16.

means to be apolitical and what the behavioral and intellectual bases are for such a stance.

One potential blind spot is a failure to recognize that actions lacking an express political agenda can still have political consequences. Officers, for example, might conclude that as long as they are not expressly acting politically, such as by advocating publicly for a particular policy agenda, they are conforming with apolitical norms (i.e., what matters is their intentions in undertaking an act, not its consequences). This view, however, “assumes that men are only political when they have an explicit set of justifications for their behavior . . . when they are ideological, or when they are doctrinaire.”<sup>47</sup> For example, a military leader may speak out, believing herself to be motivated by personal conscience or an altruistic concern for the country’s security, but then fail to recognize the action’s political effects.<sup>48</sup> That officer might even resist interpretations that suggest she is acting politically, if that behavior contradicts her self-conception as an apolitical professional.

Aspects of the debate about the appropriateness of officers resigning in protest over disagreements with civilian leaders, or what Feaver calls “McMasterism,” reflect this dynamic.<sup>49</sup> “McMasterism,” which originates from a distorted interpretation of H.R. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty*,<sup>50</sup> refers to military officers’ conviction that they have both the right to insist that civilian officials heed their advice on military planning and strategy and an obligation to resign if those civilians fail to do so. Support among elite veterans for the concept of resignation-in-protest has grown in popularity in recent years. In late 1990s surveys by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, 28 percent of elite veterans responded that resignation was an appropriate response to an “unwise” order.<sup>51</sup> In a 2013 YouGov survey by Kori Schake and Jim Mattis, the number of respondents who agreed with that statement had climbed to 63 percent.<sup>52</sup> In fact, one reason for the popularity of the skewed interpretation

47. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 234.

48. Hew Strachan, “Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal, and the Operational Level of War,” *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 5 (October–November 2010), p. 165, doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2010.522104.

49. Peter D. Feaver, “The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Spring 2011), p. 94, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00033.

50. H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997).

51. By “elite veterans,” the authors are referring to men and women who served in the military at high levels. For details on the survey’s sample population, see Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), p. 20.

52. The question asked in both the TISS and YouGov surveys was: “If a senior civilian Department of Defense leader asks a military officer to do something that the military officer believes is un-

of McMaster's book may be because it implicitly justifies opposition to civilian authority.

"McMasterism" remains popular with some in the military despite its potential political consequences.<sup>53</sup> If a military leader resigns in opposition to an imminent decision by a president or policymaker and that action mobilizes public opposition, the costs to the civilian leadership of pursuing that action increase.<sup>54</sup> In this manner, resignation can constrain political leaders' choices, subverting their practical authority to pursue policies and strategies that they otherwise deem fit for the country. The popularity of the resignation-in-protest concept within the military thus suggests a failure by its supporters to appreciate its political dimensions. In a survey of officers that he conducted over six years teaching at the National Defense University, Gregory Foster found that more than one-third of his respondents did not think that "mass resignations in opposition to administration policy" would constitute a civil-military relations crisis—a finding that suggests that even elite officers taught by Foster did not understand the political consequences of such a high-profile act.<sup>55</sup>

#### PROFESSIONS ARE POLITICAL

Second, Huntingtonian norms can encourage political behavior among officers by failing to clearly identify what constitutes such behavior and why it is intrinsically contrary to military professionalism. As discussed above, professions advocate on behalf of themselves and their clients; some forms of political activity are not obviously inconsistent with the role of a military professional.<sup>56</sup> The U.S. Army, for example, encourages its members to practice

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wise, would it be appropriate for the officer to . . . retire or leave the service in protest?". Results for both surveys appear in Jim Golby, Lindsay P. Cohn, and Peter D. Feaver, "Thanks for Your Service: Civilian and Veteran Attitudes after Fifteen Years of War," in Schake and Mattis, *Warriors and Citizens*, p. 123.

53. Richard H. Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Summer 2002), pp. 8–59, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol55/iss3/2>; and Jim Golby, "Beyond the Resignation Debate: A New Framework for Civil-Military Dialogue," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall 2015), pp. 18–46. See also the articles discussed in Patricia M. Shields, "Introduction to Symposium: Roundtable on the Ethics of Senior Officer Resignation in the United States," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 2017), pp. 3–4, [doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X16662541](https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X16662541).

54. Risa Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," in Nielsen and Snider, *American Civil-Military Relations*, pp. 213–239; and Richard Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Summer 2002), p. 10, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol55/iss3/2>.

55. Gregory Foster, "Civil-Military Relations on Trial: Through the Eyes of Tomorrow's U.S. Military Leaders," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 161, No. 4 (August–September 2016), p. 37, [doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1236472](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1236472).

56. Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies"; John M. Shalikhvili, "Our

“Stewardship”—in other words, to assume “the responsibility to strengthen the Army as a profession . . . caring for the people and resources entrusted to [the Army] by the American people, [and] ensuring Army forces are ready, now and in the future, to accomplish the Army’s missions.”<sup>57</sup> Stewardship could conceivably encompass officers publicly advancing policies that protect their service’s organizational interests and military effectiveness.

Indeed, professions advocating on behalf of their clients is consistent with their being professionals. As Andrew Milburn argues, “The Military officer belongs to a profession whose members are conferred great responsibility, a code of ethics and an oath of office. These grant him moral autonomy and obligate him to disobey an order that is likely to harm the institution writ large—the Nation, military, and subordinates—in a manner not clearly outweighed by its likely benefits.”<sup>58</sup> Although Milburn’s argument would be considered heretical according to Huntingtonian norms, it is consistent with many understandings of professionalism. As John Binkley puts it, “One would not criticize medical professionals for publicly commenting on pending national health policy or lawyers for commenting on potential constitutional issues, yet a military officer’s involvement in public discourse is considered dangerous and inimical to American democratic values.”<sup>59</sup>

One might counter that the officer corps is different from the legal and medical professions, in part because of the nature of the military’s client (the U.S. polity) and its officers’ pledge to uphold the Constitution.<sup>60</sup> “Dissent” or advocacy, even if it appears to serve the U.S. public’s proximate interest in ensuring a healthy or effective military, violates its more fundamental interest in the principle of civilian control of the military in a democracy. The conditions under which military dissent attenuates or subverts civilian control can be debated,<sup>61</sup> as can the situations in which officers should be politically aware or

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Soldiers Don’t Have to Fade Away,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2004, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB109270495423893159>; Charlie Dunlap, “Let’s Temper the Rhetoric about Civil-Military Relations,” *Lawfire* blog, May 11, 2018, <https://sites.duke.edu/lawfire/2018/05/11/lets-temper-the-rhetoric-about-civil-military-relations/>; and Christopher Gelpi, “Retired Generals Are People Too!” *Duck of Minerva* blog, August 9, 2016, <https://duckofminerva.com/2016/08/retired-generals-are-people-too.html>.

57. See Army Doctrine Publication, “Army Leadership and the Profession,” ADP 6-22 (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 31, 2019), pp. 1–5, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/ARN20039\\_ADP%206-22%20C1%20FINAL%20W EB.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN20039_ADP%206-22%20C1%20FINAL%20W EB.pdf).

58. Andrew R. Milburn, “Breaking Ranks: Dissent and the Military Professional,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (October 2010), p. 102.

59. Binkley, “Clausewitz and Subjective Civilian Control,” p. 268.

60. Tony Ingesson argues that the military cannot be a profession because it does not have the necessary autonomy. See Ingesson, “When the Military Profession Isn’t.”

61. Shields, “Introduction to Symposium”; and Lindsay Cohn, Max Margulies, and Michael A.

engaged. The point here is that Huntington does little to encourage that debate. For him, compliance with apolitical norms relies on military officers' obedience to a vaguely conceived principle, rather than on a reasoned elucidation of those norms' purpose and character.

Third, Huntingtonian norms can enable political activity by complicating efforts by the military as an organization to develop a comprehensive approach to confront challenges to its members' apolitical ethos.<sup>62</sup> If the military comprises professionals who by definition are apolitical, the norm of abstaining from politics is assumed to be self-sustaining. There is no need for a comprehensive organizational imperative to instill that ethic in military personnel. Huntingtonian norms may even foster an organizational culture that resists considering the possibility that officers are violating the apolitical ethic or might do so in the future. If, as Maj. Brian Babcock-Lumish puts it, "being called political by one's military peers is almost universally considered a slur on one's character in the American military,"<sup>63</sup> then how can its leaders acknowledge that service members behave in ways that are political or that have political effects?

