

Civilian Control and Treatment of the Military

The military is a microcosm of American society, drawn from across the spectrum of the country. But the military, even in peacetime, is a distinctly separate culture. The background of discipline, customs and courtesies, esprit de corps separates the military from the American mainstream. The military member knows he came from mainstream America, and considers that his military experience adds to that, setting him apart from those who haven't served. This document will present the ways US civilians treat the military to detriment of combat effectiveness—which in turn undermines our national security.

Political attitudes towards the military

Politicians have a tremendous effect on the military. Political decisions affect the equipment the military receives, the force level they are allowed to have, their pay, and ultimately how they will be employed in the defense of the country. Politicians and political factors usually have no serious connection to how the military might be best used in specific situations. Poor decision making, poor planning, and unintended consequences of poorly thought-out decisions can harm or cripple the military's combat effectiveness – and can cause damage that may take decades to correct.

For example, the Clinton administration inherited the finest, most well trained, best led, best equipped military in the history of the world when it took office. In a few years, disastrous decision making significantly weakened the military. The size of the military was cut nearly in half. What was left was then employed overseas in a record number of combat, humanitarian, peace-keeping and nation-building deployments, overstretching the capacity of the remaining forces. Service members were repeatedly deployed for months at a time away from their families. National Guard and reserve units were activated and deployed overseas to fill the holes, causing more disruption in communities around the country. Pay was frozen, and promotions were very limited. Soldiers, sailors and airmen were working harder and sacrificing more for the same pay with limited chances to move up. Equipment wore out. Spare parts became scarce.

While the military was being dismantled and demoralized, the economy on the outside was roaring, as the technology industries capitalized on the vast potentials unleashed by microprocessors. Retention of experienced servicemen became increasingly difficult. Many of the best and the brightest leaders left and landed six-figure jobs in business and industry. This is what George Bush had to work with in September 2001 and is one reason why the ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan turned from initial victories into military fiascos.

The military exists at the consent of Congress. Congress controls the purse strings, and allocates all the funding for the military. This budget system is fraught with inefficiency and directly jeopardizes our national security. Representatives canvass hard to bring billions of dollars of pork-barrel military projects to their districts; sometimes in the form of weapon system that the military doesn't even want (the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (aka the EFV) and the Surface Launch Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile System (aka the SLAMRAAM) come to mind.

On the other end of the spectrum, military expenditures are a political bargaining chip in a budgetary game played by two parties who have no interest in fiscal responsibility, but are mostly concerned with who can carve the biggest pieces of pork to bolster their re-election chances. Catastrophic cuts in military spending are threatened by the less scrupulous members of Congress to blackmail the more responsible members into giving them what they want. When it's time to cut the budget or pinch pennies, the military has no effective voice in Congress. Pay and promotions are frozen. Spare parts procurements are delayed, making it difficult to repair complex weapons system. All of these have adverse effects on military readiness and ultimately puts our country and citizens at risk.

Civilians using the Military for Diplomacy

These problems are a result of the government leaders' failure to understand how the military operates—or worse willfully not caring as they execute political decisions and attempt to use the military as a diplomatic tool. Since WWII, the military has effectively been an arm of the State Department, a club to be wielded in pursuit of diplomatic objectives. This is to some extent a mistaken application of Theodore Roosevelt's "Walk softly and carry a big stick" policy. Military operations are conducted under diplomatic oversight, which influences everything from battle objectives to rules of engagement. For diplomatic reasons we mustn't annoy the population excessively while we're dropping bombs on them. Consequently, military operations since WWII have generally met with less than stellar results, because the State Department and policy makers in the government don't train with the military and don't understand the tool that they wield.

What the government leaders need to understand is that the nature of the military does not lend itself to precisely controlled application of force to influence the behavior of other nations or interest groups. This is not the way our military is trained to operate, nor is it an especially effective means of conducting diplomacy in the long run. The United States cannot conduct its foreign affairs by holding the threat of military action over the heads of any nation that disagrees with us. The military is like a genie in a bottle. When diplomacy breaks down, it is and must be the last resort, and once released, it must be left alone to run its course, or the result may well be worse than if it were never used. The only effective way to use the military is for the Commander in Chief to notify the Joint Chiefs of what he wants accomplished and when he wants it accomplished. The Chiefs will then determine the necessary forces required to accomplish the mission and present their plan to the Commander in Chief for approval. The Commander in Chief will then request a congressional resolution authorizing the use of the military. Once the green light is given, the military should be left alone to accomplish the mission.

