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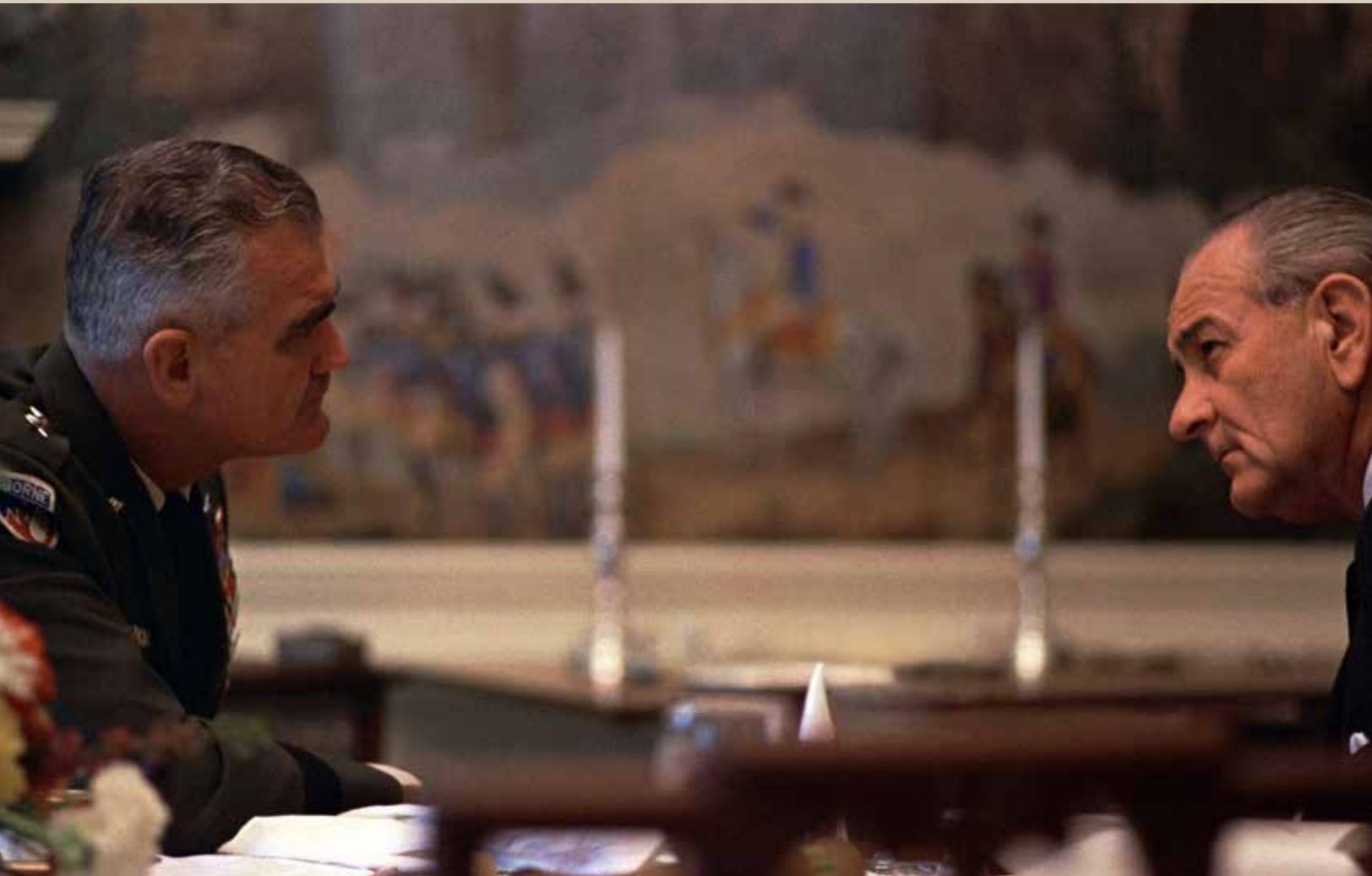


INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL  
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**STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES 33**

# **The Micromanagement Myth and Mission Command: Making the Case for Oversight of Military Operations**

by Christopher J. Lamb



**Center for Strategic Research  
Institute for National Strategic Studies  
National Defense University**

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**Cover:** General William Westmoreland luncheon meeting with President Lyndon B. Johnson, The White House, April 6, 1968 (Yoichi Okamoto/  
Courtesy LBJ Presidential Library/C9391-17A)

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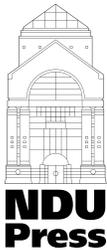


# The Micromanagement Myth and Mission Command: Making the Case for Oversight of Military Operations

By Christopher J. Lamb

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# Contents

Foreword.....	vii
Executive Summary .....	1
Introduction.....	3
Part I: The Historical Record .....	4
Historical Observations.....	24
Part II: Leadership, Micromanagement, and Mission Command .....	25
Recommendations.....	34
Conclusion .....	37
Notes .....	39
About the Author .....	59



### Foreword

This paper addresses a national security issue with broad and important implications. It documents the pervasiveness of the myth that “civilian” micromanagement of field operations has been a major factor in the failure or shortcomings of major military operations from Vietnam to the present. It then demolishes that myth, correctly pointing out that failures have generally come from inadequate clarity of mission, strategic incoherence, and toleration of conflicting policies by subordinates rather than from Presidential control of tactical decisions. Moreover, Dr. Lamb points out that senior military officers inflict more instances of unproductive micromanagement on their subordinates than the President and Secretary of Defense. Having discredited the myth, Dr. Lamb goes on to provide useful advice for high-ranking military officers to establish mutually respectful and productive relations with their appointed and elected superiors, to institute oversight mechanisms to ensure the mission of the operation is succeeding, and to intervene when it is not.

Our personal experiences in the national security system lead us to agree with this conclusion and Dr. Lamb’s recommendations. We repeatedly observed departments and agencies working at cross-purposes and in pursuit of their own priorities rather than pursuing a common conception of the Nation’s interests. And the situation is getting worse, not better. As one of us wrote with respect to Afghanistan and Iraq in an article coauthored by military, diplomatic, and intelligence leaders:

*Despite thirteen years of experience—and innumerable opportunities to learn lessons from both successes and mistakes—there have been few significant changes in our cumbersome, inefficient and ineffective approach to interagency operations in the field. [Our] current decision making framework is an ineffective, stove piped diplomatic, military and intelligence chain of command relying on complex Washington decision making procedures that operate by committee. It often produces confusion, mixed signals and slow reactions.<sup>1</sup>*

Recognizing these types of problems, Congress and senior leaders in the executive branch initiated the Project on National Security Reform some years ago to investigate means to allow Presidents to better unify national security efforts. We were privileged to lead that effort and believe the project’s recommended reforms would have greatly improved the efficiency as well as

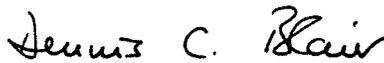
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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Blair, Ronald E. Neumann, and Eric Olson, “Fixing Fragile States,” *The National Interest*, August 27, 2014.

the effectiveness of our national security system. Unfortunately, most of the recommendations have not been acted upon. Reform requires support from both the President and Congress, and neither is typically inclined to act on this important but complex issue.