#### MOUNTING CHALLENGES TO THE U.S. MILITARY'S APOLITICAL ETHOS

At one time, Huntingtonian norms might have been adequate to forestall political behavior among U.S. military officers, but those norms are poorly suited to the contemporary era, for three reasons. First, evidence suggests that many in the military express attitudes at odds with an apolitical ethos, and therefore Huntingtonian beliefs are an inadequate check on such behavior. Scholars have found significant support among senior officers, for example, for Milburn's argument that officers have an obligation to challenge civilian authority—for instance, by disobeying orders "if they deem them to be injuri-

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Robinson, "What Discord Follows: The Divisive Debate over Military Disobedience," *War on the Rocks*, August 2, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/08/what-discord-follows-the-divisive-debate-over-military-disobedience/>.

62. See Frank G. Hoffman, "The American Professional Military Ethic: Ephemeral and Unenforceable?" (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, August 5, 2016), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/08/american-professional-military-ethic-ephemeral-unenforceable/>. There have been some important efforts by individuals, including by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael G. Mullen and Chairman Gen. Martin E. Dempsey. Thom Shanker, "Military Chief Warns Troops about Politics," *New York Times*, May 26, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/26/us/politics/26military.html>; and Martin Dempsey, "Keep Your Politics Private, My Fellow Generals and Admirals," *Defense One*, August 1, 2016, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/08/keep-your-politics-private-my-fellow-generals-and-admirals/130404/>. See also Don M. Snider, project director, and Lloyd J. Matthews, ed., *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

63. Maj. Brian Babcock-Lumish, "Uninformed, Not Uniformed? The Apolitical Myth," *Military Review*, September–October 2013, p. 51.

ous to US strategic aims, unnecessarily risky for troops, or in some cases, simply objectionable to their own moral principles.”<sup>64</sup> A 2013 survey showed that large numbers of retired military officers who once served in senior positions believed that a military officer should “resist carrying out an order” that he or she thinks is “unwise” even at the risk of a court-martial (23 percent) or, as noted above, should resign in protest (63 percent).<sup>65</sup> Heidi Urben has found evidence that prohibitions against military officers engaging in partisan political activity are weakly socialized. In a survey of more than 4,000 active-duty U.S. Army officers, she noted that although many expressed views in accordance with Huntington’s apolitical norms, a large segment appeared to have no qualms about criticizing civilian leaders and seemed to believe they should be able to express their political views without limits—attitudes that suggest either that they do not recognize the disconnect between their professionalism and these attitudes or that they do not think their professionalism requires them to maintain a nonpartisan ethic. As Urben summarizes, “The fact that a quarter of respondents feel it is appropriate for active duty military to publicly criticize elected officials and a third feel there should be no limits on their public, political expression is startling.”<sup>66</sup>

A second reason why Huntington’s norms are poorly suited to the contemporary era is that the military is facing new pressures and opportunities for partisan political expression.<sup>67</sup> The growth of social media usage among younger generations of military personnel contributes to these pressures. Urben’s 2015/16 survey research of West Point cadets and officers at the National Defense University found extensive social media usage, with 44 percent of respondents reporting that their military friends often talked about politics on social media.<sup>68</sup> In addition, 35 percent of survey participants said that they had observed their active-duty friends using or sharing “insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against specific elected officials on a social media

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64. Anna Mulrine, “Can Troops Get Too Much Love? Military Struggles with a Dark Side on Veterans Day,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 2010, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2010/1110/Can-troops-get-too-much-love-Military-struggles-with-a-dark-side-on-Veterans-Day>.

65. Golby, Cohn, and Feaver, “Thanks for Your Service,” pp. 115, 123.

66. Urben, “Party, Politics, and Deciding What Is Proper,” p. 360.

67. Department of Defense directives limit service members’ political activity. See Department of Defense, “Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces,” Directive No. 1344.10 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, February 18, 2008), <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodd/134410p.pdf>.

68. Heidi A. Urben, “Like, Comment, Retweet: The State of the Military’s Nonpartisan Ethic in the World of Social Media” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Complex Operations Case Study, National Defense University Press, May 2017), p. 24.



networking site,” while 50 percent said they had witnessed the same behavior directed at politicians running for office.<sup>69</sup> A striking 33 percent said that they had seen their friends in the military make rude comments about the president on social media sites.<sup>70</sup>

A third reason for concern about Huntington’s norms is that civilian leaders may increasingly try to politicize the military—a dynamic illustrated by President Trump. Whereas some presidents may wear flight suits or bomber jackets when speaking to the troops, Trump explicitly treats the military as an allied political constituency. In a February 2017 speech at MacDill Air Force Base, for example, he directly referred to military personnel voting for him.<sup>71</sup> As he put it, “We had a wonderful election. . . . you like me, and I like you.”<sup>72</sup> In a July 2017 speech, he called on military personnel to lobby Congress on behalf of his legislative priorities, including in opposing the country’s health-care laws.<sup>73</sup> At one point, Trump threatened that his allies in the military might get “tough” with his opponents in U.S. politics.<sup>74</sup> Trump has also adopted policy positions that aim to safeguard his persona or popularity with his political base, at the expense of the military’s organizational integrity. These include granting pardons to two service members and restoring the rank of a third accused of war crimes,<sup>75</sup> and requests by his staff to the Navy’s Seventh Fleet to obscure from view the name of the USS *John S. McCain* during his visit to Yokohama, Japan.<sup>76</sup>

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

71. Michael R. Gordon, “Trump’s Mix of Politics and Military Is Faulted,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/us/politics/trump-macdill-air-base.html>.

72. See Donald Trump, speech at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, February 6, 2017, <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-tampa-fl-february-6-2017>.

73. Carla Herreria, “Naval Ceremony Turns Political after Donald Trump Asks Crowd to Call Congress,” *Huffington Post*, July 23, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-commissioning-ceremony-uss-gerald-ford-political\\_n\\_5973f79ae4b0e79ec199b21c](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-commissioning-ceremony-uss-gerald-ford-political_n_5973f79ae4b0e79ec199b21c).

74. Greg Sargent, “Trump: You Wouldn’t Like My Supporters in the Military If They Got Angry,” *Washington Post*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/03/14/trump-you-wouldnt-like-my-supporters-military-if-they-got-angry/>.

75. Nicole Gaouette, Ryan Browne, and Barbara Starr, “Trump Ignores Pentagon Advice and Intervenes in Military War Crimes Cases,” *CNN*, November 18, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/15/politics/trump-war-crimes-intervenes/index.html>. Trump then invited the men to participate in his campaign events. Maggie Haberman, “Trump Brings 2 Officers He Cleared of War Crimes Onstage at Fund-Raiser,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/us/politics/trump-war-crimes-pardons.html>.

76. A tarp was observed covering the ship’s name, although the Navy subsequently disputed that it complied with the requests. Rebecca Ballhaus and Gordon Lubold, “White House Wanted USS John McCain ‘Out of Sight’ during Trump Japan Visit,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/white-house-wanted-uss-john-mccain-out-of-sight-during-trump-japan-visit-11559173470>; and Lolita C. Baldor, “Pentagon Tells White House to Stop Politicizing Military,” *Associated Press*, June 2, 2019, <https://apnews.com/3dba0b327e8e45e5b9589db4bb735505>.

Huntingtonian norms can perversely facilitate such efforts to politicize the military by encouraging three inadequate responses from its leaders. The first is for military leaders to remain silent on the grounds that the military operates outside the boundaries of partisan politics. Military leaders may think that it is inappropriate for them to rebut publicly or otherwise challenge a president's or politician's statements or policy decisions if doing so could influence partisan debate—even when those political leaders are using the military's popular esteem or its resources to gain an advantage in that partisan competition. Second, military leaders may comply with politicians' requests because they believe that staying apolitical requires deferring to civilian authority, whatever the request. Third, the military may not implement a president's policies in a timely or effective manner, or it might distort its advice to the president.<sup>77</sup> This approach may allow the military to defend against actions contrary to its organizational interests,<sup>78</sup> but it constitutes a form of resistance not readily observed by the public. In all three cases, military leaders may not fully grasp that their inaction or apparent readiness to follow orders can suggest to the public that the military supports controversial civilian policies or that it is the president's partisan ally.<sup>79</sup>

#### A CHALLENGE HERE TO STAY

These shortcomings in Huntington's framework are increasingly important because other politicians may emulate Trump given the growing incentives to politicize the military. Military leaders need to prepare for ongoing challenges to the military's nonpartisan stance in U.S. politics.

