

Keeping Integrity

By LEON A. EDNEY

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Honor guard marches into position at Tomb of the Unknowns, Arlington National Cemetery

The best way to voice disagreement in policy or strategy, for an Active-duty officer, is during the formulation stage before execution. The President of the United States and Secretary of Defense are the two most senior civilians in the military chain of command. One level below that are the Service secretaries.

Officers are expected, most would say required, to support the administration's policies and budgets when testifying before Congress as well as in a dialogue with the public. However, when officers are asked their opinions by a Member of Congress, while testifying before that body, they should give their best professional military judgment. That may or may not agree with the administration's position. In my experience, it is not difficult to get key staffers to have their principal ask the type of questions needed to get a point across.

The perception that senior Active-duty officers have to give up their integrity during this process is nonsense. These occasions normally address budget, military readiness, personnel, or key procurement issues. It is also clear that the press will seek officers out, if they voice an opinion that is counter to the current strategy of the administration. In my experience, all decisions made by the

Secretary of Defense that require a National Security Council or Presidential input have political and monetary considerations.

The National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and National Military Strategy are all thoroughly staffed. Each Service Chief and Combatant Commander has plenty of chances to get their views presented, as well as any disagreements. This is the proper time to influence these policies and strategies. These are broad statements and usually do not generate redline opposition. Disagreements of this nature are more likely to arise during a declining budget environment when officers are losing a procurement program that they believe is essential to them, or during the grand strategy for employment of military forces during periods of conflict, or in the personal accountability held for certain failures.

Once a disagreement is voiced in staffing, and the decision is made by civilian leaders not to address military concerns, an officer's only options are to comply, resign, or retire. Several examples from the more recent past may be helpful.

General Ronald Fogleman chose to resign/retire 1 year before his normal tour as Chief of Staff of the Air Force was completed. General Fogleman took this action

because he had concluded that his advice to the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of the Air Force on key issues that were important to him and to the Air Force was no longer being accepted.

What were these issues? General Fogleman believed that year's Quadrennial Defense Review did not properly represent Air Force requirements for air superiority out into the future. Consequently, the number of F-22s in the budget was inadequate in his judgment. His recommendation to court-martial Lieutenant Kelly Flinn after lying about a relationship was disapproved by the Secretary of the Air Force. Major General Terryl Schwalier's promotion was denied as a result of the Khobar Towers incident. These were not light issues. When an officer gets to this position, he will have similar situations, and only he can make the choice.

During the first 4 years of the Iraq War, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld repeatedly stated if the commanders in the field wanted more troops, they could have them. The public assumption was that no senior generals on Active duty, in Iraq or Afghanistan, other than General Eric Shinseki officially stated the need for or requested more forces to stabilize Iraq after Saddam was removed. General Shinseki was literally hung out to dry by Secretary Rumsfeld when



President meets with security advisors in White House Situation Room

White House (Pete Souza)

his replacement was announced 18 months early. The general was transforming the Army well before that word became dramatized by Secretary Rumsfeld. He developed the Stryker Brigade concept of fast, lighter wheeled vehicles and the Future Combat Systems program. He took the embarrassment of the Secretary's disapproval in order to guide these significant changes for the future of the Army. He is a good man.

Major General John Batiste turned down a third star and the opportunity to return to Iraq for the second time because he disagreed with the strategy and under-resourcing for the Iraq War.

Admiral William J. "Fox" Fallon, as commander of U.S. Central Command, privately (as is appropriate) voiced his objections to the President concerning any military solution to the Iranian nuclear program and also to a surge in Iraq. He then shared these thoughts with a reporter traveling with him. He thought it was an off-the-record discussion. The subsequent media coverage of an actual or perceived disagreement between Admiral Fallon and the President led to his resignation/retirement. We can never let our hair down.

General James Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, recently testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and

stated publicly that the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was inappropriate while his Marines were engaged in war. General Amos also testified that if the law was changed, he would salute and that the Marines would execute the law smartly. The Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had publicly endorsed the repeal before General Amos's testimony. Admiral Mullen publicly rebuked General Amos for stating his opinion before the analysis of a Defense-wide survey on the subject was completed.

Concerning public disagreement with national security issues after leaving the Service, clearly each individual has the freedom to do that. Some officers such as General Wes Clark and Rear Admiral Joe Sestak chose to enter politics directly and run for public office under one political party or the other. I support these endeavors, no matter which party they represent. I do not believe that retired military officers not running for or in public office should call for the resignation of a sitting Secretary of Defense. As career military officers, we have all worked for superiors we liked. We also have worked for those who are opinionated and seemingly arrogant. The so-called revolt of the *retired* generals probably resulted in Mr. Rumsfeld remaining in office 4 to 6 months longer. Although Secretary Rumsfeld had

become a lightning rod, President George W. Bush was not going to accept his resignation at the call of these generals, particularly during a midterm election. It would have been an exceedingly bad precedent. His resignation was accepted immediately after the election.

My concerns on this issue are twofold. These public statements from senior retired military officers, particularly those who served and had commands in Iraq or Afghanistan, add stress to the families and loved ones of those serving in those wars and particularly those who have lost loved ones. These types of actions contribute to the politicization of the military, which has been increasing, in my judgment, since the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. This politicization could lead to seeking a litmus test on sensitive political issues when promoting general officers to the ranks of three and four stars.

The military as an institution must remain apolitical. What these examples demonstrate is that there are no two similar issues. As senior military officers, we have to understand the process of military-civilian interaction as well as interaction with the press. There is no time off the record. However, we can maintain our integrity, act within our own personal convictions, and do what is right. **JFQ**