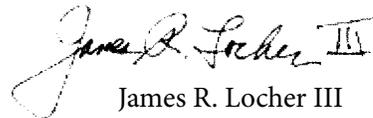
Exaggerated concerns about micromanagement have dampened support for reforms that would allow the President to better manage the system. Many national security professionals and Members of Congress mistakenly assume it is better to have less Presidential attention to national security matters because that will prevent micromanagement of departments and agencies.

As Dr. Lamb points out, what is needed is more Presidential and Secretary of Defense oversight to establish sound strategies, assign logical roles to subordinate departments and agencies, and intervene when operations are not achieving the expected results. Toward that end, we recommend the wide dissemination of this paper and its use in our national security educational institutions, particularly senior professional military, intelligence, and diplomatic courses. As Dr. Lamb notes in the conclusion, previous leaders were able to see through false allegations of micromanagement and help enact the valuable Goldwater-Nichols reforms that did so much to elevate military performance over the past several decades. If we can similarly see the micromanagement myth for what it is—one of the most damaging misunderstandings to arise from our failed intervention in Vietnam and subsequent operations—then it might also be possible to move forward on badly needed national security reform. We could then give the President the one thing he most needs to ensure effective national security performance: careful, sustained orchestration of all department and agency efforts in pursuit of truly national strategies for managing vexing security problems.



Dennis C. Blair

Former Director of National Intelligence



James R. Locher III

Former President and CEO

Project on National Security Reform

### Executive Summary

This paper argues that leaders, historians, and pundits have grossly exaggerated civilian micromanagement of the U.S. military, resulting in less effective civilian and military oversight of military operations and a reduced likelihood that military operations will achieve strategic results. Exaggerating the frequency and impact of civilian micromanagement encourages military leaders to distance themselves from oversight and disinclines Presidents from exercising it. There is also evidence that within the military chain of command, an exaggerated concern with civilian micromanagement has distorted understanding of good leadership and the Joint Staff's "mission command" doctrine, encouraging the military to ignore its own time-honored leadership principles.

Concern with micromanagement has become so widespread that it constitutes a deeply rooted cultural bias within the broader national security system. It is an especially keen concern in the Pentagon among both civilian and military leaders and among military analysts, many of whom mistakenly believe civilian micromanagement is a primary reason why military operations have been less successful. Pentagon leaders and military commentators also widely and incorrectly believe that harmful micromanagement can be avoided if senior civilian and military leaders limit themselves to different roles, with civilian leaders just setting broad policy goals and military leaders only supervising military operations to achieve those goals.

Such a strict division of labor between senior civilian and military leaders is a false and damaging dichotomy. The argument for this assertion is made in two parts. The first part is empirical. The historical record of U.S. civilian oversight of military operations since World War II is examined to determine whether insufficient oversight or too much micromanagement better explains poor strategic outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The evidence shows that insufficient oversight is more injurious by far and that both the frequency and impact of civilian micromanagement have been grossly exaggerated, especially since Vietnam. In some cases, such as the Iran-Contra scandal and U.S. intervention in Somalia, poor analysis turned these episodes, which were clearly cases of insufficient oversight, into cautionary tales of harmful micromanagement. Such false lessons have helped deeply entrench the micromanagement "myth."

The second part of the argument is deductive. A sharp division of labor between civilian and military leaders is not justifiable even on its own terms, given rudimentary requirements for effective leadership and the nature of our national security system. The case is made that good leadership principles logically require the conclusion that micromanagement can be helpful as well as harmful. Good leaders—both Presidents overseeing military operations and

military leaders supervising their subordinates—must exercise oversight and thus, on occasion, micromanage. To illustrate this point, examples are provided of leaders who abjure micromanagement in the strongest terms but nonetheless practice it because good leadership requires that they do so on occasion. Taking into account what good leaders do as well as what they say helps illustrate why a blanket injunction against micromanagement makes no sense either for Presidents or the Joint Staff’s mission command approach to command and control.

Even though the civilian micromanagement myth is not supported by history or consistent with leadership best practice, it persists, propelled by false lessons from foreign policy crises and military interventions, as well as other factors ranging from human nature to the nature of the current security environment. The exaggerated concern with micromanagement has had major consequences, distancing Presidents from the military operations they initiate, contributing to the deterioration of good civil-military relations, and lessening the likelihood of strategic success. Within the Pentagon, current understanding of the mission command concept over-emphasizes the dangers of micromanagement and seems to have disinclined senior military leaders from imposing successful tactics on brigade commanders in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the Army’s own detailed study of brigade performances in Iraq concludes, we were thus unable to ensure the spread of manifestly successful tactics across the battlefield.

To correct the exaggerated concern with micromanagement, the military should jettison the civilian micromanagement myth and rebalance its understanding of mission command doctrine by distinguishing between helpful oversight and harmful micromanagement. The high degree of professionalism in the U.S. military and the complexity of the current security environment justify the current mission command bias toward decentralized decisionmaking but not a general ban on detailed oversight, or micromanagement, as it is more commonly called. Senior leaders are obligated to intervene and eliminate impediments to high performance, but only when subordinate decisions and behaviors put mission success at risk.

The key point is that when leaders decide to intervene, they need to do so for the right reasons. They should override subordinates only when they are convinced their broader field of vision gives them insights that those further down the chain of command lack—that is, when their privileged perspective allows them to see the larger enterprise is at risk if some particular actions are not taken. Good oversight is thus based on contextual insights derived from a broader set of responsibilities and resultant field of vision. In contrast, deleterious micromanagement second-guesses a subordinate based on a senior leader’s personal past experience or some other cognitive bias rather than their broader field of vision.

Besides this rule of thumb, some excellent advice from a U.S. Army War College study on civilian micromanagement is reemphasized. In particular, military leaders should not exaggerate instances of civilian interference or confuse requests for information with control but instead should engage civilian leaders in creative collaboration. To illustrate this point, the paper closes with a historical instance where military leaders fixed problems that impeded mission success. Such examples are much more uplifting and reflective of the American spirit than the historically unfounded and damaging micromanagement myth—and better for military morale as well.

### Introduction

This paper argues that civilian and military leaders, pundits, and historians exaggerate the harmful impact of civilian micromanagement on military operations, thus weakening the oversight needed to ensure strategic results from operational military success. The current administration is a case in point. President Donald Trump emphasized that he would not micromanage the military. “Micromanagement from Washington, DC,” he stated, “does not win battles.”<sup>2</sup> Early on, Trump delegated most decisions to his Secretary of Defense and geographic combatant commanders, prompting some complaints that he was not performing his oversight duties.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, however, his stance met with approval, especially from the military.<sup>4</sup>

President Trump contrasted his approach with that of his predecessor, Barack Obama, who was criticized by both Republicans and Democrats for micromanagement of the Pentagon.<sup>5</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that key decisions in the Obama administration were already made by national security staff before he could present his views to the President, and he called for change to diminish the centralization of authority in the White House staff. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates went further, stating, “the controlling nature of the Obama White House and the national security staff took micromanagement and operational meddling to a new level,”<sup>6</sup> which he believed rivaled Lyndon Johnson’s during Vietnam.<sup>7</sup>

President Obama was not the first commander in chief to be charged with poor strategic decisionmaking and micromanagement, nor is Trump the first President to forswear micromanaging the military and receive approval in response. The civilian micromanagement charge has been made so often, and is so widely accepted, that most Presidents make a point of declaring themselves innocent of any intent to micromanage, believing that doing so leads to bad outcomes and poor civil-military relations.