Two factors interact to produce these incentives. First, as numerous studies have documented, since the 1970s, military officers have become increasingly partisan, identifying with one of the major political parties (primarily the Republican Party).<sup>80</sup> This trend is long-standing, but matters today because of

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77. Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

78. See, for example, the discussion of how Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Joseph Dunford appeared to rely on slow-rolling tactics in response to White House efforts to politicize the military. Mark Perry, "The Last Adult Is Leaving the Room," *Foreign Policy*, August 13, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/13/the-last-adult-is-leaving-the-room-trump-military-dunford-mattis-kelly/>.

79. For example, Secretary of Defense Mattis's decision to forgo Pentagon press conferences was interpreted by some observers as complicity in Trump's controversial policies. See Lara Seligman, "Mattis's Successor Signals He Wants to End the Pentagon's Long Silence," *Foreign Policy*, August 19, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/19/mattis-successor-signals-he-wants-to-end-the-pentagon-long-silence-defense-secretary-mark-esper-media-relations/>.

80. For a discussion, see Urben, "Like, Comment, Retweet," pp. 351–368; and Urben, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What Is Proper," p. 15. There has been a decline in the number of officers who identify as independent or nonpartisan compared to those who claim affiliation with a political party. See Golby, Cohn, and Feaver, "Thanks for Your Service," p. 101; and Hugh Liebert and

how it could interact with a second factor: a potentially growing confidence gap in how Americans perceive the military. Although, in general, Americans regard the military highly, as David Burbach reports, “Republican confidence increased sharply over the last 20 years. Party ID is now the best predictor of one’s confidence in the military.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, mounting evidence suggests that many of the country’s citizens view partisan statements by military leaders positively when those statements align with their own views and thus may support the military acting in a partisan way.<sup>82</sup>

Consequently, political coalitions may form between sections of the officer corps and parts of the electorate.<sup>83</sup> Members of the Republican Party, for example, may come to see the military as their allied constituency, and many of the country’s officers and enlisted personnel may support—or at least not be wholly uncomfortable with—that perception. There are signs, in fact, that at least some in the military are at ease with being seen as partisan. On Trump’s visit to Iraq in December 2018, for example, troops eagerly lined up for the president to sign caps with his signature phrase “Make America Great Again.”<sup>84</sup> In May 2019, Trump’s visage and the phrase “Make Aircrew Great Again” appeared on sailors’ morale patches during the President’s Memorial Day address on the USS *Wasp*.<sup>85</sup>

### *Paradox Two: Civilian Authority versus Civilian Control*

Huntington’s objective control model promotes civilian authority, but undermines civilian control of military affairs. As conventionally characterized by

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James Golby, “Midlife Crisis? The All-Volunteer Force at 40,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 2017), p. 119, doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16641430.

81. David T. Burbach, “Partisan Dimensions of Confidence in the U.S. Military, 1973–2016,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 45, No. 2. (April 2019), pp. 211–233, doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X17747205.

82. Michael A. Robinson, “Danger Close: Military Politicization and Elite Credibility,” *War on the Rocks*, August 21, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/danger-close-military-politicization-and-elite-credibility/>; and James Golby, Peter Feaver, and Kyle Dropp, “Elite Military Cues and Public Opinion about the Use of Military Force,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2018), pp. 44–71, doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X16687067.

83. Risa A. Brooks, “Integrating the Civil-Military Relations Subfield,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 22, p. 391, doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060518-025407. See also the comments by Jim Golby in Risa Brooks et al., “The (Four) Starts and the State: Civil-Military Affairs in 2019,” *War on the Rocks* podcast, November 11, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/the-four-stars-and-the-state-of-civil-military-affairs-in-2019/>.

84. Eli Watkins, “White House Says It Didn’t Distribute MAGA Hats Trump Signed in Iraq, Germany,” *CNN*, December 27, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/26/politics/iraq-trump-hats-us-troops-maga/index.html>.

85. Lee Moran, “Service Members Pictured Wearing Donald Trump–Themed Patches,” *Huffington Post*, May 28, 2019, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-patches-memorial-day\\_n\\_5cecd9ae4b00356fc26b996](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-patches-memorial-day_n_5cecd9ae4b00356fc26b996).

scholars, civilian control requires that military personnel willingly defer to civilian officials in decisions about military affairs. Yet civilian control fully considered requires more than compliance with civilian orders and the absence of a military veto. It also requires that civil-military relations operate in a positive manner by promoting civilian preferences and political goals.<sup>86</sup> Those relations should support political leaders' efforts to achieve the full potential of the country's military resources in pursuit of the country's foreign objectives. Huntingtonian norms undermine civilian control defined in this broader sense in three ways.

#### FLAWED CIVIL-MILITARY INTERACTION

First, Huntingtonian norms inhibit the emergence of advisory processes that enable civilians to fully discern how military tools might or might not serve their political objectives.<sup>87</sup> Objective control implies a hierarchical, linear system in which civilians formulate goals without consideration of the military means to achieve them and then provide that formulation to military leaders. As Huntington prescribes, "When required in his executive capacity to make decisions involving both military and political elements, the military man ideally should formulate his military solution first and then alter it as needs be on the advice of his political advisors."<sup>88</sup> Military leaders formulate options and deliver a menu of choices to political leaders and, in a repeat of the cycle, amend those options upon the request of civilians.

This approach generates expectations about the roles that political and military leaders are supposed to play in the advisory process. "Military leaders are taught civilian leaders will clearly articulate the ends of policy and military advice should be limited to matters of ways, means and risk," writes William Rapp.<sup>89</sup> Yet, as James Golby and Mara Karlin explain, "In many cases, even setting political objectives requires a textured understanding of expected costs, troop commitments, conflict duration, the likelihood of success, the impact on other global contingencies, and military and political risks."<sup>90</sup>

86. Frank G. Hoffman, "Dereliction of Duty *Redux*? Post-Iraq American Civil-Military Relations," *Orbis*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 2008), p. 217, doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2008.01.004.

87. Golby and Karlin, "Why 'Best Military Advice' Is Bad for the Military—and Worse for Civilians"; and Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making."

88. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 73.

89. William E. Rapp, "Ensuring Effective Military Voice," *Parameters*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Winter 2016/17), p. 15.

90. Golby and Karlin, "Why 'Best Military Advice' Is Bad for the Military—and Worse for Civilians," p. 144.

In 2015, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey described the advisory process this way:

In the military culture, as you know, we spend decades learning how to do campaign planning, and we start with a well-stated and clear objective. Then we build a campaign to achieve that objective, with intermediate objectives and milestones along the way. Then we come up with three courses of action: high risk, medium risk, and low risk. We pick the middle-risk option and execute. If you are an elected official, the likelihood of your conceiving a well-crafted and well-defined objective at the beginning is almost zero.

Rather, as an elected official, your first instinct is to seek to understand what options you have. . . . What other options do I have in this magnificent toolbox called the U.S. military? What tools do I have that I can apply pressure with, that I can manage escalation with, and that I can integrate with the other instruments of national power? Elected officials are hardwired to ask for options first and then reverse-engineer objectives. And the military is hard-wired to do exactly the opposite.<sup>91</sup>

The transactional Huntingtonian model is at odds with this inductive process.<sup>92</sup> Military officers inculcated in Huntingtonian norms, consequently, may resent or be unprepared to adjust to civilians' needs in the advisory process. As Janine Davidson describes, civilians' "expectations [for the advisory process] are often considered inappropriate, unrealistic or irrelevant by the military."<sup>93</sup> The Huntingtonian mind-set fuels an interpretation that problems in advisory processes lie with civilians, rather than with how military leaders approach their roles within these processes. In this view, the process fails because civilians do not provide military leaders with clear guidance on their desired goals, or they expect them to achieve military objectives while imposing timelines or limiting resources. Civilians' failure to act in accordance with military leaders' expectations may then be framed as dysfunction or flawed political leadership—attitudes that may reinforce military recalcitrance to changing practices.<sup>94</sup>

Second, Huntingtonian norms impede civilian control by fostering within the military an aversion to civilian oversight of battlefield activity that

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91. These comments appear in Hooker and Collins, "From the Chairman," p. 5.

