

Leadership and the American Military

Leadership is the key role in a successful American military. Many people will argue there is a civil-military gap in the United States (U.S.) and this is blamed on the lack of trust and communication between civilian and military leaders. This lack of effective communication and lack of trust cause loss of life and war. The American military time and time again have proven the military is only as strong as its leadership.

Meilinger (2010) provides ample evidence of a gap in civil-military relations in the U.S., beginning around the Civil War period. It was expected for generals to become President and civil servants to leave politics to fight wars. The Civil War was the highest peak of intermingling between the military and civilian leaders in the history of America. The gap continued to grow larger as the Army changed after World War II (WWII). The last general elected to the Presidency was Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Ricks (2012) supports Meilinger's finding and explains the decline of intermingling between the military and civilian relations, especially in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. One cause of this was the fact that General Westmoreland and President Lyndon B. Johnson had a strong distaste for one another. Ricks shows this by quoting President Johnson, who said, "I don't happen to be a fan of General Westmorland...and I certainly didn't become one as a result of the Vietnam War." (Ricks 232) Ricks takes a further step in naming the people responsible for the loss of the Vietnam War, and indirectly states the reason being the lack of team work

between military and civilian leaders. Therefore, as the Vietnam War ended, so did the existence of the draft in the American Army. It was to become an all voluntary Army.

Civil and military relations were still weak in 1991. “The failure to consider the conditions of the end of the war was hardly Schwarzkopf’s [the commander of Operation Desert Storm] alone...there was a lack of guidance from Washington.” (Ricks 383) The statement provides evidence the gap was very large during the Gulf War. General Franks, who led the defeat of the Iraqi Army after September 11th, also made major mistakes, causing the needless deaths of American Soldiers. These actions caused civilians to lose trust in military leaders. Ricks is certain this erosion of confidence explains President Barack Obama’s distrust in military leadership and, overall, risks the effectiveness of the American military’s future.

Ulrich (2011) elaborates Ricks and Meilinger’s point. The dismissal of McChrystal was not common to the military of WWI through Vietnam. When the general could not perform his duties he was removed. However, McChrystal was removed by the civilian leadership—not the military. “When generals do not fire generals, civilians will.” (Ricks 462) Ulrich uses Douglas MacArthur for comparison of McChrystal. MacArthur “spoke recklessly” to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a meeting at the White House. Like General McChrystal, MacArthur was not only speaking in an ill manner to the president, he was violating direct orders. MacArthur was relieved of duty, in 1951, by President Harry S. Truman.

Ricks briefly explains the incident of McChrystal’s dismissal. Ricks, favoring the Marshall model of a general, suggests dismissal is necessary. Generals must especially be removed in a case where they lack the ability to perform the task at hand, because a bad leader will be detrimental to forces. McChrystal and MacArthur were disposable in the eyes of the civilian

leaders due to lack of trust and support. Military leaders should support the system of rewarding success and removing failure.

Ricks supports Ulrich, generals need a better education. Generals need to be flexible and learn how to think rather than just do what they are told. Top generals during recent times lack critical thinking and writing skills. Ricks agrees intermingling with civilians at universities, working with foreign countries, or types of mission work will sharpen the military leader's civilian relations at all levels.

Skelton (2012) discusses the civil-military gap, which is produced by behaviors of generals, such as McChrystal and MacArthur. Ricks considers Marshall and Eisenhower's relationship to be the model for civil-military relations. Marshall believed it was important to keep relationships professional to avoid trouble with civilian leaders. MacArthur is Ricks' idea of the most detrimental type of general for civil-military relations. MacArthur believed he could not be relieved. Therefore, he showed no respect to leaders on both sides. He goes as far as to say, "he might be the most significant for the negative influence he had on civil-military discourse, lingering well into the Vietnam War." (Ricks 97) President Lyndon Johnson is Ricks' example of what civilian leadership should not do. President Johnson avoided confrontation at all cost and was very skeptical of the military leaders. He would design policy without advice of military leaders. President Johnson's lack of communication eroded his position and duty to inform the American population of what was really happening in the Vietnam War. Both military and civilian leadership failed to perform their duties. Therefore, leadership increased the civil-military gap, during the Vietnam War. Ricks supports Skelton that both sides are to blame for the civil-military gap. Both, Ricks and Skelton paint a clear picture on the gap

becoming a chasm, due to the lack of communication and trust between civil and military leaders.