This paper argues something different: that micromanagement can be hurtful but also helpful and that it is in fact a requirement of good leadership on occasion. The evidence suggests that believing otherwise and encouraging a blanket injunction against micromanagement has distanced Presidents from the military operations they initiate, lessened the likelihood of strategic success, and contributed to the deterioration of good civil-military relations.

Part I of this paper examines the historical record and makes the case that insufficient oversight of military operations has been far more injurious than micromanagement. Part II helps explain why this is so by demonstrating that effective leadership occasionally requires micromanagement, particularly in our “President-centric” national security system. The same point applies to military oversight, which is why the across-the-board bias against micromanagement implied by current mission command doctrine needs to be reconsidered.

## **Part I: The Historical Record**

*Micromanagement* could be defined as a technical term for leaders exercising oversight by intervening multiple or many levels down in their organizations. However, in common usage, micromanagement is construed as a negative intervention—one that generates poor results because the leader is too far removed from immediate circumstances to know best how to fix problems. In the case of civilian micromanagement of military operations, it is widely believed that it should be prevented by having civilian and military leaders exercise different roles.

Frank Hoffman, a keen observer of civil-military relations, has argued the opposite: that insufficient civilian oversight leads to strategic failures.<sup>8</sup> He postulates four gaps between civilian and military thinking, one of which—the “role gap”—is of particular interest here.<sup>9</sup> The role gap refers to the view that the role of civilian leaders is setting clear policy goals and then leaving military leaders alone while they execute operations to achieve those goals. This widely accepted but mistaken division of labor is based in part upon Samuel Huntington’s influential but flawed theory of American civil-military relations. In reality, strategic success requires sustained collaboration between Presidents and military leaders. Hoffman cites Eliot Cohen on this score, who states that Presidents must:

*Immerse themselves in the conduct of their wars no less than in their great projects of domestic legislation; that they must master their military briefs as thoroughly as they do their civilian ones; that they must demand and expect from their military subordinates a candor as bruising as is necessary; that both groups must expect a running conversation in which, although civilian opinion will not*

*usually dictate, it must dominate; and that that conversation will cover not only ends and policies, but ways and means.*<sup>10</sup>

The exchange is supposed to be a two-way street, one in which “military professionals need to demand the same disciplined and comprehensive search for viable solutions from their overseers.” Thus, military subordinates are obliged to probe the oversight they are given to ensure ends, ways, and means all mesh in what hopefully is a “cooperative engagement” between civil and military authorities.<sup>11</sup>

The false dichotomy in civil and military oversight roles postulated by Huntington has been reinforced by the growing conviction that history demonstrates civilian leaders are inclined to micromanage military operations to failure.<sup>12</sup> Hoffman argues this conviction is actually a myth, citing four examples (Vietnam, Panama, the first Gulf War, and Iraq) to demonstrate that poor civil-military collaboration is likely to generate poor strategic outcomes. The Pentagon’s concern with civilian interference dates back to the Korean War but was especially prevalent as an explanation for what went wrong in Vietnam. Thus, we begin our historical review of whether U.S. military operations have suffered more from lack of oversight than micromanagement with a review of that conflict.

### **Vietnam, 1955–1975**

Much of the debate over Vietnam relies on counterfactual cases made for alternative courses of action—for example, arguing that fewer civilian constraints on bombing or an earlier and more vigorous approach to population security would have led to better results. However, it is not necessary to resolve such debates to determine whether the war effort in Vietnam suffered more from lack of oversight than overbearing micromanagement.<sup>13</sup> Four points of scholarly consensus on the Vietnam War make the case that lack of oversight was a far greater problem.

***President Johnson Had No Overall Strategy for Success.*** The common assessment among historians is that the Johnson administration managed the war incrementally without an overall strategy for success. Without strategy, oversight is less effective. A strategy for success would align all elements of the executive branch in a common effort and inform decisions on when to correct errant subordinate efforts. With no strategy for success, oversight must be based on a few central concerns, leader impressions, or snap judgments. In Vietnam, the President was most concerned with preventing escalation of the war, and he ignored a strategy for how to win it. As George Herring, a keen historian of the war, argues:

*Limited war requires the most sophisticated strategy, precisely formulated in terms of ends and means, with particular attention to keeping costs at acceptable levels. What stands out about the Johnson administration's handling of Vietnam is that in what may have been the most complex war ever fought by the United States there was never any systematic discussion at the highest levels of government of the fundamental issue of how the war should be fought.<sup>14</sup>*

In part, this was because “Americans could not conceive that they would be unable to impose their will on what Johnson once dismissed as that “raggedy-ass little fourth-rate country.” Hence, “there was no need to think in terms of strategy.” Herring also notes that Johnson did not consider strategy his responsibility or area of expertise, often quoting his political mentor Sam Rayburn to the effect that we sent military leaders to Service academies so that civilians would not have to make military decisions. Similarly, Johnson’s Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, “refused to interfere with the formulation of strategy, leaving it to the military.” When asked why he did not intervene to set the strategic agenda with his military subordinates, McNamara “shot back that he was no Churchill and would not dabble in an area where he had no competence.” There was also a sense that strategy was no longer important. Many civilians like McNamara misread the Cuban Missile Crisis to mean, “There is no longer any such thing as strategy, only crisis management.” Thus, “when Hanoi refused to respond as bargaining theory said it should, the United States was left without any strategy at all.”<sup>15</sup>

***Military Leaders Fixated on More Bombing.*** It has been clear at least since the release of the Pentagon Papers in 1971<sup>16</sup> that U.S. military leaders, including proponents of counterinsurgency such as Marine General Victor Krulak, argued for unconstrained bombing.<sup>17</sup> They did so long after it was clear that unrestrained bombing would not be permitted by civilian political leaders and that pressing the case for it led to military leadership being excluded from the Johnson administration’s highest levels of decisionmaking. There are differences of opinion over whether military leaders pressed the point sufficiently, but historians agree they persistently argued for more bombing,<sup>18</sup> which they considered the key to success.

The bombing issue dominates explanations for failure in Vietnam. President Johnson is reported to have bragged that “those boys can’t hit an outhouse without my permission.”<sup>19</sup> This and other bombastic comments attributed to Johnson have helped solidify civilian micromanagement as a (or *the*) major explanation for U.S. failure by underscoring how egregious it was. The military’s angst about bombing constraints is understandable. The restrictions imposed by

civilian authority were morally and legally unnecessary, cost American lives, and made bombing less effectual.<sup>20</sup> However, the constraints on bombing do not explain failure in Vietnam.