This model worked well in World War II and Desert Storm. In WWII, the Military was given a broad charter: conduct operations as necessary to defeat the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. In Desert Storm, a similar simple mission was defined: Conduct operations as necessary to liberate Kuwait from Iraq.

These missions had clearly stated military objectives, and once the mission was handed to the military, there was little interference from the politicians on how to complete the mission. Such interference wasn't totally absent, however, and a case may be made that WWII in Europe was prolonged by as much as six months because of political decisions when allocating resources among the Allies.

Civilians Treating the Military like a Business

Another example of political meddling took place under the Kennedy administration when Robert McNamara was appointed Secretary of Defense. McNamara was a businessman from the auto industry and was charged to re-shape the military using business practices to make it more efficient. His well-intentioned effort had some merit in various military supply chains, but was attempted in a disastrous fashion. Anyone who has experienced the military bureaucracy recognizes the need for efficiency and cost control improvements. The problem is that doing so using a civilian model doesn't work well in the military. Civilian operations measure their performance by production efficiency, product quality, and cost control. These are easily identifiable metrics that can be directly associated with the bottom line of most any civilian enterprise: to make money and win market share. But the military measures its performance in less tangible ways: combat readiness, deterrence, and military personnel morale and experience. Military strategy and tactics do not lend themselves to easy measurement—for example; a violent engagement with resultant heavy casualties often saves lives in the long run by ending the conflict quickly and decisively. For a further example, we go back to McNamara; the push for status metrics to measure success in Vietnam resulted in the idiotic reporting of enemy body counts—leading commanders to concentrate on killing enemy soldiers to the exclusion of more pertinent military objectives.

The Military and the Media

Civilian support of the military or lack thereof is a cultural phenomenon, which cannot be cured with shallow platitudes. The lip service that the liberal mainstream media pays towards honoring vets rings hollow when their editorial story selection and journalistic tone is so blatantly anti-military. The appropriate treatment of our military servicemen and vets can only come from a deeply seated cultural appreciation of the role of the military, which must be nurtured and protected by the actions of our politicians.

"Men, this stuff that some sources sling around about America wanting out of this war, not wanting to fight, is a crock of bullshit. Americans love to fight, traditionally. . . Americans love a winner. . . Americans will not tolerate a loser. The very idea of losing is hateful to an American." – Gen George S. Patton

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since Patton's words. The US fought a "police action" in Korea to a perceived draw, and a counterinsurgency in Vietnam to a perceived loss. The nation's experience in Vietnam, with the willing aid of an anti-war media, had profound effects on American culture that rippled far beyond the issue of how the military is perceived. Our political leaders, many of whom began their careers on a distinct anti-war platform in the Vietnam era, drew some conclusions from this experience that didn't necessarily reflect reality.

Before Vietnam, journalists had a code of ethics devoted towards reporting 'The facts--just the facts.' Editorializing was considered a separate function and easily identifiable as such. The Fox News', "We report, you decide" was a self-evident motto of any respectable journalist from the WWII era. Historically, this was an anomaly, as journalists have made careers of influencing American opinion for as long as there have been newspapers. In WWII, the nation united behind a common goal for clearly understood reasons and the journalist's job was made easy by reporting the success of our forces at war.

The Korean War had little effect on this journalistic mindset. The war lasted three years, the last two of which were a virtual battlefield stalemate. The level of commitment of the US military involved a much smaller proportion of the American public, so fewer people were interested in the war, which was overshadowed by other serious foreign events. From a journalistic standpoint, Korea really was “The Forgotten War.”

The Vietnam conflict marked a sea-change in the American journalist’s relationship with the military. The history and politics of the region was complicated. The importance of the American involvement in Southeast Asia - though very real - was nebulous to most citizens and not easily articulated. The Johnson administration did little towards selling the war to the American public, and in fact contradicted itself when it stated, “We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.” Then he increased the military presence to a high of 536,000 in 1968. The American public was bewildered by the war and its reasons. This tension reached a breaking point in early 1968 with the Tet offensive, almost exclusively because of an offhand comment from one of America’s most respected journalists, Walter Cronkite, when he stated that “We are mired in stalemate.” History shows this single uninformed statement was totally inaccurate from a military perspective; nevertheless, it marked the shift of public opinion away from the war.

