

General Martin E. Dempsey, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, center, listens to briefing from U.S. and Afghan special operations forces at Camp Morehead, Afghanistan, April 23, 2012 (DOD/D. Myles Cullen)



Preparing Senior Officers and Their Counterparts for Interagency National Security Decisionmaking

By Joseph J. Collins

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One of the most essential areas of civil-military relations is the cooperation among senior military officers, Cabinet officers, and the President to make national security decisions. It is also one of the most problematic. In 2015, a team

from National Defense University's (NDU's) Institute for National Strategic Studies was tasked to analyze the strategic lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹ In many cases, the authors found senior military officers, their civilian counterparts, and even the President in dysfunctional struggles. Friction, misunderstanding, and trust deficits ruled, often resulting in a "broken dialogue."²

Friction in civil-military decisionmaking is not always dysfunctional, so the aim here is not to stop or even lessen friction, but simply to analyze some ways in which educators and executives can further understanding between senior military officers and their civilian counterparts. In the end, America will be better off if uniformed officers know more about interagency decisionmaking and their civilian colleagues understand more about the military and how it is schooled. The answer to the problems at hand is education writ large, but the critical part will be in determining how, when, and where this education takes place.

At the highest levels of the Department of Defense (DOD) and in the White House, politics, policy, strategy, and often military operations come together like strands of the same rope. Players in this drama can be nonpartisan, but no one is apolitical.³ At the highest levels, everything is political. Generals must be generals, first and foremost, but simultaneously they must also be statesmen.⁴ At the same time, senior civilian decisionmakers must be current on military-related issues.

Defense decisionmaking is already contentious well before it gets to the interagency community and the situation room of the White House. Not only are generals and admirals notoriously strong-willed personalities, but there are inter-Service rivalries as well as problems among the "communities" inside the Services, between forces at home and those abroad, and between the urgent concerns of the present and the important demands of the future. Procurement fights with research and development, and current operations compete with readiness spending. Somehow, the

Pentagon brings order to this chaos and participates in the interagency national security battle with both civilian and military officials at multiple levels of the National Security Council (NSC) process. In my experience, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or their deputies typically come to the White House with a single position, but disputes within the Pentagon may occasionally complicate decisions across the river.

Contentious interagency disputes often break out into the media, which is always hungry for stories of bureaucratic infighting. Worse than adverse publicity, excessive friction can cause suboptimal decisions, sowing mistrust between Cabinet departments and the Executive Office. In matters of war and peace, vast amounts of resources and thousands of lives are also at risk. Bad decisions can result in casualties, which undoubtedly constitute the greatest incentive for making improvements to decisionmaking.

Some Case Illustrations

A wide variety of cases demonstrate where interagency national security decisions took a bad (or unusual) turn. The decision to invade Iraq was one example where the uniformed military resisted (partly successfully) attempts by Donald Rumsfeld, an activist Secretary of Defense, to use a small, lean ground force. At the same time, the military and our diplomats did an inadequate job both on post-conflict planning and, later, on adapting to what became a counterinsurgency campaign. On the civil side, national goal selection was faulty, and dissident experts in the State Department and at the Central Intelligence Agency did not receive a fair hearing. Intelligence was hyped by some in the civilian leadership for political gain.⁵

In the Iraq War Surge decision, President George W. Bush overruled his military and defense advisors, sought military advice outside the chain of command, and decided on a military and diplomatic surge that was highly successful for the next few years: The Surge dampened societal violence in Iraq

and set conditions for the withdrawal of coalition combat forces. The policy was a success, but the contribution by the Joint Chiefs and the generals in theater was neither imaginative nor decisive. It would be easy to see this lack of contribution as a failure on the part of military leadership, but one experienced strategist who served on the NSC staff at that time stated,