Both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Johnson administration senior civilians expected bombing to work and were equally deceived on that point.<sup>21</sup> Civilian leaders thought incremental escalation of the bombing—and threats of less constrained bombing—would incline North Vietnam toward a peaceful solution, and military leaders thought unconstrained bombing would compel them to desist from aggression, but both groups thought bombing would work. When all was said and done, the thesis that bombing could compel the enemy to desist from aggression was well tested.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. military dropped more tons of bombs in the Vietnam War between 1964 and 1973 than it expended in World War II and Korea. The Air Force alone did so by a factor of more than two.<sup>23</sup> In retrospect,<sup>24</sup> both military and civilian leaders were wrong about how much North Vietnamese leaders were willing to sacrifice to conquer South Vietnam.<sup>25</sup>

***Limits on Bombing Were Motivated by Legitimate Concerns.*** Even if civilian micromanagement of bombing was ineffectual and costly to U.S. forces, civilian leaders had legitimate reasons for imposing limits on bombing. They wanted to keep China and Russia out of the war and the American public sufficiently supportive to keep the United States in it. Johnson justified his micromanagement of bombing on just this score, stating:

*By keeping a lid on all the designated targets, I knew I could keep the control of the war in my own hands. If China reacted to our slow escalation by threatening to retaliate, we'd have plenty of time to ease off the bombing. But this control—so essential for preventing World War III—would be lost the moment we unleashed a total assault on the North—for that would be rape rather than seduction—and then there would be no turning back. The Chinese reaction would be instant and total.<sup>26</sup>*

Other senior civilians also worried about the extent to which the United States could pummel North Vietnam without forfeiting world opinion and the support of its own public. Secretary McNamara is often cited for his comment that “the picture of the world’s greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1,000 noncombatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one.”<sup>27</sup>

The civil-military dispute over bombing reflected fundamentally different lessons from history and assumptions about limited war. The military’s preference for unconstrained bombing originated in America’s “limited war” in Korea, where it (and arguably the public) learned

that “limited wars were neither desirable nor acceptable.”<sup>28</sup> The military’s “never again” attitude was the exact opposite of what civilian leaders learned. Civilians understood the advent of nuclear weapons to mean that unconstrained warfare would lead to nuclear exchanges, and their foremost concern was to prevent such escalation.

In contrast, the military believed tactical nuclear weapons were a legitimate use of firepower. During both the John F. Kennedy<sup>29</sup> and Johnson<sup>30</sup> administrations, military leaders considered the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam (and Europe).<sup>31</sup> Their willingness to do so alienated senior civilian leaders, as did their persistent calls for unconstrained bombing that ignored civilian concerns about precipitating greater Chinese and/or Russian intervention. As the official Joint Staff history concludes, the Service chiefs were not influential because the Joint Chiefs of Staff “consistently offered the President courses of action that carried with them a certainty of high costs and risks while at best containing only tenuous promises of decisive and favorable political and military results,”<sup>32</sup> which brings us to the fourth point of historical consensus.

***The U.S. Military Was Divided Over Operational Approaches.*** While national strategy was ignored, theater strategy was conflicted. The Army, under General William Westmoreland, pursued search-and-destroy operations to eliminate enemy forces and gave civic action and support for local Vietnamese forces lower priority. The Marines under Major General Lewis W. Walt and Lieutenant General Krulak did the opposite, pursuing population security with their Combined Action Platoons. Marine leaders advocated protecting the largest population concentrations along the coast and gradually spreading inland as security was consolidated. General Krulak was a particularly vocal advocate for this approach, making his case boldly up to and including the President.<sup>33</sup>

There is still sparring over how much the Army and Marine approaches differed from one another with respect to their overall implications for the level of the U.S. war effort, but the point made here is that there were major differences over how to defeat insurgents in South Vietnam and that those differences were manifest in at least two operationally coherent alternative approaches that were never reconciled.<sup>34</sup> At a minimum, that meant the ground war lacked unified effort, which was a source of continuing frustration to both Marine and Army leaders. It has been argued that under General Creighton Abrams, the Army eventually adopted a population-centric counterinsurgency effort more consistent with the Marine approach, albeit too late to make a difference in Vietnam.<sup>35</sup>

The military did not resolve its internal differences over operational strategy, nor did it offer the two alternative approaches with their relative risks to assist civilian leaders in developing a strategy for success. It is not clear Johnson desired such an informed decision process. In

earlier years, he was often cited for comments suggesting he wanted higher body counts and thus presumably supported Westmoreland's approach. On the other hand, in 1967, Johnson sent Ambassador Robert Komer to head the newly created Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support program to improve prospects for nation-building efforts. In any case, neither military nor civilian leaders made a concerted effort to assess which operational approach was most efficacious or politically and economically affordable. Thus, the dialogue between military and civilians was just as broken on operational approaches to the ground war as it was on bombing and strategy.

In sum, civilian and military leaders lacked a strategy for success and did not even resolve major differences in operational approaches. It seems clear, then, that insufficient oversight was a far greater problem in Vietnam than micromanagement, especially given the tonnage of bombs dropped and the vast use of firepower against insurgents, neither of which proved winning nor sustainable. Yet Johnson's micromanagement is now the iconic explanation for failure in Vietnam—a myth so well entrenched that he has been lumped in with Adolf Hitler as “a self-appointed military strategist” guilty of directing military campaigns from afar.<sup>36</sup> The myth is not that Johnson micromanaged, which he did, but that micromanagement explains the failure. What the U.S. military should have learned from Vietnam is that war requires effective civilian oversight based on a strategy that explains how military force will achieve political objectives. Instead, what the military learned from Vietnam is that failure could be traced directly back to civilian leaders.<sup>37</sup> Military leaders responded by crafting an operational level of war that served as an independent layer of command, insulated from civilian interference, and solely under the military's own professional jurisdiction.<sup>38</sup> Vietnam also inclined military leaders to demand larger military forces for small interventions, and even then, to argue against military interventions for any purpose other than the destruction of enemy forces.<sup>39</sup> As we shall see, the unfortunate result has been less strategy to guide military operations.

### **The *Mayaguez* Crisis, 1975**

Just weeks after South Vietnam and Cambodia fell to communist forces, a U.S. merchant ship, the SS *Mayaguez*, was commandeered by Cambodian forces while en route from Hong Kong to Thailand. The United States demanded the release of the ship and, after hastily assembling forces, sent in the Marines to recover the ship and crew. The Cambodians released the crew members just as the Marines assaulted the ship and a nearby island where it was assumed crew members were being held. The attack on the island was nearly disastrous. Until recently, the consensus was that civilian micromanagement fatally handicapped the military

operations at great cost to U.S. Servicemembers, a point underscored by military commentators in particular.<sup>40</sup>

Recent scholarship demonstrates otherwise, however. As declassified National Security Council (NSC) minutes illuminate, civilian leaders—specifically President Gerald Ford and national security advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger—were quite solicitous of military judgment about the risks involved in the island assault. Ford gave orders to launch the assault not in spite of best military advice, but in complete conformity with it. He had been assured by the Chairman and the Joint Chiefs that Tang Island could be taken with “high assurance of success.” In fact, the only issue civilian and military leaders really disagreed about was the sinking of Cambodian boats. Pentagon leaders refused to obey Presidential orders because they wanted to avoid sinking a boat that they thought held *Mayaguez* crew members. Ford bridled at the wanton ignoring of his orders and later fired the Secretary of Defense because of it, but his umbrage was not a case of micromanagement. Deciding what level of risk to the crew was acceptable—something the crisis outcome hinged upon—was a legitimate Presidential decision. In any case, there was no micromanagement because the military ignored President Ford’s guidance, and later Ford conceded it would have been a mistake to attack the boat. The little micromanagement that did occur during the crisis came from military leaders and was not consequential in terms of outcomes.<sup>41</sup>

What was highly consequential was poor joint military planning and risk assessments. In particular, even cursory oversight should have revealed the inadequacy of plans for close air support and the actual risks of the assault plan for Tang Island. Instead, the Air Force officer overseeing the operations set aside his qualms about the risky Marine assault, stating that he would “accede to the guy’s judgment that has to do the job.” In this regard, insufficient oversight was a major problem. If that officer, or any higher ranking officials, had asked questions about the plans to assault Tang Island, egregious problems in tactical planning (particularly the failure to disseminate accurate intelligence and to arrange for good close air support) would have been revealed. Yet the *Mayaguez* is widely considered a classic case proving White House micromanagement dooms military operations to failure.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Korean Axe Murders, 1976**