92. Hoffman, "Dereliction of Duty *Redux*?" p. 226.

93. Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making," p. 131; and Rapp, "Ensuring Effective Military Voice," p. 20.

94. For an example of how this culture clash can be interpreted in a manner that disparages civilians, see Paul D. Miller, "The Military Did Not Thwart Obama, the Taliban Did," *Foreign Policy*, October 20, 2010, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/20/the-military-did-not-thwart-obama-the-taliban-did/>.

may challenge the ability of civilian policymakers to ensure that this activity conforms to their preferences and advances their goals. Huntington's construct perpetuates a conception that autonomy is an inherent prerogative of the military and that civilian incursions into its sphere of responsibility and authority represent a violation of that prerogative. In *The Soldier and the State*, Huntington argued: "What does the military officer do when he is ordered by a statesman to take a measure which is militarily absurd when judged by professional standards and which is strictly within the military realm without any political implications? This situation, provided that the last qualification holds and that it is completely removed from politics, represents a clear invasion of the professional realm by extraneous considerations. The presumption of superior professional competence which existed in the case of a military superior giving a questionable order does not exist when the statesman enters military affairs. Here the existence of professional standards justifies military disobedience."<sup>95</sup> Huntington's objective control also complements and magnifies the military's natural organizational interests in maximizing autonomy and minimizing uncertainty.<sup>96</sup> For these reasons, noted Major Babcock-Lumish, it is no surprise that the "military has fully embraced the Huntingtonian myth, and used it as a justification for a membrane between the political and military."<sup>97</sup>

Consistent with Huntingtonian norms, the 1998 Triangle Institute for Security Studies survey and Urben's 2009 survey showed that majorities of military officers believed that military leaders should not just offer advice or advocate certain approaches, but should insist that civilians heed their judgments about which units to use when committing U.S. forces abroad.<sup>98</sup> In this manner, the military's professionalization can justify political engagement in defense of its autonomy and mandate—a phenomenon that scholars of comparative politics have widely observed in their studies of militaries in Latin America, Asia, and beyond.<sup>99</sup> But even if military leaders do not overtly con-

95. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 77. Martin Cook argues that the acquisition of expertise by military professionals can foster insubordination to civilian authority. Officers may believe that they know better than civilians how to manage military affairs. Cook, "Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics," *Parameters*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 4–15.

96. Bruneau, "Impediments to the Accurate Conceptualization of Civil-Military Relations"; and Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

97. Babcock-Lumish, "Uninformed, Not Uniformed?" p. 49.

98. For details, see Urben, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What Is Proper," p. 363.

99. Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (London: Pall Mall, 1962); Bengt Abrahamsson, *Military Professionalization and Political Power* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1972); and Alfred Stepan, "The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role

test civilian involvement in their professional domain, Huntingtonian norms rationalize a cultural narrative opposed to civilian oversight of the military. They fuel the presumption that the military is best equipped to monitor and address any defects in the organization; it is able to and should solve its own problems, independent of civilian authorities. Of course, institutions may resent intervention in their affairs by those whom their members perceive as outsiders; pushback against micromanagement is not unique to the military. Huntington norms are insidious, however, in the way they transform such interventions from something that might be seen as merely inconvenient or frustrating to something that represents a violation of the appropriate role of civilians in overseeing the military.

In addition, the Huntington model can fuel disdain among military personnel for politics and its practitioners, which can magnify cultural impediments to civilian oversight. As one analyst puts it, "Military members generally view politics with distaste, if not downright hostility. Many view themselves as separate from and morally superior to politicians, whom they see engaged in political turf wars and nasty electoral campaigns."<sup>100</sup> Surveys show that a majority of those in uniform agree with the statement that "when civilians tell the military what to do, domestic partisan politics rather than national security requirements are often the primary motivation."<sup>101</sup> Grievances about civilians' violations of the rightful boundaries of military authority, in turn, are made worse if military personnel view those interventions cynically and believe that they are not motivated to ensure military success.

Third, Huntingtonian norms pose challenges for civilian control in how they can affect civilian leaders' understanding of their role in monitoring and overseeing military activity. The obstacles described above create a mind-set among military officers that can foster resistance to civilian oversight and practices contrary to civilian control. Equally problematic is that Huntington provides a model that civilians may themselves embrace that can result in insufficient investment and focus on oversight of the military. At the extreme, Huntingtonian logic discourages the kind of transparency and accountability that is essential to civilian control and fosters practices in which the military's

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Expansion," in Stepan, ed., *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Politics, and Future* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973).

100. Dayne E. Nix. "American Civil-Military Relations: Samuel P. Huntington and the Political Dimensions of Military Professionalism," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Spring 2012), p. 36, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol65/iss2/7>.

101. In her 2009 survey, Urben reports that 55 percent of respondents agreed with the statement,

tactical and operational activities become disconnected from civilians' broader political and security goals—a dynamic I turn to next.

#### DECLINING CIVILIAN CONTROL OF MILITARY ACTIVITY UNDER TRUMP

The implications of Huntington's logic for civilian control are especially relevant given how they have shaped civil-military relations in the Trump administration and the possibility that future presidents will adopt the objective control approach.<sup>102</sup>

Trump has implicitly embraced the objective control model, either by directly absorbing Huntingtonian thinking or perhaps by being influenced by military leaders (or other civilians in his administration) who adhere to Huntingtonian norms.<sup>103</sup> This embrace of Huntington's model may also be a means to curry favor with military personnel happy to avoid civilian oversight. Regardless, this model has legitimized a massive delegation of authority to the military to run the country's wars and administer its own affairs in a manner contrary to civilian oversight and control.

Trump's stated reasons for delegating significant operational authority to the military reflects his apparent embrace of the objective control model. As Trump puts it, he is leaving the military alone "to do its job."<sup>104</sup> Trump implicitly attributes the military's tactical success to the Huntingtonian model. In May 2017, he contended, "We have the greatest military in the world and they've done the job as usual. We have given them total authorization . . . and that's why they've been successful lately."<sup>105</sup> As Secretary of Defense James Mattis put it, "I have absolute confidence as does the President, our commander in chief, in the commanders on the ground as he's proven by dele-

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compared with 54 percent who agreed with it in the Triangle Institute for Security Studies surveys conducted in the late 1990s. See Urban, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What Is Proper," p. 360.

102. See Hoffman, "Dereliction of Duty Redux?" p. 228; and Feaver, "The Right to Be Right," p. 87.

103. Jeremy Diamond, "How Trump Is Empowering the Military—and Raising Some Eyebrows," CNN, June 26, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/24/politics/trump-pentagon-shift-war-power-military/index.html>.

104. Akela Lacy, "Trump's Thanksgiving Message to Troops: We're Really Winning," *Politico*, November 23, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/11/23/trump-thanksgiving-message-troops-259600>; Paul Bedard, "Trump: Military Beat ISIS Because 'I Let Them Do Their Job,' Didn't Interfere Like Obama," *Washington Examiner*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/trump-military-beat-isis-because-i-let-them-do-their-job-didnt-interfere-like-obama>; and "Trump to Troops: I'm Letting You Do Your Job," *Fox News*, November 24, 2017, video, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/trump-troops-im-letting-job-194954822.html>.

105. John T. Bennett, "Trump's 'Total Authorization' on Military Gives Some 'Deep Concerns,'" *Roll Call*, May 31, 2017, <https://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/trumps-total-authorization-military-gives-deep-concerns>; and W.J. Hennigan and Brian Bennett, "Trump Doesn't Micromanage the Military—but That Could Backfire," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-trump-military-20170602-story.html>.



gating this authority to me with the authority to further delegate it and they've carried it out aggressively."<sup>106</sup> Trump also echoes other themes consistent with Huntingtonian thinking, such as the military's apprehension about timelines and its rejection of the premise that domestic political constraints should bear on the pace or nature of military operations.<sup>107</sup> Many in the military have applauded Trump's actions as a necessary "course correction" that allows them to more aggressively pursue their tactical objectives.<sup>108</sup>

Specifically, the Huntingtonian model is reflected in two aspects of civil-military relations under Trump. The first is the degree to which he has delegated broad authority to military commanders to decide within their chains of command when and how to prosecute military operations.<sup>109</sup> Trump has loosened rules of engagement and otherwise delegated authority for the military to decide those rules in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen,<sup>110</sup> allowing commanders greater leeway than under past presidents to undertake bombing missions, raids, air strikes, and other missions.<sup>111</sup> For example, when describing the delegation of authority in the fight against the Islamic State, Trump stated, "I let the colonels and the majors and the all of them—the captains—that's what they do . . . they do their job. They don't have to call me to get approval to go into battle."<sup>112</sup> Trump has taken other actions to provide military commanders greater authority, such as declaring regions of Yemen and Somalia areas of "active hostilities."<sup>113</sup> He has granted them more autonomy

106. Bennett, "Trump's 'Total Authorization' on Military Gives Some 'Deep Concerns.'"

107. White House, "Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and Syria" (Washington, D.C.: White House, August 21, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/>.