A fair rendering of this episode might conclude that at bottom, the system worked as it should. For his part, President Bush was careful to solicit the views and inputs of his most senior military and civilian advisors and weighed them carefully. . . . Yet he also went outside the circle of formal advisors to ensure that all points of view were brought forward. . . . Against strong opposition in Congress and much criticism in the media, he displayed a persistence and determination that proved most helpful to the theater commander and chief of mission charged with implementing his strategy. . . . By any standard, and the ultimate outcome in Iraq notwithstanding, this decision and its implementation must stand as a high point in President Bush's administration and a successful example of civil-military interaction.⁶

In the Barack Obama administration, there was no such good fortune. The 5-month run-up to the decision for a surge in Afghanistan was fraught with civil-military tensions in a contentious, drawn-out decisionmaking process, where the President felt boxed in and ill-served by his military advisors.⁷ This problem was compounded by an unfortunate breach of military decorum that resulted in the relief of a talented commander, General Stanley McChrystal, just as the surge was starting. His successor, General David Petraeus, at the end of his tour as commander in Afghanistan had the unpleasant experience of having his troop-level recommendations overturned by a President eager to reduce U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The Obama administration ultimately reduced U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan from 100,000 men and women in uniform in 2011 to 8,400 by the end of the second term, some 5 years later.⁸



General Stanley McChrystal, commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and General David Petraeus, commander, U.S. Central Command, at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, during Operation *Enduring Freedom*, October 29, 2009 (DOD/Bradley A. Lail)

The Donald Trump administration began with the anomalous condition of a recently retired general being appointed Secretary of Defense. With a very close relationship between Secretary of Defense James Mattis and General Joseph Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a former subordinate commander of then-Major General Mattis, some observers believed that civilian experts in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy lost much influence in DOD decisionmaking.⁹ As time progressed, friction increased between the Secretary, who closely guarded his Department's prerogatives, and an often impetuous and impatient President.¹⁰

In December 2018, the Secretary of Defense resigned in the face of a surprise decision by President Trump to withdraw U.S. troops in Syria.¹¹ Eight months later, the President executed that decision,

which precipitated the abandonment of our Kurdish allies and a Turkish invasion. The fate of the so-called Islamic State hangs in the balance, as does the fate of democratic insurgents and the continuing safety of a small U.S. stay-behind detachment in Syria.

President Trump disdains long meetings and formal briefings; as a result, the complex, multilevel national security decisionmaking process that inspired this article has been hobbled in his administration. Hopefully, it will one day rise and regain its past effectiveness. Contentious and plodding as that complex, time-consuming process may be, it is essential to effective national security policy.

The remainder of this article focuses first on the general sources of civil-military friction and how DOD and others can shape the managerial and educational enterprises to help keep friction at an appropriate level.

Sources of Civil-Military Friction

Many factors come into play to create civil-military friction in the interagency decisionmaking process. First, we have a Constitution that features separation of powers and checks and balances.¹² A quick review of Articles 1 and 2 shows that the commander in chief is not the only powerful player in national security affairs. In addition to the mighty power of the purse, Congress's Article 1, Section 8 powers—to raise and support armies, to provide and maintain a Navy, and to “make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces”—ensure that every Cabinet officer looks over his or her shoulder toward Capitol Hill when making every key decision.¹³

Even the simplest things in national security affairs are subject to a vast set of laws. While Congress often bows to the Executive Office in national security

affairs, the Constitution and national security law frustrate and complicate streamlined, top-down decisionmaking—even in crisis moments. The Constitution is rarely center stage in the situation room, but it always lurks in the background, affecting the position and behavior of many of the players in the drama. Again, in the first 2 years of the Trump administration, congressional resistance to the executive branch in national security affairs was generally low but not nonexistent. Indeed, the Turkish invasion of Syria and the impeachment of President Trump may in the next few years breathe new life into the legislative check on foreign policy.