Misrepresenting the *Mayaguez* incident influenced crisis management the following year, when North Koreans murdered U.S. officers with axes in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. “Recalling the micromanagement by officials in Washington who had reacted to the seizure of *Mayaguez* the previous year,” General Richard G. Stilwell, USA, commander in

chief of United Nations (UN) Command, “took steps to head off the tendency to skip echelons in the command and control system with high-level queries. . . . To preclude Washington micromanagement,” he and key members of his staff “cut potential communications links between the President and subordinate commands.” General Stillwell did so even though he and his chief of staff, Major General John Singlaub, believed the situation could easily escalate to general war. “It was my estimate, shared by many of the staff, that the operation stood a fifty-fifty chance of starting a war,” Singlaub later stated. Even so, he and Stillwell preferred being out of touch with the White House to preclude micromanagement.<sup>43</sup>

### **Iranian Hostage Rescue, 1980; Intervention in Grenada, 1983**

Both President Jimmy Carter’s 1980 decision to attempt a rescue of Americans held hostage by Iran and President Ronald Reagan’s 1983 decision to intervene in Grenada led to notorious military mishaps caused more by insufficient oversight than micromanagement. Carter, who was detail-oriented, initially was blamed by some for micromanaging operations, but those allegations have been thoroughly debunked.<sup>44</sup> Carter vowed no interference, and he was true to his word, which military leaders appreciated.<sup>45</sup> Former Chief of Naval Operations James Holloway considered Carter’s performance a “textbook case of the proper relationship between a commander in chief and his military subordinates.”<sup>46</sup>

President Reagan’s team made a point of contrasting Reagan’s penchant for delegating with Carter’s reputation for worrying about details. Reagan was so relaxed in his management style that he reportedly even tolerated Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger ignoring his orders to launch military strikes in the Middle East that Weinberger disagreed with.<sup>47</sup> Reagan made a point of telling the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff early in the planning phase of the Grenada operation that he had the authority to disregard any attempts by the White House staff to micromanage the operation.<sup>48</sup> Military leaders appreciated the latitude Reagan provided but also took steps to reinforce their decision autonomy. Admiral Joseph Metcalf, who commanded the operation, purposefully kept a flow of information going up the chain to Washington in order to preserve his decisionmaking autonomy,<sup>49</sup> and the Chairman, General John Vessey, later emphasized that “the SecDef and the President did not interfere” in the execution of the plans.<sup>50</sup>

Despite no micromanagement, or perhaps because of it, the rescue attempt in Iran was a disaster, and operations in Grenada came “within a hairsbreadth of being a military disaster.”<sup>51</sup> Both cases played major roles in convincing Congress to enact the Goldwater-Nichols legislation that empowered the Secretary of Defense, Chairman, and combatant commanders to exercise greater oversight in the Pentagon.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Grenada, classified testimony

also guaranteed congressional intervention to mandate the creation of U.S. Special Operations Command in law.<sup>53</sup> Senator Barry Goldwater, one of the principal sponsors of the legislation, also cites a third case as a major inducement for the legislation: the 1983 Marine Corps Barracks Bombing in Beirut.<sup>54</sup>

### **Marine Corps Barracks Bombing, 1983**

In the midst of U.S. planning for military operations in Grenada, terrorists in Beirut killed 305 people by driving two truck bombs into the buildings occupied by U.S. Marines and French peacekeepers. Since then, allegations have circulated among Marines to the effect that Department of State leaders wanted the Marines to present a less threatening appearance and that this contributed to their lax security posture. However, an in-depth study of the incident by a Marine veteran reaches a different conclusion—arguing the rules of engagement for armed sentries were adjusted by Marine leaders after a series of accidental discharges by Servicemembers. Marine orders issued for internal security posts “specified that no magazines would be inserted into the weapons”; for external posts, “a magazine could be inserted into the weapon” but with “no round in the chamber.”<sup>55</sup> Detailed reviews of the entire incident concluded that insufficient oversight, not micromanagement or political interference, explained lax security.

There remains a difference of opinion as to whether civilian or military leaders failed to provide the oversight. The Long Commission, established by Reagan to investigate the disaster, concluded senior military officials were responsible for “lack of effective command supervision” of the Marine security posture. Others argue the President and senior civilian leaders were responsible because they assigned the Marines a vague mission of “presence.” Also, unknown to the Marines, Ambassador Philip Habib promised Yasser Arafat that Palestinians would be protected if he evacuated his forces from Beirut. Habib’s assurances proved worthless when Christian militia massacred Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, which changed local attitudes toward the U.S. presence. Whether civilian leaders not keeping the Marines informed on political developments or military leaders not ensuring sufficient Marine security were to blame, inadequate civil-military communication and oversight clearly played a greater role in the tragedy than micromanagement.

### **Iran-Contra Scandal, 1985–1987**

Even though it did not involve major U.S. military forces, the Iran-Contra scandal is included in this historical survey because it was a milestone event that has been misconstrued to

reinforce the belief that White House supervision of department and agency activities constitutes micromanagement. It also illustrates the extent to which civilian leaders now agree with the Pentagon that civilian micromanagement is a critical threat to successful military operations. In the same way that President Johnson's picking bombing targets is invoked as shorthand for civilian meddling in military matters, Iran-Contra is often cited as proof that NSC staff should limit themselves to making broad policy and leave all operational matters to Cabinet officials.<sup>56</sup>

The "scandal" in the Iran-Contra affair was that senior Reagan administration officials orchestrated the sale of arms to Iran, despite an official U.S. arms embargo on that country, and then funneled proceeds from the sales to insurgents (the Contras) fighting the left-wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua despite Congress having passed legislation prohibiting such assistance.<sup>57</sup> After multiple investigations revealed the details of what happened, only two explanations seemed plausible: either the President ordered subordinates to break the law, or elements of the NSC ran a rogue operation.

Reagan's National Security Advisor, Vice Admiral John Poindexter, barred pursuit of the first explanation by categorically denying he told the President about the diversion of funds to the Contras.<sup>58</sup> His testimony seemed to relegate the entire episode to a clear-cut case of insufficient oversight. President Reagan failed to oversee Poindexter, and Poindexter failed to oversee his subordinate, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. North, "the NSC staff officer with responsibility for terrorism policy," played an outsized role in managing the plan's implementation.<sup>59</sup> During testimony, Poindexter answered in response to a question about his relationship with North that it was good and then explained that his management style was to avoid "micromanagement."<sup>60</sup>

Despite the obvious conclusion that North's activities were not properly supervised, the Iran-Contra affair is not remembered as a case of failed oversight. On the contrary, Iran-Contra is widely considered a *cautionary tale on the dangers of micromanagement*.<sup>61</sup> This "lesson" from Iran-Contra requires a highly selective reading of the Tower Commission report. The report held President Reagan responsible for lack of oversight, stating that "the NSC system will not work unless the President makes it work" and that Reagan's lax management style allowed events to unfold as they did. "At no time," the report concludes, did Reagan "insist upon accountability and performance review." Yet all that is remembered from the report is its recommendation that "the national security advisor should focus on advice and management, not implementation and execution of policies."<sup>62</sup> This single observation has been twisted into the maxim that NSC activity beyond policymaking constitutes interference in department and agency operations and thus deleterious micromanagement.<sup>63</sup>