108. Bennett, "Trump's 'Total Authorization' on Military Gives Some 'Deep Concerns.'"

109. Hennigan and Bennett, "Trump Doesn't Micromanage the Military—but That Could Backfire."

110. Geoffrey S. Corn, "The Newly Relaxed Rules of Engagement in Afghanistan and Civilian Casualties" (New York: Just Security, Reiss Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, October 6, 2017), <https://www.justsecurity.org/45680/newly-relaxed-rules-engagement-afghanistan-civilian-casualties/>; and Julian Borger, "U.S. Air Wars under Trump: Increasingly Indiscriminate, Increasingly Opaque," *Guardian*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/23/us-air-wars-trump>.

111. Helene Cooper, "Trump Gives Military New Freedom. But with That Comes Danger," *New York Times*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/us/politics/rules-of-engagement-military-force-mattis.html>; and Max Greenwood, "Trump Gives Commanders New Powers to Order Military Strikes; Report," *The Hill*, March 3, 2017, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/322259-trump-granted-commanders-expanded-authority-to-order-military-action-report>.

112. Bedard, "Trump: Military Beat ISIS Because 'I Let Them Do Their Job,' Didn't Interfere Like Obama."

113. Charlie Savage and Eric Schmitt, "Trump Eases Combat Rules in Somalia Intended to Protect Civilians," *New York Times*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/world/africa/trump-is-said-to-ease-combat-rules-in-somalia-designed-to-protect-civilians.html>.

than prior presidents to undertake kill or capture operations against foot soldiers in militant groups and reduced the need for high-level approval of drone strikes.<sup>114</sup> He reportedly has also given the Pentagon authority to increase troop levels in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, Trump has gone months without talking with his top commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan, instead “keeping with the chain of command.”<sup>116</sup>

A second way in which the Trump administration is following the objective control model is allowing the military a high degree of autonomy over its affairs. An example is the military’s declining transparency about its operational and tactical activities, and internal affairs, enabling the military to self-regulate within domains it deems to be within its professional expertise. One such area concerns how the military tracks its performance in Afghanistan. Beginning in October 2017, the military command in Afghanistan decided to keep secret not only indices related to the effectiveness of local Afghan government security forces, but also casualty figures; this move is significant because training these forces has consumed a large portion of the more than \$120 billion spent on reconstruction through October 2017, and because this effort had been a key facet of Trump’s apparent strategy for ending the war.<sup>117</sup> Also restricted is information about other factors with strategic implications, such as anti-corruption efforts by the Afghan ministry of interior.<sup>118</sup> In addition, the U.S. military command decided in April 2019 that it would no longer undertake regular assessments of the degree to which the Taliban maintains control over the population at the district level, an imperfect indicator, but one that provides a tractable and consistent barometer of the strength of the insurgency.<sup>119</sup> As the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, John Sopko, summarized, “What we are finding is now almost every indicia, metric for success or failure is now classified or nonexistent. Over time it’s been classified or it’s no longer being collected.”<sup>120</sup> The military has claimed variously that the

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114. Charlie Savage and Michael Schmitt, “Trump Poised to Drop Some Limits on Drone Strikes and Commando Raids,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/us/politics/trump-drone-strikes-commando-raids-rules.html>. See also Borger, “U.S. Air Wars under Trump.”

115. Hennigan and Bennett, “Trump Doesn’t Micromanage the Military—but That Could Backfire.”

116. *Ibid.*

117. Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Afghan War Data, Once Public, Is Censored in U.S. Military Report,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/30/world/asia/afghanistan-war-redacted-report.html>.

118. David Zucchino, “U.S. Military Stops Counting How Much of Afghanistan Is Controlled by Taliban,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/01/world/asia/us-afghanistan-territory-taliban.html>.

119. *Ibid.*

120. Katie Bo Williams, “It’s Getting Harder to Track U.S. Progress in Afghanistan,” *Defense One*,

indicators are not useful (despite long providing them), that releasing them publicly undermines national security, or that they duplicate information otherwise available. According to Sopko, however, “The classification in some areas is needless.” Moreover, there has not been an effort to provide alternative metrics or information that was once available. However flawed, such indicators provided the public at least some information about the military’s activity in Afghanistan.<sup>121</sup>

The military has also starkly limited information in other areas, including about its air strikes in Yemen, Somalia, and Libya; deployments of Special Operations forces;<sup>122</sup> and troop levels in places such as Syria and Afghanistan.<sup>123</sup> The Pentagon has sought to prevent officials from the Department of Defense from testifying before Congress, and it has reduced its interactions with the press, in some cases issuing prohibitions against them.<sup>124</sup> The U.S. Navy has classified its accident record and other information.<sup>125</sup> On May 8, 2019, an internal Department of Defense memo placed conditions on when the military could share information about operational plans and orders, for example, mandating that officials provide a “summary briefing” rather than the actual plans or document. Notable is how that move was justified: “A defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to describe military officials’ thinking about the memo, said Pentagon leaders had been concerned about preserving the military chain of command and about the

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April 24, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/news/2019/04/its-getting-harder-track-us-progress-afghanistan/156513/>. The inspector general’s quarterly reports are mandated by Congress to track fraud and abuse in the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan; since 2002, they have been a publicly available means for monitoring territorial and population control by the Taliban and for evaluating efforts to build security forces and address corruption.

121. Loren DeJonge Schulman and Alice Friend, “The Pentagon’s Transparency Problem: Why Accurate Troop Levels Are So Hard to Find,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 2, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2018-05-02/pentagons-transparency-problem>.

122. Luke Hartig and Joshua Geltzer, “An Opportunity for National Security Transparency in the Trump Era” (New York: Just Security, Reiss Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, April 27, 2018), <https://www.justsecurity.org/55454/opportunity-national-security-transparency-trump-era/>.

123. Schulman and Friend, “The Pentagon’s Transparency Problem.”

124. James Stavridis, “It’s Been Over 300 Days since a Pentagon Press Briefing. That Should Concern All Americans—including the Military,” *Time*, April 16, 2019, <https://time.com/5571643/pentagon-press-briefings/>; and Barbara Starr, “Admiral Warns Staff Against Talking Too Freely,” *CNN*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/08/politics/admiral-warns-navy-of-speaking-freely/index.html>.

125. Jason Paladino, “The Navy’s Terrible Accident Record Is Now Hidden from Public View,” *Atlantic*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/10/the-navys-accident-data-is-now-hidden-from-public-view/572461/>; and Ellen Mitchell, “Navy to Stop Announcing Names of Officials Fired for Misconduct,” *The Hill*, May 2, 2018, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/385867-navy-to-stop-announcing-names-of-officials-fired-for-misconduct-report>.

potential for congressional interference in what they consider to be an executive branch function, the formulation of military operations.”<sup>126</sup>

These and other actions by the Trump administration could harm civilian control in at least two ways. The first is by reducing the capacity for the public to hold the military—and ultimately the civilians in charge of it—accountable. Second, civilian control, as defined above, may suffer. Civilian leaders’ reliance on the Huntingtonian model means that the military may prosecute operations consistent with its commanders’ preferences, in a manner potentially discordant with the president’s foreign policy or political preferences. As Alice Hunt Friend puts it, “Operational and tactical level contexts can have incentive structures that are separate from national purposes, and political leaders can lose control of military campaigns if they aren’t proactively evaluating the first-order diplomatic and political purposes of applying force.”<sup>127</sup> One example is how a decline in transparency has enabled misrepresentation or omissions in accounting of facets of the Afghanistan war,<sup>128</sup> potentially creating a more positive view of progress and obscuring the degree to which what is happening on the ground is consistent with Trump’s larger strategic and political objectives to reduce the country’s role in the war.<sup>129</sup>

### *Paradox Three: Furthering Yet Compromising Military Effectiveness*

A third paradox of Huntingtonian norms is that while they promote the skills and expertise of military personnel, and therefore effectiveness in battlefield

126. Missy Ryan and Greg Jaffe, “Internal Memo Orders Military to Restrict Information It Shares with Congress,” *Washington Post*, May 22, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/lawmakers-bristle-at-new-rules-for-sharing-pentagon-information-with-congress/2019/05/21/79315df9-d792-41df-a42e-10df9af7306e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/lawmakers-bristle-at-new-rules-for-sharing-pentagon-information-with-congress/2019/05/21/79315df9-d792-41df-a42e-10df9af7306e_story.html). The memo apparently did not pertain to budgetary or policy issues.