A second factor is the contending approaches to civil control of the military. Many scholars (and war college students) argue the merits and vitality of Samuel Huntington's objective control, which assigns policy to civilian leaders and offers the military freedom of action in plans and operations. This stands in contradistinction to the modern "hands-on" notion, associated with Eliot Cohen, dean of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, which features tighter civilian control, intense management by questioning, and an "unequal dialogue" where the President (or the Secretary of Defense) reserves the right to get down into the weeds of the planning and execution of military operations.¹⁴

The merits of each theory may matter less to an individual case than to the policymaking style of the President or his/her Cabinet officers. These officials may be unfamiliar with Huntington or Cohen, but they bring to the table differing management styles from their past lives. Some, like Donald Rumsfeld, prefer hands-on, detailed management, while others favor more delegation of authority or even an approach akin to mission command. Another key factor here will be the agility of the military in adapting to the style of civilian control in a given case. Past events suggest that the start of a new administration can create a difficult transition for a sometimes tone-deaf military. Conversely, new civilian leadership teams

are often ill-informed about past decisions and not aware of the costs incurred in changing policies. Ignorance about the military and the art of the possible is commonplace, as are steep learning curves about the chain of command.

In any case, the President and the Secretary of Defense will determine where the line is drawn between Executive prerogative and military freedom of action. There have been great successes and failures in the various styles, but in every case the President retains the right to be wrong (or right) and to use the unequal dialogue as he or she sees fit.¹⁵

Third, there are cultural differences. A Council on Foreign Relations team comprised of Janine Davidson, Emerson Brooking, and Benjamin Fernandes wrote:

*Career military personnel now exist in a world apart from 99.5 percent of American society: they go to different schools, live and work in a specialized system of promotions and deployments, and often belong to successive generations of the same families. While subordinate to civilian leaders, military leaders are taught that their professional judgment should be respected once the fighting starts.*¹⁶

At the highest levels of decisionmaking, civilian counterparts often go to more prestigious schools, have advanced degrees, and know more about foreign affairs, but they have little knowledge of day-to-day life in the military, of how military planning works, or of military capabilities in general. While they often respect military professionals in their role of the management of violence, they often see military leaders as doctrinaire or narrowly focused. For example, Douglas Feith, a former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, opined,

Military officers are ill-prepared to contribute to high policy. Normal career patterns do not look toward such a role. . . . Half-hearted attempts at irregular intervals in an officer's career to introduce him to questions of international politics produce only superficiality and presumption and an

*altogether deficient sense of real complexity of the problems facing the nation.*¹⁷

President John Kennedy, like Carl von Clausewitz, expected a lot from his senior-most generals. Disappointed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's performance in the run-up to the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy instructed the Nation's top military officers:

*While I look to the Chiefs to present the military factor without reserve or hesitation, I regard them to be more than military men and expect their help in fitting military requirements into the overall context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in Government is to combine all assets in a unified effective pattern.*¹⁸

Sadly, under President Lyndon Johnson, with active interference by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the Chiefs failed to live up to Kennedy's charge to give effective advice.¹⁹

Compounding the collision of new players with differing cultures is the inherent uncertainty of national security affairs. Clausewitz wrote that "war is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty."²⁰ This high level of uncertainty carries over into national security decisionmaking in war and peace.

Military planning data often comes from doctrine and past experiences. Military staffs can recommend and analyze, but they can rarely prove their positions, which are often accompanied by complex assumptions. Political opponents can and will poke holes in even the best available analysis. From time to time, even the greatest generals may be flummoxed by the sharp questioning of civilian staffers. In NSC deliberations, generals soon learn that they are no longer in the realm where proper tactics is the opinion of the senior officer present.