The report actually stated that National Security Advisors should “focus” on running the system well for the President. That does not mean that Presidential intervention in the behaviors of the departments and agencies is never needed. Indeed, as numerous studies have shown,<sup>64</sup> the President has a far larger and more grievous problem getting the departments and agencies to collaborate in implementing his policies than he does with overly aggressive NSC directorates circumventing the law and running operations.<sup>65</sup> In both cases, however, the proper remedy is good oversight, not a blanket injunction against the President and his staff ever intervening to correct poor performance further down the chain. Nonetheless, this false lesson from Iran-Contra has disinclined Presidents and their advisors from overseeing the military operations they put in motion, as the next case illustrates.<sup>66</sup>

### **Intervention in Panama, 1989**

During the Iran-Contra affair, North and Poindexter considered Panamanian military dictator Manuel Noriega as a possible collaborator for putting pressure on the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But in February 1988, while George H.W. Bush was still serving as Vice President, the Justice Department surprised the rest of the national security establishment when it made grand jury indictments of Noriega public, thus “transforming the crisis from a largely internal affair into a full-blown political confrontation between the governments of Panama and the United States.”<sup>67</sup> A year later, President Bush authorized force against Noriega’s regime.

The first major post-Goldwater-Nichols use of the military went smoothly compared to Grenada. Although there was grumbling about “micromanagement” in the runup to the intervention,<sup>68</sup> senior military leaders were delighted by the outcome of Operation *Just Cause*. They concluded operations went well because there was no civilian interference. For example, when President Bush was asked about the controversial decision to use the stealth F-117 bomber, he blandly replied, “If that’s the best plane, use it.”<sup>69</sup> Lieutenant General Carl Stiner, the designated commander of all forces employed during the Panama intervention, stated that he was allowed to execute his plan “without changes,” which, he stated, “was very germane in the outcome of Operation *Just Cause*.”<sup>70</sup> Civil leaders were consistently “hands-off” in their oversight role:

*Operation Just Cause was successful from a military perspective [but] inputs into the campaign came exclusively from the military, while even civilians in the Pentagon had little role in the planning. The President approved the Joint Staff plan with no modifications or discussion. In the words of a retired military officer,*

*Just Cause* “showed what professional soldiers can accomplish when allowed to do their jobs without micromanagement and second guessing.” . . . One general claimed that “Mr. Cheney’s biggest contribution to the invasion was to get out of the way.”<sup>71</sup>

But as later studies showed, lack of civilian oversight meant the entire purpose of the intervention—putting popularly elected civilian leader Guillermo Endara in office and the country on a sound footing—was forgotten.<sup>72</sup> While military leaders focused on operational combat tasks, they neglected their responsibilities for stabilization and governance to achieve policy goals.<sup>73</sup> Instead, widespread looting and collateral damage from the U.S. military operations put the Endara government in a multibillion-dollar hole and tarnished the U.S. reputation around the world.<sup>74</sup> Civilian leaders again had failed to ensure military operations were tailored to produce desired policy outcomes. Thus, lack of oversight, not micromanagement, was the major impediment to strategic success.<sup>75</sup>

### **First Gulf War, 1991**

The results of the 1991 Gulf War had much in common with the intervention in Panama. Joint military operations were a success. Iraqi forces were evicted from Kuwait, just as Noriega had been evicted from power. And as with Panama, military leaders were pleased with the lack of civilian leader oversight. President Bush made no major decisions that contradicted Pentagon advice, and “every American commander in the Gulf conflict expressed gratitude and satisfaction over the fact that their President and commander in chief had allowed them to fight the war as they saw fit.”<sup>76</sup> In fact, as astute insider accounts demonstrate, Bush essentially let his Chairman, General Colin Powell, make the call on when and how to end the war. The result, as was the case in Panama, was that the United States again failed to consider postwar planning and obtain a satisfactory strategic outcome.<sup>77</sup>

General Max Thurman, the combatant commander who oversaw Operation *Just Cause*, warned senior Pentagon leaders planning the Gulf War that Panama demonstrated the necessity of considering the aftermath of military operations. His advice was ignored.<sup>78</sup> There was greater attention to minimizing collateral damage (particularly to the oil fields) and preparation for civil affairs activities, which were helped along by the deep pockets of the Kuwaitis who were willing to pay for all the proffered U.S. services. However, U.S. leaders had not thought through what they wanted from Iraq,<sup>79</sup> and in the end, U.S. forces stood by while Saddam Hussein ordered his remaining security forces to crush the uprisings in northern and southern Iraq that

were stimulated, and in some cases actively encouraged, by the U.S. military.<sup>80</sup> The decision not to pressure Saddam to desist remains controversial. Some consider the restraint a concession to realpolitik that kept the allied coalition intact. Others call it “the original sin,” a “misjudgment so dark, so cynical that it haunted America’s leaders for a generation.”<sup>81</sup> In any case, the President’s management of war termination issues was clearly too detached, something he later indicated when expressing angst about Saddam’s survival.<sup>82</sup> The Iraqi leader remained a thorn in the side of the United States, feinting attacks that kept U.S. forces yo-yoing back and forth to the Gulf at great cost, until he was ousted by U.S. forces two decades later.<sup>83</sup>

### **Intervention in Somalia, 1993**

The United States intervened in Somalia to facilitate distribution of food aid and prevent the mass starvation of millions of Somalis. It then passed the mission to the UN, which embarked on a more ambitious reconciliation and reconstruction agenda that encountered stiff resistance from local warlords. U.S. special operations forces (SOF) were deployed to deal with the most troublesome warlord, Mohammed Farah Aideed. That ended badly when U.S. forces were pinned down in a protracted engagement with Aideed’s gunmen on October 3, 1993. After inflicting close to 1,000 casualties and losing 18 soldiers, U.S. forces eventually were extracted by a UN relief force, even though the operation was conducted independent of the UN command. The Bill Clinton administration negotiated the release of the lone U.S. Soldier captured by Aideed and then withdrew U.S. forces from Somalia.

Even though SOF had been deployed to circumvent the need for a large force commitment, the Clinton administration was accused of micromanagement for denying requests for AC-130s, armor, and other assets. Admiral Jonathan Howe, the American leading the UN operation, also wanted aircraft carriers and field artillery. Both military and civilian leaders in the chain of command thought those requests were ridiculous. General Joseph Hoar, the regional combatant commander, argued that if a counterinsurgency campaign was judged to be in the nation’s best interests, more ground forces and better intelligence were needed—not more firepower. Major General William Garrison, who commanded the special operations task force and who assured Major General Thomas Montgomery during the battle that his forces were not in danger of being overrun, later claimed he had all the firepower he needed.<sup>84</sup> U.S. forces were not overrun, and given the casualties they inflicted, Garrison’s assertion that lack of firepower was not a key factor in the outcome seems reasonable.