127. Alice Hunt Friend, “‘Micromanagement’ and Military Operational Autonomy” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 22, 2017), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/micromanagement-and-military-operational-autonomy>. See also Andrew J. Bacevich, “Leave It to the Generals: A Nonstrategy for Afghanistan,” *New Republic*, November 8, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/145418/leave-generals>; Micah Zenko, “Does the Military Need a Micromanager?” *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/12/does-the-military-need-a-micromanager/>; Hartig and Geltzer, “An Opportunity for National Security Transparency in the Trump Era”; and Cohen, *Supreme Command*.

128. Rod Nordland, Ash Ngu, and Fahim Abed, “How the U.S. Government Misleads the Public on Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/08/world/asia/us-misleads-on-afghanistan.html>; and Anthony H. Cordesman, “Telling the Truth about the War in Afghanistan” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 12, 2018), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/telling-truth-about-war-afghanistan>.

129. Yochi Dreazen, “Candidate Trump Promised to Stay Out of Foreign Wars. President Trump Is Escalating Them,” *Vox*, August 25, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/8/25/16185936/trump-america-first-afghanistan-war-troops-iraq-generals>.

operations and tactics, they impede the country's overall strategic effectiveness, in four ways.

#### MILITARY ROLES IN STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

First, Huntington's norms exacerbate what Hew Strachan argues is a bias common among military organizations that privileges operational objectives over strategic and political goals.<sup>130</sup> Organizational interests in reducing uncertainty and other factors may contribute to the origins of this bias,<sup>131</sup> but instead of mitigating it, Huntingtonian norms reinforce it.

Second, Huntingtonian norms generate a reluctance among military leaders to engage in debate about factors in strategic assessment that might bear on civilians' policy choices or political objectives. Strategy—or the theory for how to use force to achieve political goals—sits at the intersection of the political and the military spheres. Therefore, the military's role in formulating strategy is ambiguous in the objective control model. To be sure, Huntington recognized that there is an overlap between the two spheres and that a “commander can make a decision on purely military grounds only to discover it has political implications unknown to him.”<sup>132</sup> His solution, however, was for military commanders facing this situation to stand aside and allow political leaders to assume decisionmaking responsibility once such “considerations of policy” become apparent. Huntington was uncompromising in this regard: there are two distinct categories of decisions—political and military—and civilian and military leaders are each responsible for one. As Sarkesian and Connor put it, “It has been an article of faith in the military profession to erect a wall between the military and politics.”<sup>133</sup> This culture induces officers to “cognitively stop at the edge of the military playing field as their culture has encouraged,” rather than seeing themselves as “concurrently responsible with civilian leaders and other agencies to achieve strategic policy ends.”<sup>134</sup>

Third, the transactional advisory style encouraged by Huntington contributes to strategic ineffectiveness. When civilians question options that military leaders provide, or they fail to commit the resources that the military considers necessary for success, Huntingtonian thinking encourages one of two re-

130. Strachan, “Strategy or Alibi?”

131. Carl H. Builder, “Keeping the Strategic Flame,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 76–84; and Tami Davis Biddle, *Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: United States Army War College Press, 2015), p. 47.

132. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 72–73.

133. Sarkesian and Connor, *The U.S. Military Profession into the Twenty-First Century*, p. 167.

134. Rapp, “Ensuring Effective Military Voice,” p. 16.

sponses. First, military leaders simply take the resources provided and operate under civilian-imposed constraints. With the mind-set of “tell us what you want to do and what resources you are willing to commit,” the discussion between civilian policymakers and military leaders devolves to a least-common-denominator analysis of options and resource commitments framed in terms of tactical-level or operational-level commitments. Rather than question civilians about whether their strategic or political goal is achievable, the military works with what it is given, to an uncertain end.

Alternatively, military leaders exert pressure to obtain the resources or policy changes they deem necessary to achieve their operational goals. For example, military commanders may insist that they be provided additional troops for a specific mission, even when that proposed commitment is at odds with the aggregate costs that the public is willing to bear in overseas wars, the coherence of the strategy for the war, or the attainment of civilian leaders’ political objectives in fighting it. Huntingtonian norms, moreover, provide military leaders leverage in their efforts to mobilize U.S. public opinion in support of their plans through, for example, public statements or leaks to the media.<sup>135</sup> Americans seem to have absorbed Huntington’s argument that the military should be given autonomy to run the country’s wars and may be receptive to claims by military leaders that the civilian leadership is violating this principle.<sup>136</sup>

Fourth, Huntingtonian cultural notions can lead to an inadequate sense of ownership among military leaders over the strategic outcomes of their operations. If military leaders offer their advice and civilians do not provide the recommended resources or otherwise heed their recommendations, then military leaders can skirt responsibility for strategic failures.<sup>137</sup> Rather than seeing themselves as mutually accountable for a war’s outcome, military leaders influenced by Huntington norms may contend that civilians lost the war because they did not give the military what it needed to win. Alternatively, if military leaders achieve their mission’s objective, they may count it as a success, whether or not it contributes to achieving larger strategic or political ob-

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135. Brooks, “Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies.”

136. In a 2013 survey, 83 percent of civilians and 76 percent of veterans in the general population believed that “when a country is at war, the President should basically follow the advice of the generals.” Large numbers also agreed that “when force is used, military rather than political goals should determine its application.” See Golby, Cohn, and Feaver, “Thanks for Your Service,” pp. 112, 115, 117.

137. The objective control model may also appeal to military officers, because it focuses blame on civilians’ decisions and shields the military from criticism if the war does not go well. See, for example, the discussion in Hoffman, “Dereliction of Duty *Redux?*” p. 224.

jectives in the war. Military commanders have done what Huntington's norms require of them—applied their expertise to achieve the military goal set before them. Hence, military successes are measured against themselves, not against the larger political or strategic goal that those operations are ostensibly aiming to accomplish. Indeed, military leaders focused on operational and tactical victories may not even seem to absorb strategic failures, as long as metrics on the ground appear favorable.<sup>138</sup> The chasm between political goals and military operations, where strategy resides, widens.

The third paradox is also salient today, for two reasons. First, the Huntingtonian mind-set may be ill suited to the type of wars and military operations in which the United States has recently been engaged and may fight in the future.<sup>139</sup> These involve combating terrorist organizations and insurgencies, as well as confronting peer competitors employing gray-zone tactics, in which nonmilitary measures combine with unconventional tactics in “the space between routine statecraft and open warfare.”<sup>140</sup> Such conflicts involve the comingling of political, strategic, and tactical issues.<sup>141</sup> A model that divides these levels of military activity into discrete categories, such as Huntington's, is therefore ill suited to ensuring strategic effectiveness in these types of conflicts.<sup>142</sup> Second, public opinion surveys and social mobilization by anti-war groups reveal that Americans appear to be increasingly coming to terms with the inconclusive outcomes of the United States' wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>143</sup> Given this public skepticism, it is vital that the diagnoses of

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138. This mind-set may help explain the disconnects in military thinking about the war in Afghanistan present in U.S. government documents obtained by the *Washington Post* in 2019. The documents show that military leaders frequently focused on tactical and operational objectives, while failing to probe whether their successes in those domains were contributing to U.S. strategic and political goals. Craig Whitlock, “At War with the Truth,” *Washington Post*, December 9, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/>.

139. Strachan, “Making Strategy,” pp. 70–71.

140. Quotation in Kathleen Hicks et al., *By Other Means, Part II: U.S. Priorities in the Gray Zone* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019), p. v, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/Hicks\\_GrayZone\\_II\\_full\\_WEB\\_0.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/Hicks_GrayZone_II_full_WEB_0.pdf).