Fourth, major differences in scope of authority can create friction. DOD representatives speak for more than 3 million people and control a budget far in excess of \$740 billion per year, but

those responsibilities pale in the face of Presidential authority and the entire Federal Government budget. The leader of a political party, the Nation, and the free world may well have different perspectives from civilian and uniformed DOD officials trying to contribute to the solution of a national security problem. DOD pays little attention to the fiscal needs of the Nation. Future Presidents, weighed down by the national debt and growing entitlement spending, can be forgiven for wincing when DOD officials again (and again) call for 5 percent real growth per year.²¹

Fifth, and certainly related to the previous factors, are the different ways to make decisions. The military is wedded to an objectives-based, deliberate decisionmaking process that is taught to junior officers and utilized by staffs in ascending levels of complexity at every echelon of command. It is at its heart a commander-directed process and unlike participative decisionmaking in civilian enterprise. This process is organic to military men and women, essentially tattooed onto their collective consciousness. It features mission analysis, course of action development, analysis, comparison, and approval. Relentlessly logical, it is focused on an objective or endstate.

Generals are often surprised that civilians do not follow this system. General Martin Dempsey, the 18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, felt that he had to learn an alien system to the one he grew up in. He noted an influential article by Janine Davidson that described how military and political leaders talk past one another.²² In preparation for his duties, he studied Bob Woodward's book *Obama's Wars* to get firsthand knowledge of the ins and outs of civilian argumentation and decisionmaking. He concluded that civilians and military officials are "just hardwired differently." He said in an interview in 2015,

In the military culture . . . 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.*²³

The Chairman concluded that the military has to adapt to the civilian system, not vice versa. Dempsey observed that, rather than the Chairman or even the President playing a commander's deciding role, "the person at the table with the most persuasive argument tends to prevail in those environments."²⁴

In any case, the tension between civilian and military participants in the interagency community can get tense and result in a "broken dialogue." Rosa Brooks wrote about one case in which the military appeared to stonewall a potential operation in Africa:

*The White House staff members considered their military counterparts rigid, reductionist, and unimaginative. At worst, they were convinced that the Pentagon was just being difficult—that the military didn't care about Sudan. [The military representatives] were equally exasperated. What was wrong with these civilians? Didn't they know what they wanted? [Didn't they realize that such a large operation] required greater specificity in terms of assumptions, constraints, and desired end states?*²⁵

Indeed, the military interlocutors in Brooks's example had a point. As then-Brigadier General Bill Hix noted, there are "simple laws of physics" in military planning.²⁶ It tends toward the slow and ponderous because at the end of it, people's lives will be on the line and huge amounts of fiscal resources may be in play. Not just time and space, but logistics, force availability, and the detailed planning process and course of action evaluation all come into play.

Option development is not brainstorming. Courses of action are thoroughly evaluated for suitability (Will it get the job done?), feasibility (Do we

have the wherewithal to carry it off?), and acceptability (Will the option be accepted by the people and allies?).²⁷ DOD can be reluctant to offer options that have not been vetted or do not meet those tests. Dempsey said that the task must be proportional to the force required: "We will not ask a brigade to do a division's worth of work."²⁸ Still, he would insist that a set of creative options cannot be limited to the size of the force involved, a lesson that DOD has hopefully absorbed after the problems in military input to the Obama administration's planning of the surge in Afghanistan.

Finally, there is the issue of trust. The Nation's top decisionmakers—the President, the NSC, and the members of the principals and deputies committee—are teams that must function on high degrees of trust and understanding, which does not come easy with such disparate groups. Trust, understanding, and empathy take time and effort to develop. Couched as advice to his successor, Dempsey said that "you have to demonstrate a certain gravitas. You have to be able to have a conversation about grand strategy, not just military strategy." He characterized as "job number one in terms of being influential inside decisionmaking boardrooms [is] that relationships matter most of all. If you can't develop a relationship of trust and credibility . . . then you won't be successful in contributing to our national security strategy."²⁹

By way of summary, the most significant problems fall under the heading of a lack of knowledge and misunderstanding. Civilians do not understand the requirements of military decisionmaking and the physics of the process, while military officers are unfamiliar with civilian decisionmaking and may well have the tunnel vision that comes with an expertise honed over three decades of being surrounded by experts and comrades in the same field. Compounding the "fixable" problems is the fact that we are all human. Senior civilians and generals face high standards and often do not meet them. National security decisionmaking will never be easy, but it can be better.