When President Clinton met with families of slain U.S. Soldiers, he explained the debacle by stating that he was reluctant to micromanage the military and had intentionally remained

disengaged for that reason. His explanation echoed the sentiments of Carter, Reagan, and Bush, who also wanted to avoid micromanaging. But, as a later in-depth Senate investigation argued, such sensitive special operations demand close supervision, as do all complex politico-military endeavors.<sup>85</sup> The United States was trying to pressure Aideed while negotiating an end to the violence, a complex two-track undertaking that demands close civilian and military coordination. That kind of cooperation, and effective oversight, was lacking. The Deputies Committee—technically the second-ranking officials from all the major departments represented on the NSC—was supervising Somalia operations but was not able to keep pace with the rapidly evolving situation. Then, General Garrison decided to run high risks with a daring daylight raid into the heart of Aideed's territory without informing leaders in Washington,<sup>86</sup> a decision that cost the Secretary of Defense his job<sup>87</sup> and years later still rankled the President.<sup>88</sup>

The scale and intensity of combat on October 3 shocked leaders in Washington. Even though the administration had argued for months that it was in U.S. interests to ensure the success of the first Chapter VII UN peace enforcement operation, President Clinton reacted by stating, "We went there for no purpose other than to keep those people alive; [for] no other purpose than a humanitarian mission."<sup>89</sup> Humanitarian motives could not explain large-scale fighting and casualties, or answer the father of a deceased Ranger who asked why it was so important to capture Aideed on October 3 but was no longer important on October 4.<sup>90</sup> Unable to justify the operations, the President decided to cut his losses and withdraw U.S. forces. *Newsweek* called the incident a "military disaster to rank with *Desert One* or the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut."<sup>91</sup> With eerie parallels to the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, Aideed secured a strategic political victory by suffering a huge tactical defeat of his forces. Somalia should have been a wake-up call for the need for timely oversight and politico-military coordination, as the Senate investigation concluded, but just like Vietnam, the *Mayaguez* crisis, and Iran-Contra, it became the opposite—a widely but wrongly understood calamity used to underscore the danger of micromanagement.<sup>92</sup> Both military leaders and the President were deeply aggrieved by the outcome, and civil-military relations deteriorated as a result.<sup>93</sup>

### Operations in Haiti, 1993–1994

About a week after the disaster in Somalia, the United States suffered another setback in Haiti. The Clinton administration was trying to restore democracy to Haiti by returning deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to his office. The Central Intelligence Agency considered Aristide "dangerously unstable," but the real resistance to the plan originated in the Department of Defense, which judged Haiti a low priority.<sup>94</sup> State pushed for a military mission

to Haiti and succeeded in getting USS *Harlan County* to sail for Haiti with 218 U.S. and Canadian military personnel to perform humanitarian construction tasks (such as building clinics and schools) and to provide basic nonlethal instruction to improve the professionalism of the Haitian military. In interagency meetings, the Pentagon insisted these lead elements of a UN mission could only operate in a permissive environment. State argued that it was necessary to be realistic about the possibility of some orchestrated demonstrations and not exaggerate their import. To keep the process moving forward, the NSC staff simply papered over these differences between State and Defense in meeting minutes.

Consequently, *Harlan County* sailed for Haiti. When it entered Port-au-Prince harbor, it was greeted by a small angry mob chanting hostile anti-American slogans.<sup>95</sup> State, certain that the protest was merely a staged event, wanted U.S. forces to brush the Haitian mob aside. Defense reiterated that the ship had been loaded for a humanitarian and not a use-of-force mission. NSC staff who had finessed interagency differences were uncertain what to do.<sup>96</sup> In the end, after several hastily arranged meetings of the Nation's top leadership, the ship was ordered withdrawn, a spectacle captured for the world by multiple news outlets.<sup>97</sup> The result was the worst of all outcomes: not a delay of *Harlan County*'s mission until the situation was more stable or a forceful entry to assert serious U.S. intent, but a humiliating reversal inflicted by a mob organized by the illegitimate leaders of one of the poorest nations on Earth.

Department of Defense leaders were pleased that they had resisted what they considered misguided White House policy,<sup>98</sup> but the United States went to the brink of war with Haiti less than a year later trying to reverse damage from the incident.<sup>99</sup> In September 1994, the United States launched a carefully orchestrated politico-military operation to get the Haitian military to relinquish control of the country. Former President Jimmy Carter, Senator Sam Nunn, and retired Chairman General Colin Powell went to Haiti to negotiate. At the same time, to underscore the irrevocable intent of the U.S. Government, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division was launched and en route to Haiti as negotiations proceeded. Realizing the United States was already committed to enforcing its will one way or another, the Haitian military capitulated. The massive diplomatic and military effort against the small, impoverished country was considered necessary to reverse the earlier failure. White House intervention should have resolved differences between State and Defense one way or the other. Instead, limited and poor oversight deferred to departmental preferences at the expense of coherent national-level policy, which proved disastrous.

### **Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999)**

Despite Somalia and Haiti, Clinton's National Security Advisor stated publicly that he remained more impressed by the danger of micromanagement than the need for effective oversight. Anthony Lake approved of the "general pattern in which the White House offers strategic guidance and direction . . . but does not get into tactical decisions which are best left to professional military men."<sup>100</sup> This accepted wisdom was the standard that Clinton's senior civilian leaders publicly embraced.<sup>101</sup> Privately, they believed they had to be much more involved in overseeing the U.S. military interventions, which is how they proceeded in the Balkans.<sup>102</sup> A more engaged White House led to better results, with the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo doing a better job of accomplishing U.S. objectives. Success notwithstanding, White House engagement irritated the Pentagon and led to more fraying of civil-military relations.<sup>103</sup>

Over the course of the 1990s, a prolonged tug of war occurred between the White House and the Pentagon over whether and how to use military force for limited political goals. The extended conflict over the "assertive multilateralism" championed by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, which the Pentagon considered "nation-building," deepened Pentagon sensitivity to perceived micromanagement. The Pentagon establishment's hostility toward General Wesley K. Clark probably represents the zenith of the conflict. Clark was seen to be siding with civilian leaders during his tenure as the director of Strategic Plans and Policy (J5) and as Ambassador Richard Holbrooke's aide. In this capacity, Clark was not above trying to direct military operations from beyond the official chain of command, which understandably infuriated the Pentagon. Later, as Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Clark sided with the White House on the need for intervention in Kosovo. The way that Clark integrated military and political measures was resented. Senior Pentagon leaders eventually found a way to force Clark into retirement.<sup>104</sup>

### **Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*, 2001 and 2003<sup>105</sup>**

In reaction to the bitter civil-military disputes of the 1990s, "President [George W.] Bush famously campaigned against nation-building."<sup>106</sup> Bush promised a hands-off approach with no micromanagement, stating that he remembered the harm done by Johnson picking bombing targets in Vietnam.<sup>107</sup> One study argues that Bush was so detached from military operations that his NSC never even met to debate the merits of going to war in Iraq.<sup>108</sup> The same source contends the combatant commander, General Tommy Franks, told the President that he had postwar security "all taken care of," when in fact he "had no such plan, had provided for no real postwar security concept, and was telling everyone who would listen that the postwar was someone else's problem and that U.S. forces would be leaving as quickly as they arrived."<sup>109</sup> There

are many indications that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld encouraged Franks's desire to withdraw military forces quickly, so the planning failure cannot be attributed to Franks alone.<sup>110</sup> However, the relevant point is that the NSC never reviewed postwar plans or resolved differences over their adequacy.