The Nixon strategy to “Vietnamize” the war consisted of stabilizing the military and political situation in Vietnam long enough for the Vietnamese army to be effectively trained and equipped to prosecute the war without the need for American ground forces. This was a long process which stretched the patience of the already disaffected American public. The press turned against the administration, unrealistically demanding an immediate withdrawal of forces from Vietnam. This animosity changed from hostility to outright treason when the New York Times published the Pentagon Papers, a series of classified documents detailing the plans for prosecuting the war. This act of treason directly jeopardized American soldiers, one of the very groups that the NYT claimed to be supporting, by giving the enemy essential information to counteract our plans.

The collapse of South Vietnam, the communist takeover of Cambodia, and the deaths of millions took place because America refused to lift a finger. The world political scene was influenced by the assumption that Americans were pacifist and the corresponding reluctance of American politicians to challenge that assumption. America’s enemies practiced a balancing act of provocation to undermine American interests without provoking the American public to reconsider their pacifism.

Journalism in America has lost sight of the boundary between reporting and editorializing. The two have become indistinguishable, to the point where stories that run counter to the desired perception that the media wants to project never see air time. The sad commentary is that the news branch of Al Jazeera can be seen to be more objective than any American news network. Those who challenge the media’s shaping of public opinion are castigated and publicly destroyed. The culture of political correctness stems from the need to avoid saying anything deemed unpopular by the self-appointed stewards of public opinion. This shaping of American opinion and the resultant political correctness has filtered throughout our culture. Politicians fear challenging the media, who can make them effectively disappear from public notice. Our schools have turned into indoctrination centers where the only history that’s taught is that which promotes the liberal agenda—which includes a loathing for the US military.

Society and PTSD

Shell shock, Battle fatigue, or Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. The terms have changed over the years, but the condition remains the same. Combat is such an intense, terrifying experience that it sears neural pathways in the psyche that are nearly impossible to erase. Victims experience flashbacks to combat, extremes of depression, nightmares, panic attacks, insomnia.

Media sensationalism has capitalized on this until every veteran is considered a ticking time bomb. The plight of the mentally wounded veteran has sparked an outpouring of sympathy and empathy for the victims – which many psychologists suspect is exactly the worst thing that can be done for these people. Part of the condition is that the victim feels separated from society, cut off by his experiences and unable to reintegrate. They find it difficult to relate to the day-to-day details of normal American civilian life because of the enormity of the horror that they experienced. Efforts to sympathize or empathize with the PTSD victim merely confirm their suspicion that they are broken, separate, and unable to live normal lives.

The plight of the PTSD combat veteran is exacerbated by the nature of the wars that we fight in the atomic era, and the inconstancy with which we fight them. The traumatized combat vet from World War II came home victorious to a grateful country. He was sent to school or back to work, and was surrounded by other vets in a similar circumstance. He had a distinct advantage in his healing process by being able to look at the unequivocal victory that had been won, the feeling that the mission had been indisputably accomplished, and recognize that it had been worth it. They knew they had invisible wounds, but they knew those wounds had been received in a just cause, and that the sacrifice had led to victory.

In Vietnam, and most recently the War on Terror, there has been no such victory. Even though the Vietnam conflict achieved a military victory, it was never acknowledged, and was wasted by inconstant political decisions that betrayed our allies, the South Vietnamese. The War on Terror deposed two governments before we realized that the populations of the countries in question were incapable of self-governance, and not worth the blood and treasure expended to give them a freedom they could neither appreciate nor maintain. In both of these conflicts, the wounded – both physically and mentally – ask the legitimate question if their sacrifice was worth it, and the inescapable answer is often no.

Interaction with Civilians

The military experience and culture often causes a certain amount of friction when the military member tries to re-integrate with civilians. This friction is often exacerbated if the veteran has combat experience. He's been to a place that most civilians are simply unequipped to comprehend; further, he did it on behalf of the civilian who are frequently too ignorant to appreciate the veteran's experience and contribution.

Military members face a variety of challenges with civilians, who rarely understand how to act appropriately to a service member. Reactions vary greatly. There is the gushing wannabe who wants to be accepted as an "honorary veteran." There are those who express outright hostility, and regard the serviceman as some sort of Neanderthal from a more primitive time, unacceptable to associate with proper society. There are those who just ignore the military member's service completely. None of these behaviors are appropriate, but they just highlight the gulf between the military and those the military protects.