Peshmerga soldier discusses day's mobile checkpoint training with fellow soldiers at Black Tigers Training Camp, Iraq, January 19, 2017, as part of Combined Joint Task Force—Operation *Inherent Resolve* (U.S. Army/Josephine Carlson)

Improving National Security Decisionmaking

Some of the factors that impede decisionmaking are hard to fix. The Constitution will remain as it is. The essential theories of civil-military relations are generally set. Executive decisionmaking in national security affairs will continue to vary according to law, personality, and style. Executives who favor delegation will succeed micromanagers, and vice versa. Presidents will have broader and more differentiated views than those of generals or Secretaries of Defense. Cabinet officers will also carry organizational water. Decisionmaking among civilians will not resemble military decisionmaking processes. The personalities and mental agility of civilian and military participants in the inter-agency national security decisionmaking

process will be neither better nor worse than those in the past: The situational variables and personalities will change, but education in the broadest sense of the word can increase understanding among all participants.

There are no silver bullets or cookie-cutter lessons here. Military and civilian participants must ultimately learn from history. As Henry Kissinger wrote, “History teaches by analogy, shedding light on the likely consequences of comparable situations.”³⁰ It is a delicate process that offers no guarantees. The only insurance you can buy is to know many “comparable situations” over long periods of time. For civilians and military participants in decisionmaking at the highest level, there is no substitute for reading widely and studying deeply. This applies to all senior officials, military and civilian alike.³¹

At the top of our national security establishment, especially in the early days of a new administration, there may be greater ignorance and less empathy than one might hope. At the highest levels, more experienced civilian players could help, but, sadly, the electorate’s demand for many years of on-the-job experience and demonstrated competence at senior-level jobs appears to be very low. Our last three Presidents at the start of their terms have all been national security neophytes, and their experience in national-level affairs ranged from “a bit” to “none at all.”

We can do a better job of preparing senior military officers, too many of whom have been groomed only for senior tactical billets such as division, naval, or wing battle group commands. Senior generals complain of their “weak bench” for strategic affairs and that they had a general officer corps with too many



Sailor assigned to Assault Craft Unit 5 watches over departure of Landing Craft Air Cushion from Red Beach in preparation for San Francisco Fleet Week, featuring unique training and education program that brings together civilian and military forces, September 27, 2018 (U.S. Marine Corps/Jacob Farbo)

officers fixated on gaining division command.³² Command at the tactical level in all Services is the path to general or flag rank. Talent managers and promotion boards can fix this over time, but institutional resistance will be fierce; generals tend to choose future generals in their image and likeness.

For the senior-most military officers and the field grade officers who support them, civilian graduate education is an important foundation for strategic decisionmaking. It would be helpful for all the Services if more senior officers had graduate degrees in economics, international relations, history, or any other relevant discipline. It is even more important for each of the Services and combatant commands to ensure that assigned field and senior officers and senior noncommissioned officers become lifelong learners. All too often, new war college students reveal that their last

serious study or reflection took place a decade ago, when they were in staff college. If unit or ship life is an intellectual wasteland, the best staff or war college will be frustrated and its educational efforts will go unreinforced.

In an interview with the author, Petraeus recommended that future chiefs, combatant commanders, and theater commanders be groomed through graduate education as well as key assignments (executive officer to a combatant commander, a Service chief of staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, J5s, and so on) that will enable them to act as understudies during the current leadership and witness how decisions are made. He said, “Those key assignments really matter. They are the vantage points which give you the experience to develop . . . the guiding principles and ideas that help you when you’re under stress in tough situations with imperfect information.”