Skelton suggests several ways of mending the gap through being involved in the community. For civilians, he suggests to invite the military to participate at civilian schools and organizations. Both sides can teach the other and narrow the gap. In recent years, the military is “worn out” due to ongoing wars in Middle East. Ricks believes a change in military personnel policy would be of great benefit to the military. He offers the suggestion to allow leave time and flexible rotations. These options would allow for service men and women to spend more time at home and allow willing and able soldiers to remain in place. This will allow for better attitudes of soldiers and their families, who play a large role in the civil-military gap.

Allen (2011) feels it is important to look at the attitudes of soldiers toward their senior leaders. He argues the strain and stress soldiers endure may sway the opinion towards their leaders. Allen agrees that one of two things will happen if this problem is not addressed. It will endure or break, as it did after the Vietnam War. Allen believes trust will ensure higher opinions of officers and leaders. The idea of trust between civil and military leaders and trust at all levels within the military is vital to its survival.

Ricks strongly agrees with Allen’s view on trust. He provides evidence throughout “The General”. General George Patton was irreplaceable in regards to combat effectiveness. However, his treatment of his subordinates was replaceable. He was known to mistreat servicemen. Patton is Ricks’ prime example of how not to treat those under you. Nonetheless, he was remarkable at his single task of finding and pushing back the enemy. In Patton’s case the

men under him operated out of fear due to the consequences of failure. Nonetheless, Patton was a case of endurance.

General William Westmoreland was untrustworthy due to the lack of being truthful. Some offences could be overlooked. However, Westmoreland would carry his fabrications to war, misleading civilians and civilian leaders about Vietnam. These types of behavior cripple military and civilian operations. Westmoreland is one general who can be considered personally responsible for fracturing the system. Ricks supports Allen's point that senior leaders need to support service members in terms of professionalism. Ricks provides plenty of evidence in the lack of professionalism throughout the military in Vietnam. For example, servicemen would have sexual relations with Vietnamese women, some of these being high ranking officers. This provided the enemy with knowledge of when to take out high-ranking officers and when to attack most effectively.

Ricks provides the graphic evidence of leaders possessing poor qualities. The men and women whom serve under them carry the same flaws. This is shown in My Lai when the military lost its core values. "It had become an organization in which lying and hypocrisy were widespread and tolerated, perhaps encouraged and required." (Ricks 309-10) The incident at My Lai was intentionally covered up in higher ranks as well as the lower. The ample evidence, provided by Ricks, instills the importance of trustworthiness and professionalism and the consequences when core values vital to the survival of the military and success of missions are lost. Along with low values, the lack of strategic leaders is a problem within the military, especially in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. However, the lack of strategic thinking still creates problems in the military today. Salmoni, Hart, McPherson, and Winn (2010) offer a suggestion

of how to address this issue. The authors suggest education in civilian schools, mingling in civil and military environments, holding staff or aide positions, and positive mentorship. Ricks promotes the same solution to the problem, especially mentorship.

Matthew Ridgeway turned the Korean War around in a few short months. Ridgeway served under MacArthur and worked under him at West Point. However, he was closer to Marshall. Ridgeway and Marshall served together in WWII. Ridgeway and Marshall were not only coworkers but friends. Ricks provides evidence of what having a good mentor—such as Marshall—can do for future leaders. Ridgeway followed Marshall's example of what a general should be and was very successful. He had more experience in combat and rank. He also treated those under him as equals, ensuring his success. William DePuy was an exceptional mentor as well. However, he was only a great mentor outside of battle, not during battle. DePuy mentored Frederic Brown, who retired a three star general. Brown recalled DePuy as a man who had exceptional tactical command and professionalism. Unfortunately, DePuy's downfall was he could not adapt to a changing situation.

DePuy was accepted back into the Army after the retirement of General Harold K. Johnson. He was just what the Army needed to rebuild, but still lacked strategy and education. The lack of strategy proved detrimental in Afghanistan and Iraq. Ricks ensures the reason to be lack of officer training methods in situations of the uncertain. The only education being received was on what is going on in the present. Ricks believes in having leaders that can adapt to unknown situations. Thus, they would be more successful and tolerance of anything else is corrosive.