141. C.C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (January 1999), pp. 18–22; and Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

142. John Garofano, “Effective Advice in Decisions for War: Beyond Objective Control,” *Orbis*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 238–254, [doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2008.01.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2008.01.005); and Mackubin Thomas Owens, “Military Officers: Political without Partisanship,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall 2015), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26271520>.

143. Jennifer Steinhauer, “Two Veterans Groups, Left and Right, Join Forces against the Forever Wars,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/16/us/politics/vote-vets-concerned-veterans-america.html>; Ruth Igielnik and Kim Parker, “Majorities of U.S. Veterans, Public Say the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Were Not Worth Fighting” (Washington,

what went wrong in these wars consider how civil-military relations may have influenced their outcomes.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE SOURCES OF STRATEGIC INEFFECTIVENESS TODAY

To illustrate how Huntingtonian norms contribute to the United States' strategic ineffectiveness, I examine the U.S. military's role in President Obama's 2009 review of the war in Afghanistan. My aim is not to provide a complete analysis of the Afghanistan war, but to use analysis of U.S. civil-military relations at this crucial decision point to illustrate how Huntingtonian norms can contribute to politico-strategic disintegration in war.

When Barack Obama assumed the presidency in January 2009, he inherited a dire situation in Afghanistan and faced a pending request by the military to send in more troops. In February, the president approved the deployment of 21,000 additional forces.<sup>144</sup> Following a review undertaken by Bruce Reidel, an expert on counterterrorism, Obama announced on March 27 that his goal in Afghanistan was to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future,"<sup>145</sup> by bolstering the Afghan government and building the country's security forces, so that terrorist organizations could not attack the United States again.

In early June 2009, Obama assigned Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the newly appointed commander of International Security Assistance Force, to undertake a sixty-day assessment of the situation in Afghanistan as part of a broader review of U.S. strategy. On August 31, McChrystal provided the Pentagon with a report that concluded, "Failure to provide adequate resources" for a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in Afghanistan is "likely to result in mission failure."<sup>146</sup> McChrystal called for more troops and ultimately requested 40,000.<sup>147</sup> In late November 2009, at the culmination of the review, the president approved a "surge" of 30,000 troops to be deployed by mid-2010 and to remain until July 2011, when they would start to be withdrawn. The surge had some positive consequences, such as reducing the Taliban's foothold in southern

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D.C.: Pew Research Group, July 10, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/10/majorities-of-u-s-veterans-public-say-the-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan-were-not-worth-fighting/>; and Andrew J. Bacevich, "The Iraq Reckoning Still to Come," *Daily News*, March 19, 2018, <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/iraq-reckoning-article-1.3879224>.

144. Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 236; and Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), pp. 337, 340.

145. Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" (Washington, D.C.: White House, March 27, 2009), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-a-new-strategy-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

146. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 178; and Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 242.

147. Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 242; and Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 177.



Afghanistan, but ultimately contributed little to stabilizing the Afghan state and allowing the Afghan military to take over defending the country's territory. Thus, though perhaps tactically successful, the surge failed to produce enduring strategic or political benefits.

Two aspects of the Huntingtonian mind-set are apparent in how military leaders approached the strategy review, and both help explain the Afghan surge's strategic failings. First, accounts of the events reveal that military leaders focused on the tactical and operational levels of war and tended to subordinate larger strategic considerations to those priorities.<sup>148</sup> From the start of the review, Central Command's commander, Gen. David Petraeus, together with McChrystal and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Adm. Michael Mullen, favored an enhanced counterinsurgency effort against the Taliban.<sup>149</sup> Support for that approach reflected an assumption that reliance on the tactics of population-centric COIN would translate into the emergence of a stable and capable Afghan government.

Discussions in numerous National Security Council meetings in the fall of 2009, however, revealed major obstacles to achieving strategic and political success based on COIN. One central issue raised repeatedly by civilian participants in the review was corruption in the Afghan government, police, and military, and how this impeded the "transfer" problem inherent in COIN—that is, the capacity to transfer responsibility for governance and security to the Afghan state.<sup>150</sup> In addition, participants repeatedly raised concerns both about Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan and about Pakistan's role in providing safe haven to Taliban militants.<sup>151</sup> Accounts of the meetings and review process suggest that U.S. military leaders tended to gloss over these strategic concerns and to focus on how to implement COIN.<sup>152</sup> They assumed,

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148. Strachan, "Strategy or Alibi?" p. 158.

149. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan* (New York: Vintage, 2012), p. 124. See also Ambassador Karl Eikenberry's "detailed rebuttal to [McChrystal's] counterinsurgency strategy" that appears in two memos leaked to the press. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Envoy's Cables Show Worries on Afghan Plans," *New York Times*, January 25, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/26/world/asia/26strategy.html>. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates sided with McChrystal, Petraeus, and Mullen in the debate over COIN. See Gates, *Duty*, pp. 360–361, 375. Note that some members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, such as Marine Corps Commandant James Conway, were concerned about the focus on troop numbers versus the mission. Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, pp. 252–253.

150. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp. 224–225, 229. At the time, U.S. intelligence agencies estimated that approximately 100 members of al-Qaida were in Afghanistan; the rest were in Pakistan. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 126.

151. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp. 167, 212, 231; Gates, *Duty*, p. 371; and Dorani, *America in Afghanistan*, p. 109.

152. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 123–127.

for example, that neither corruption in the Afghan government nor Pakistan's support for militants would be an obstacle if COIN was implemented and the Taliban insurgency weakened.<sup>153</sup>

One example of this bias occurred in a meeting with the NSC principals on October 8, 2009, when McChrystal was asked what he meant by "defeat"—a concept that appears in his report fourteen times in reference to the Taliban.<sup>154</sup> When pressed, McChrystal responded that what he really meant was to "degrade" the Taliban. When asked at the same meeting if the shift from defeat to degrade meant that fewer troops would be needed, McChrystal replied no—he still needed 40,000. The next day, in a full NSC meeting with the president, a small blue box had been added to McChrystal's briefing slide, clarifying that defeat meant that the Taliban could no longer threaten the Afghan government or operate as an effective insurgency.<sup>155</sup> A strategic shift in the goal of U.S. COIN operations—from eliminating the insurgency to eroding the capabilities of the Taliban—was thus seemingly initiated on the fly by McChrystal in response to a query in an NSC meeting.<sup>156</sup>

Comments by Gen. John Nicholson, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, further demonstrate how these strategic considerations seemed to fail to penetrate the military's thinking. Nicholson cited "two illusions" that had limited the military's earlier success: "The first was that U.S. commanders didn't realize just how crucial external support from Pakistan was in allowing an unpopular Taliban insurgency to survive. The second was that commanders didn't understand how corruption was rotting the Afghan security structure the United States was trying to build."<sup>157</sup> These are the same fundamental obstacles to strategic success discussed during Obama's review nearly a decade earlier.<sup>158</sup>

153. Dorani, *America in Afghanistan*, p. 109.

154. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 177.

155. *Ibid.*, p. 216. Subsequently, in an October 26 meeting with the president, Secretary of Defense Gates stated that he disagreed with the military's initial focus on the word "defeat" and that they should change it to "degrade." See *ibid.*, p. 253.

156. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

157. David Ignatius, "Trump's Afghan Strategy Isn't to Win. It's to Avoid Losing," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/trumps-afghanistan-strategy-isnt-to-win-its-to-avoid-losing/2017/08/22/0fc3b5e6-877a-11e7-a94f-3139abce39f5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/trumps-afghanistan-strategy-isnt-to-win-its-to-avoid-losing/2017/08/22/0fc3b5e6-877a-11e7-a94f-3139abce39f5_story.html).