Petraeus also recommended experiences such as internships, term membership in the Council on Foreign Relations, or teaching at West Point to create “entrée effects” for future senior officers to interact with public intellectuals, senior officials, and Members of Congress.³³

In the end, we want officers who can balance the roles of warfighting and national security decisionmaking. Petraeus believed that field or theater commanders must

Have the skills to be both statesman and general. As a commander, he has to be a warfighter. He has to have confidence in that. . . . You cannot do that as on the job training. . . . Having said that, there is no question that the individual also has to have the skills of a statesman. . . . The [field or theater] commander has to focus on providing military advice based on the facts on the ground . . . and informed by

*an awareness of the realities with which the President has to deal. . . . If one allows political considerations to drive a recommendation, I think you erode the integrity of military advice.*³⁴

Petraeus saluted the Army's strategist program but observed that most of its participants will serve only to the rank of colonel. He believed that it is more important to have generals who are both competent field commanders and strategists. Right now, we have many excellent field commanders, but we severely lack senior officer strategists. So where should we focus our educational institutions?

We have to avoid the temptation to recommend the restructuring of American higher education. It would be lovely if every holder of a bachelor's degree had a fulsome understanding of history, geography, economics, and national security affairs, but that is not the case. What we can do is to focus on educating key members of the attentive public and then design publications, exercises, and simulations for those who may soon become officials.

There are some indirect, long-term, and specific measures that could have immediate utility and are worth considering. In the long term, to make better, more strategically minded generals, we should start with smarter, better educated lieutenants. The Armed Forces should examine how they teach what the Army calls tactics, operations, and strategy. In most training, tactics (and techniques and procedures) occupies the first decade of Service. Staff college introduces the officer to higher level staff work and takes the officer beyond the ship, the squadron, and the brigade level into higher echelons of command. For ground officers, the upper limit of that progression usually focuses at the Corps/Marine Expeditionary Force level. At each of these first two levels, and especially at staff college, there are excursions to strategy, the direction of higher units, and Service roles and missions.

Rather than seeing tactics, operations, and strategy as different stops in a linear program, we should approach curriculum planning by thinking of them as a nesting doll, like the Russian *matryoshka*

dolls—with tactics embedded within major operations, and operations in a theater embedded in a strategy that, in turn, is embedded in a national effort.

To see the whole “doll,” the cadet, the lieutenant, and the captain should know more about the operations and strategy that drive their immediate tactical missions. This would not only contribute to more fulsome learning about strategic affairs but also further mission command. By the time an officer is a company or battalion/squadron/ship commander, he or she should know the intent and plan of his or her four-star commander and have a basic understanding of military and defense strategy. Corps/fleet/numbered Air Force staff should understand the national intent and the role that their force and the theater plays in an entire conflict. They should be masters of strategy who understand the national security strategy and their unit's role in it.

Today, strategic affairs dominate the war colleges, with the Service war colleges focused on military strategy and the NDU colleges focused on national security strategy. Students—military and civilian—often arrive with a deficient knowledge of strategy development as well as many of the contextual factors that are well known to economists, political scientists, and experts in international affairs or the history thereof.

For the future, the Nation's war colleges—whose graduates become ambassadors, generals, and the officers who support them—should pay more attention to national security and interagency decisionmaking. The war colleges need to assess their efforts at understanding national security strategy and deliberations at the highest levels. All the war colleges must have a goal to prepare future colonels and generals to design and command the military aspects of a theater campaign, but they should also be able to shape the strategic plans needed for interagency decisionmaking. Focused instruction on the dynamics of decisionmaking and its pitfalls, such as groupthink, should begin in staff college and accelerate in the war colleges. War college students should learn from numerous cases of interagency national security decisionmaking.³⁵

The colleges need to do more outreach with local universities and organizations, such as the Council on Foreign Relations. Two worthwhile efforts would be to share case studies on important decisions and then conduct simulations with civilian and military students. The end-of-year exercises, common to war colleges, could include local colleges and graduate schools in the exercise play.

Closer to the Washington cockpit, NDU and its colleges could institute certificate programs for future (or serving) national security officials in decisionmaking, strategy, joint doctrine, and force development. Empty seats could go to local junior officers eager to improve their strategic knowledge. NDU once had a master's degree program for non-DOD government civilians, but it became too expensive to maintain. Extra funding for NDU and the other colleges would be necessary to restart this effort. Although NDU should be expanding its remit, it seems to be continually hamstrung by a lack of resources; it is reducing its scope and closing some of its colleges. With a defense budget of more than \$700 billion, it is shameful that we have to make deep cuts in our most prestigious war colleges.