Publicly, the military member is anonymously used for crass political advantage. He is disparaged by pacifist politicians, denigrated as inferior and unable to make his way in civilian life. His pay and benefits – indeed, his whole quality of life – becomes a political football in federal budget negotiations. He is waved like a flag to show patriotism, yet his every action when under fire is examined through a microscope to find evidence of wrongdoing and criminal behavior. And throughout this hot and cold publicity, he's expected to do his job with enthusiasm, taking the fight to those who would harm our country and manning the defenses of a country that prefers to pretend his services aren't needed.

When you meet a serviceman

Military members are just people, and few appreciate having a fuss made over them. They feel that they've earned a measure of respect for their service and the sacrifices they've made. Unless you've served, they feel you cannot comprehend their experience, and shouldn't try. A simple "Thank you" is sufficient to acknowledge a person's service. Unless you've been there, you have no idea how much a simple "welcome home!" will mean to a returning serviceman. It's appropriate to call out service members and veterans in public forums for recognition, as long as it's brief and respectful. The rule of thumb is that it's appropriate to acknowledge a person's service respectfully, but otherwise treat them as anybody else.

It's never appropriate to berate a serviceman for his service. If you object to the war, your problem is with the political machine that started the war, not with those who followed the orders and went to fight it. This was especially true during Vietnam, when many servicemen who were spat on and booed had been drafted and chose to serve, instead of running to Canada or becoming a perpetual student to avoid the draft.

Proposed solutions

To counter all that is described in this document; American culture must be returned to the basics, rooted in civics education. The military must be recognized as a facet of American society for which every American citizen bears the responsibility, not a separate, distinct, and sometimes menacing entity. If the public is properly educated in history and civics, the natural and proper respect for the role of the military in American society – both among the general public and the politicians who make the decisions about employing the military – will be realized as a natural result.

The politically correct atmosphere of our culture has turned its back on the military. Military recruiters are turned away from speaking at schools because school administrators object to the idea of anyone serving in the military. This sort of behavior is unconscionable, and should be grounds for a school to lose its accreditation. How can our young people make an informed decision about a possible career in the military, much less understand the military, if their educators actively discourage them from having any contact with the military?

School students should put aside the ephemeral "social studies" courses which teach nebulous, morally relativistic topics of no real consequence or interest, and replace them with a more rigorous curriculum of civics and American History. American History courses as taught today are mind-numbing discourses on the development of progressive ideology in American History, and spend very little time on the reasons and results

of the frequent and historic use – and misuse - of our military. This is a great disservice to the military, and to the citizens of the country.

For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Chuck him out, the brute!"

But it's "Savior of 'is country" when the guns begin to shoot;

-Rudyard Kipling, *Tommy*

MilitaryValues.org Principles and Mission

The content of these topical white papers from MilitaryValues.org is aligned with the organization's principles and mission statement. At the core is the protection of America and the founding principles—mainly summarized by freedom and liberty for citizens and a federal government with limited and enumerated powers. All of this is made abundantly clear in our Constitution and the founder's many writings .The US military's role to protect this is made very clear by the oath that is taken by military officers today:

"I, [name], do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God."

For details on the MilitaryValues.org principles and mission statement go to www.MilitaryValues.org.

About MilitaryValues.org

The effectiveness of the United States military has been significantly compromised over the last 20 years by social engineering and politically driven decisions. This is especially true and serious with military units that face front line combat duties. In stark terms, this problem has unnecessarily cost the lives of our front line men and women—while many more suffer various combat-related physical and mental traumas. And there are untold tangents of pain and loss suffered by families, fellow soldiers, and others.

Combat units, and those that support them, greatly benefit from a culture in which there is a focus of effectively prosecuting missions and wars—and rejects unnecessary risk to the military personnel. This culture creates trust and increases effectiveness and loyalty—which is truly critical for the best shot at success in the complex and dangerous endeavor called combat. However on the other hand, if a military is constantly beat down by forces that do not care about its well-being—then a culture of distrust, failure, and despair will increasingly result. This second culture is what we have today in America's military.

MilitaryValues.org exists to educate millions of citizens on what has gone wrong and how it can be reversed. We hope you will continue to our website and learn more!