Archer (2013) focuses on gender stereotypes. Archer's findings are the stereotypes within the Marine Corps reveal a leadership problem but a cultural problem as well. . Stereotypes influence mentorship, advancement, socialization, and opens areas for double standards. Therefore, females are more competitive and lack support of other female officers due to these labels. Ricks does not discuss the subject of gender within his writing. However, he does emphasize the importance of trust which leads to team work or in this case the lack of. For example, Marshall was relaxed when addressing issues of race in WWI "...perhaps could have done far more to integrate the armed forces of WWII than he did". (Ricks 51) However, Marshall's largest mistake came from his assumption that white southern commanders would be best to work with black soldiers. This simply caused unit division. When the unit was deemed "unsatisfactory" it would be the black soldiers who were blamed. One member declared the unit "a slave unit for white masters." In the Korean War six of the veterans from the division operated under Ridgeway. He would state there was nothing wrong and they worked well under the right circumstances in leadership and training. Therefore, it is likely that Ricks would be in support of the same views towards gender stereotypes.

Eichenberg (2005) touches on gender inequality in public opinion, which supports Archer's idea of gender discrimination stemming from culture beliefs. Ricks work supports Eichenberg's results of what effects public opinion during war. This is shown in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Eichenberg finds that casualties will be accepted as long as victory is certain and noticeable. Ricks deems the lack of knowing what victory looks like to the lack of public support during the Korean, Vietnam, and Iraq wars. The Korean War would be deemed the most unpopular war in United States history. The war was not only unpopular to civilians but also

within the Army itself. The war began as a campaign to stop Communism. Nonetheless, it ended as the United States interfering in a civil war, as it did in Vietnam. The United States purpose in Vietnam was to train and assist the South Vietnamese, providing supplies and weapons. The political war is very unpopular. This was caused by separation of military and civilian leaders, including congress. When a large amount of casualties were added there was a large lack of support, from all aspects. Unpopular wars carried detrimental effects to civilian leaders. President Roosevelt promised not to send Americans into a foreign war. However, his advisors wanted him to at least prepare for the worst in regards for the safety of the nation. Roosevelt was able to keep his promise and Marshall was able to prepare for war. Many times throughout history, public opinion has been dismissed by military leaders but always lays heavy on the minds of civilian leaders. They understand the power of public opinion and successful wars more so than the military leaders.

Leal and Nichols (2013) discuss a different aspect of public opinion. This article also touches on gender separation. The main focus in Leal and Nichols assessment and finding is provided on the basis the majority of military spouses are women. However, race also played a factor in these findings. The overall support for leaders was over fifty percent. Leal and Nichols believed spousal opinion shaped the opinion of soldiers and how they view their leadership and have the potential of affecting morale and retention.

Ricks supports this theory by weighing the morale of soldiers under different types of leadership. In Korea, Ridgeway turned the war around in a very short period of time. The soldiers were poorly led previously and the consequence was a lost war effort with tired, untrained soldiers. This is also supported by Ricks belief that leaders must be able to be trusted.

Trust is a large factor in a soldier's morale. When there is a lack of trust between a soldier and leadership it causes inadequate performance and low family support of officers. It was especially prominent in the Iraq War. General David Petraeus and Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno together revamped the military's approach to Iraq. They increased their risk taking which included more casualties. Nonetheless, they gave the military a reason to fight again. Therefore, leaders gained increasing support at home.

The increase of support in Iraq and the leaders that paved the way for this to be possible maintained the ability to adapt to a situation and make a decision when training had failed them. Today's military turned to outsourcing to be able to compensate for insufficient soldier numbers. There are mixed feelings about civilian contractors within the military. However, Kelty and Bierman (2013) discuss the role of civilian contractors. The military and its servicemen acknowledge the need of contractor due to the lack of enlistments. This also allows for shorter rotation times. Ricks will argue that the rotation will hinder the overall effectiveness of military operations, unless leadership shows through management and mentors. Col. Dale Eikmeier's concern for subcontracting out jobs is it does not show leadership.

All in all, the authors explain the key role leadership plays in the functioning of the American military. Trust in leaders is vital in the functioning of the military. The second key factor is effective communication between civil and military leadership. When these key factors are not implemented wars are lost and casualties are suffered. The American military is only as strong as its civil and military leaders.

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