These indirect activities will help enlarge the educated attentive public, but more must be done directly for those who are or will soon be direct participants in the interagency decisionmaking process. One way to do that has been to publish issue-oriented books for new office holders. Brookings has long been a standout in this area. Another important national security book, written by DOD experts at NDU and published by NDU Press, is *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, which covers issues from weapons of mass destruction to Arctic strategy.³⁶ It is useful for experts in any one policy area but even more so for managers who have to “get smart” in a hurry on numerous issues.

Knowledge of issues is important, but understanding the dynamics of decisionmaking and developing trust are even more essential. Crises often come early in an administration, and it would be dangerous if the members of a deputies



Soldiers from 1st Armored Division search for insurgents in houses located across street from Outpost 293 in Ramadi, Iraq, after mortar attack and gunfire were received on outpost July 24, 2006 (U.S. Air Force/Jeremy T. Lock)

committee first met on the eve of the crisis. In a Presidential election year, NDU or RAND (or, alternatively, major non-Federal think tanks) should offer a series of weekend seminars and simulations for potential participants or their principal assistants from either party. The weekends should leave plenty of time for informal conversations, team-building activities, and social events.

Joint doctrine, force planning, the contingency planning process, and issue histories, among other important topics, would be appropriate subjects to cover in these seminars. Guest lectures from the Nation's leading authorities could kick off the seminar. For 2020, these lectures would include threats being presented by

China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and the global counterterrorist campaign. Panels and seminars on case studies of successful and unsuccessful decisionmaking events should also form an important part of the program.

In conclusion, and at the risk of restating the obvious, we can have more fruitful civil-military dialogues and better interagency national security decisionmaking. If learning from the last decade is possible, the year 2021 will see a rebirth in interest in coordinated, systematic decisionmaking at the national level. Hope is not a strategy, but it springs eternal when necessity must become the mother of strategic reinvention. JFQ

This article is based on a paper presented at the biennial Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society International Conference, in Reston, Virginia, November 8–10, 2019. The author thanks Lieutenant Colonel Ben Fernandes, USA, for his scholarship and comments on the original manuscript.

Notes

¹ Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015).

² The phrase *broken dialogue* was popularized by Janine Davidson in an article, in a monograph, and at a Council on Foreign

Relations conference. Janine A. Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 2013), 129–145; and Janine A. Davidson, Emerson T. Brooking, and Benjamin J. Fernandes, *Mending the Broken Dialogue: Military Advice and Presidential Decision-Making* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2016).

³ I acknowledge discussions with James Golby in early October 2019. His formulation on apolitical versus nonpartisan is spot-on in my view. Military personnel can strive to be nonpartisan, but at the highest levels nearly every issue is political.

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 111–112.

⁵ See Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 21–88, 165–276.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁷ One of the best and most popular accounts is Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). For a more militarily analytical account, see Frank G. Hoffman and G. Alexander Crowther, "Strategic Assessment and Adaptation: The Surges in Iraq and Afghanistan," in *Lessons Encountered*, 89–164.

⁸ The dispute over troop numbers was first covered in Paula Broadwell, *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus*, with Vernon Loeb (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 291–303. Petraeus gives a short account of this topic in Joseph Collins and Nathan White, "Reflections by General David Petraeus, USA (Ret.), on the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," *PRISM* 7, no. 1 (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, September 2017), 163–164.

⁹ Loren DeJonge Schulman, Alice Hunt Friend, and Mara E. Karlin, "Two Cheers for Esper's Plan to Reassert Civilian Control of the Pentagon," *Defense One*, September 9, 2019.