158. Huntington's model also enables a truncated narrative about why the surge failed, which attributes it primarily to the timeline that Obama placed upon the commitment of forces. The military views the imposition of such timelines as an incursion of politics into the domain of operations. See Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 230; and Bryan Bender and Wesley Morgan, "Generals Win Key Fight over Afghanistan They Lost with Obama," *Politico*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/22/trump-generals-afghanistan-241922>. From the military's per-

A second aspect of military leaders' role in the review concerns their response when their advice that the administration commit to a fully resourced COIN approach was challenged.<sup>159</sup> During the review, some in the administration, including Vice President Joseph Biden, favored an alternative known as "counterterrorism-plus," which focused on preventing attacks on the United States (Obama's overarching goal) by going after al-Qaida using special operations forces and drone attacks, with some limited number of additional troops for training Afghan forces.<sup>160</sup> In response to an NSC request to evaluate this option, McChrystal provided a peremptory two-page dismissal of its feasibility, stating that a counterterrorism approach would not work in the absence of a fully committed COIN effort.<sup>161</sup> Gen. James Cartwright, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, nonetheless, developed an option reflecting Biden's view;<sup>162</sup> it involved a hybrid counterinsurgency-counterterrorism approach that would require 10,000–20,000 additional troops.<sup>163</sup> Other members of the military leadership were dubious. "There was a glitch," as one account of the episode reports. "Admiral Mullen despised the hybrid option. He did not want it discussed and debated at the White House. So he barred it from leaving the Pentagon."<sup>164</sup> McChrystal was similarly opposed to the option. In October 2009, during a speech on Afghanistan at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, McChrystal was asked if he would support a plan that focused on hunting down and eliminating al-Qaida militants (Biden's preferred option). He replied, "The short answer is: no."<sup>165</sup>

Other actions taken by military leaders suggest that the military was trying to constrain Obama's choices in favor of the COIN option. After an article by David Ignatius critical of the prospects of COIN appeared in early September in the *Washington Post*,<sup>166</sup> Petraeus contacted Michael Gerson of the *Post*, who

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spective, McChrystal provided the president with a sound plan to weaken the Taliban, but the civilian leadership failed to grant the resources and the time necessary to execute it. Rosa Brooks, "Civil-Military Paradoxes," in Schake and Mattis, *Warriors and Citizens*, pp. 21–68.

159. Dorani, *America in Afghanistan*, p. 107.

160. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 236; and Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 246.

161. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 236; and Dorani, *America in Afghanistan*, p. 107.

162. Biden stated that although he had a strategic concept, he was not a "military guy" and needed a plan. Cartwright reportedly responded, "We'll provide that." Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 244.

163. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 236; and Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 251.

164. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 236; and Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 251. Whereas Mullen was opposed on substantive grounds, Cartwright's decision to go outside the chain of command to work with Biden also rankled the military leadership. See Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 237.

165. Quotation in John F. Burns, "McChrystal Rejects Scaling Down Afghan Military Aims," *New York Times*, October 1, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/02/world/asia/02general.html>.

166. David Ignatius, "A Middle Way on Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, September 2, 2009.

then published an interview with the general in which Petraeus, echoing McChrystal, advocated a “fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign.”<sup>167</sup> Mullen subsequently testified during hearings on his reappointment as Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman that he supported a “properly resourced classically pursued counterinsurgency”;<sup>168</sup> the tenor and language of his comments reinforced the sense that a “military bloc” was pushing COIN.<sup>169</sup> Finally, on September 21 the *Washington Post* published a version of the McChrystal assessment under the headline, “McChrystal: More Forces or Mission Failure,” which, according to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, had been leaked by someone on McChrystal’s staff.<sup>170</sup> As Feaver put it at the time, “The leak makes it harder for President Obama to reject a McChrystal request for additional troops because the assessment so clearly argues for them.”<sup>171</sup>

Finally, there is General McChrystal’s characterization of the 2009 review in a 2019 interview—and how his thinking reflects Huntingtonian norms. McChrystal muses that if he had “been politically smarter in the summer of 2009, I would have done the assessment, I would have the numbers say we need 40,000 more troops and I’m not going to ask for any. I’ll try to do it without. Now what that would have done would be that it would put me in one of those positions where. . . . The numbers say we need more, but I’m not asking for more. I’m not recommending more. We’ll do our best.” Therefore, rather than reconsider whether his COIN-based approach was sustainable or strategically efficacious given the aforementioned constraints, or whether it was aligned with the Obama administration’s overarching counterterrorism goals, McChrystal says he might have just pushed forward with fewer troops than he thought necessary for success.<sup>172</sup>

167. Michael Gerson, “In Afghanistan, No Choice But to Try,” *Washington Post*, September 4, 2009; and Gates, *Duty*, p. 367; Perry, *The Pentagon’s Wars*, p. 245; and Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 157.

168. Perry, *The Pentagon’s Wars*, p. 246.

169. Gates, *Duty*, pp. 365, 367–368. Although offering candid advice in testimony was appropriate, Mullen could have demurred or acknowledged that a policy review was in process. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 173.

170. Bob Woodward, “McChrystal: More Forces or ‘Mission Failure,’” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2009; and Gates, *Duty*, p. 368.

171. Peter Feaver, “Bob Woodward Strikes Again! (McChrystal Assessment Edition),” *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/21/bob-woodward-strikes-again-mcchrystal-assessment-edition/>. Senator Lindsey Graham reportedly told Obama administration officials through back channels that Republicans would support the Afghan strategy “as long as the generals are O.K. and there is a meaningful number” of at least 30,000 troops committed. Peter Baker, “How Obama Came to Plan for ‘Surge’ in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/world/asia/06reconstruct.html>. Obama reflected at one point during the review that he had been pressured by the military to adopt its recommendations. Mullen reportedly replied, “We would never do that.” Perry, *The Pentagon’s Wars*, p. 247.

172. McChrystal, “General Stanley McChrystal on Military Leadership and Policymaking.”

McChrystal goes on to say, "It would have been a shrewder move to not ask for any [troops] but I'm not sure it would have been as intellectually honest as Sam Huntington would want me to be. Because Sam Huntington wants you to measure and tell you how long it is and what you need." He continues, "I kept telling my staff in Afghanistan, 'We don't own this war. This is not our war. We are technicians. We are going to use the Sam Huntington model here.'"<sup>173</sup> McChrystal seems to be arguing that it is not the military's job to care about the larger politico-strategic success of what it is doing on the battlefield. The general's comments thus encapsulate the deficiencies in Huntingtonian thinking, exemplifying Mackubin Owens's conclusion that "this strategic black hole [in the military's thinking] exists largely because the military has focused its professional attention on the apolitical operational level of war, abdicating its role in strategy making."<sup>174</sup>

### Conclusion

Samuel Huntington based his argument about civil-military relations on a simple, but powerful logic: objective control would allow an apolitical professionalism to flourish in the military. This apolitical professionalism would provide both for the military's effectiveness and for its subordination to civilian authority. Huntingtonian norms, however, have more contradictory and, in some ways, negative implications for military professionalism than sometimes appreciated by scholars and practitioners. As I have argued, they can be contrary to the military's apolitical ethos, undermine civilian control, and contribute to strategic ineffectiveness.

It is time for scholars and practitioners to develop a normative framework for military professionalism that is better suited to the contemporary era, focusing on the following three goals.<sup>175</sup> First, the military should develop a comprehensive approach to counter mounting pressures on its nonpartisan ethic.<sup>176</sup> Senior military leaders should also proactively consider what might constitute effective responses to civilian politicians' efforts to draw the military into electoral politics, such as what to do when politicians make partisan comments to military audiences, or use military personnel or resources as props in partisan speeches or events.

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173. See McChrystal, "General Stanley McChrystal on Military Leadership and Policymaking."

174. Owens, "Political without Partisanship," p. 92.

175. Hoffman, "Dereliction of Duty Redux?" p. 234; and Crosbie and Kleykamp, "Fault Lines of the American Military Profession."

176. Urben, "Like, Comment, Retweet," pp. 6–9.

Second, scholars and practitioners should develop a framework that specifies how senior military leaders can participate in advisory processes to enhance the United States' strategic effectiveness in armed conflict. That new approach should promote greater engagement by military leaders with civilian policymakers in considering political objectives and policy-related issues.

Third, and most fundamentally, military leaders should rethink the meaning and scope of what it means for military personnel to be "apolitical," and reconsider how they use that concept to describe the U.S. military.<sup>177</sup> Officers are now taught to inhabit the identity of an austere type of depoliticized professional. But as Morris Janowitz states, professionalism does not "mean being 'above politics' to the point of being unpolitical."<sup>178</sup> Officers need to be politically aware, so that they can distinguish negative and partisan behaviors that are contrary to civilian control from those that are essential to achieving strategic success and ensuring a healthy civil-military relationship. Reconceptualizing the apolitical norm will help prevent the potentially damaging political behaviors facilitated by Huntingtonian norms, while supporting more productive forms of political involvement.

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177. Damon Coletta and Thomas Crosbie, "The Virtues of Military Politics," *Armed Forces & Society*, published ahead of print, September 12, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X19871605>.

178. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 234.