¹⁰ Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis has not spoken out about these problems in depth, but a former speechwriter and assistant wrote about them extensively in an unauthorized memoir. See Guy M. Snodgrass, *Holding the Line: Inside Trump's Pentagon with Secretary Mattis* (New York: Sentinel, 2019).

¹¹ See James Mattis's resignation letter to President Trump, December 20, 2018, available at <<https://d3i6fh83clv35t.cloudfront.net/static/2018/12/mattis-letter2.pdf>>.

¹² Publius (James Madison), "The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments," *Federalist Papers*, no. 51 (1788).

¹³ U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8.

¹⁴ The relationship between the views of Samuel Huntington and Eliot Cohen is examined in Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making," 133–134, and

Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 4–14, 225–248.

¹⁵ For Cohen's approach to civil-military relations, see Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 1–14, 173–224. This approach is echoed in Peter Feaver, "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011), which is an excellent guide to the Iraq Surge decision from the White House perspective.

¹⁶ Davidson, Brooking, and Fernandes, *Mending the Broken Dialogue*, 10.

¹⁷ As quoted in John F. Reichart and Steven R. Sturm, eds., *American Defense Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 724.

¹⁸ National Security Action Memorandum 55, "Relations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War Operations," June 28, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, available at <www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF/330/JFKNSF-330-005>.

¹⁹ On the failure of the Chiefs in the war in Vietnam, see H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997).

²⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, bk. 1, chap. 3, 101.

²¹ Aaron Mehta, "DOD Needs 3–5 Percent Annual Growth Through 2023, Top Officials Say," *Defense News*, June 13, 2017.

²² It was clear from the back and forth in the interview that the Chairman was referring to Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making."

²³ R.D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, "An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey," *Joint Force Quarterly* 78 (3rd Quarter 2015), 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Rosa Brooks, "Thought Cloud: The Real Problem with the Civilian-Military Gap," *Foreign Policy*, August 2, 2012.

²⁶ Davidson, "Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making," 136.

²⁷ This is also a standard war college approach. For an example from the National War College, see Steven Heffington, Adam Oler, and David Tretler, eds., *A National Security Strategy Primer* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019), available at <<https://nwc.ndu.edu/Portals/71/Documents/Publications/NWC-NDU-Primer.pdf>>. The notion of assessing options for suitability, feasibility, and acceptability—echoed in the Primer—was cited by Dempsey, a National War College graduate, in Hooker and Collins, "An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey."

²⁸ Hooker and Collins, "An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey," 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 27.

³¹ For a detailed examination of using

history to inform decisions, see Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

³² Conversations between General Carl E. Vuono and the author, 1987–1989, and briefing to and discussion with General Eric Shinseki, by Walt Ulmer and the author, fall 1999. Division command is almost mandatory for promotion to four-star rank, but it is a tactical-level, single-Service command. The Active-duty Army has 231 major generals, but only 10 divisions. Because of its salience, many maneuver combat arms officers manage their careers to become competitive for division command.

³³ David Petraeus, interview by Joseph Collins and Nathan White, Washington, DC, March 27, 2015.

³⁴ Collins and White, "Reflections by General David Petraeus, USA (Ret.), on the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," 166. The concept of "best military advice," a favorite of the last two Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has been attacked in a number of places. See, for example, James Golby and Mara Karlin, "Why 'Best Military Advice' Is Bad for the Military—and Worse for Civilians," *Orbis*, January 18, 2018. While Karlin and Golby's rationale is cogent, the senior-most military officers always want to characterize their "best military advice" as a reflection of military factors, not political preferences. Realities are often more complex, and "best military advice" is sometimes not best and not purely military. Still, on occasion, Presidents have reprimanded senior officers for offering advice that was clearly not military in nature.

³⁵ A useful new text comes from a team at the Naval War College. See Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Jessica D. Blankshain, and David A. Cooper, *Decision-Making in American Foreign Policy: Translating Theory into Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019). This book has excursions to the Trump era and covers numerous models and approaches to national-level decisionmaking.

³⁶ R.D. Hooker, Jr., ed., *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2016).