Despite Bush's detached posture vis-à-vis the Pentagon, his administration did not escape criticism when things went poorly. Many—including Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of coalition ground forces from June 2003 to June 2004—believed Secretary Rumsfeld's micromanaging explains the disaster in Iraq. Sanchez claimed Iraq was a repetition of the Vietnam War, with Rumsfeld “micromanaging his generals” with “devastating impact,” so that “warfighting commanders, all the way down to the divisional level, were never able to plan beyond the basic mission of defeating Saddam Hussein's military.”<sup>111</sup> Sanchez was not the only one dissatisfied. A 2006 *Military Times* poll indicated almost 60 percent of military personnel did not believe Pentagon civilian leadership had their “best interests at heart.”<sup>112</sup>

Rumsfeld did micromanage decisions about the deployment of forces and doing so increased civil-military tensions in the Pentagon.<sup>113</sup> However, like civilian micromanagement of bombing in Vietnam, Rumsfeld's decision to avoid manpower-intensive postwar plans was a conscious decision made with strategic rationale. The real problem was that it conflicted with the strategic rationale that the State Department was pursuing on the ground in Baghdad. From prewar planning to implementation, State and Defense pursued two different plans for transitioning Iraq to indigenous control. President Bush's detached management style left this long-running internecine conflict unresolved, with grievous results. Numerous postwar memoirs complain that the White House would not resolve the outstanding differences between State and Defense.<sup>114</sup> Instead of digging into the debate among his Cabinet officials and discovering the key point of divergence, President Bush would walk out of the room and tell Condoleezza Rice, his National Security Advisor, to “work it out.”<sup>115</sup>

According to Rice, Bush was not interested in the issue of postwar security.<sup>116</sup> When he finally was asked to rule on whether the United States was committed to building democracy in post-Saddam Iraq, he equivocated, stating that we would give the Iraqis a chance but that it was up to them. On this key issue, President Bush, “the Decider,” did not make a clear decision.<sup>117</sup> As noted elsewhere, this “left plenty of wiggle room for disagreements about how the mission should be conducted,” and State and Defense obliged:

*They disagreed over the importance of ensuring good governance . . . over the appropriate level of U.S. commitment to this mission, over how it should be carried*

*out, and over which department would do what to execute postwar tasks. These disagreements should not have been a surprise; they had been a longstanding bone of contention between the two departments. . . . President Bush did not resolve the differences. . . . As the situation deteriorated, State was increasingly adamant about security and DOD was increasingly adamant about early departure for U.S. forces. State increased its appeals for more troops, while Rumsfeld's generals told him irregular warfare was an intelligence-dependent mission and that more troops would be counterproductive.<sup>118</sup>*

After 4 years of increasingly costly insurgency and the failure of his war in Iraq looming, Bush finally got involved in the details of military planning. Rice created the Iraq Stabilization Group to impose coherence on all U.S. operations in Iraq, which led to intense friction with the Department of Defense in particular and, of course, to the accusation that she was micromanaging. When she kicked off her effort with a list of 50 hard-hitting questions for commanders in Iraq, General George W. Casey complained that “Washington was trying to micromanage the war” with “an 8,000-mile screwdriver.”<sup>119</sup> Rice agreed she was “far deeper into operational matters than [she] believed wise” but ended up glad she intervened, as did her successor, Steven Hadley.<sup>120</sup> This time, Bush backed Rice and Hadley up, and the White House intervention led to decisions to surge forces and impose counterinsurgency tactics that helped salvage the situation.<sup>121</sup> Bush, like Clinton before him, had to learn that insufficient oversight was a far greater danger than micromanagement.

Publicly, however, the White House was still concerned about being accused of micromanagement. The President went out of his way to bring senior military leaders on board with his decision to surge U.S. forces in Iraq, promising them an increase in force structure.<sup>122</sup> By then exaggerated concern with micromanagement was prevalent throughout the upper echelons of the national security system and down through most ranks of the Pentagon, if not also in other departments and agencies. Senior military and civilian leaders, in their memoirs and interviews from the Bush administration and later the Obama administration as well, voiced concerns about the deleterious effects of micromanagement.<sup>123</sup>

Senior leaders in the Bush and Obama administrations distinguished between unhelpful micromanagement and helpful oversight in an amazingly consistent manner. No matter who they were or where they sat, leaders agreed that unhelpful micromanagement is what they received from anyone higher up, and helpful oversight is what they provided to their subordinates.<sup>124</sup> In other words, they all complained of being micromanaged by their superiors, but

believed the guidance they provided to their own subordinates was helpful oversight, not deleterious micromanagement. Senior leaders extended this tendentious treatment of guidance to requests for information. They resented higher authorities requesting information from their subordinates—but made a point of keeping themselves well-informed by seeking unfiltered information from lower echelons of their own organizations.

These attitudes demonstrate the extent to which exaggerated concern about micromanagement is now an embedded feature of U.S. national security culture. The irony is two-fold: Leaders roundly condemn micromanagement in general, but make an exception when they are the ones providing the guidance—thus tacitly acknowledging that micromanagement can be good or bad. More broadly, when it comes to strategic outcomes, the widespread leadership concern with micromanagement is not consistent with the historical record, which clearly demonstrates insufficient oversight is a much greater problem than deleterious micromanagement.

### **The Obama Administration**

The Obama administration was criticized for micromanaging national security affairs and the military in particular. Three former Secretaries of Defense from both parties accused the White House of unhelpful micromanagement.<sup>125</sup> Some have argued the Obama administration's penchant for micromanagement impaired its ability to provide strategic oversight.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, one former Pentagon official recently summarized the Pentagon's take on the Obama record by stating that “many senior military officials complain of feeling baffled and shut out by a White House that combines micromanagement with a near-total inability to articulate coherent strategic goals.”<sup>127</sup> Understandably, micro-meddling uninformed by a guiding strategy is particularly unwelcome in the Pentagon.

But the Obama White House had its own complaints about Pentagon leaders, believing that they were not forthcoming with basic information and what information they did provide was packaged with the intent of managing rather than facilitating Presidential decisions.<sup>128</sup> The White House believed the Pentagon was resorting to the time-tested Washington “Goldilocks gambit.” Pentagon planners provided three options with the first and last so flawed that only their preferred course of action—the middle one—made any sense at all.<sup>129</sup> As options were debated, the Pentagon concluded two of its own senior military leaders—Lieutenant General Douglas Lute and General James Cartwright, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—were working too closely with the White House.<sup>130</sup> Lute, pursuing information rather than directing, was disparaged by the Pentagon for micromanaging.<sup>131</sup> Cartwright, responding when the President made it clear he wanted a wider range of options, was accused of disloyalty (not being a

“team player”), although from his point of view he just performed his statutory responsibility to provide candid professional military advice as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>132</sup>

Space constraints preclude a detailed review of the history of the Obama administration’s military operations, but some summary observations are possible. It is true that Obama micro-managed. For example, early on, the White House wanted more aggressive targeting of enemy leaders, and later it imposed onerous restrictions.<sup>133</sup> Also, White House interference made execution of the training and equipping of rebels in Syria nearly impossible.<sup>134</sup> That said, White House concern about the Pentagon trying to manage rather than facilitate Presidential decisions seems justified. In any case, it is difficult to argue the Pentagon was not allowed to pursue the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq largely the way it wanted. The real underlying problem was the broken strategy dialogue between senior civilian and military leaders, which precluded agreement on U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan and what it would take to obtain them:

*Senior military leaders understood their tactical objectives—attacking Taliban forces and capturing or killing terrorists—but they were uncertain about U.S. strategy for the war on terror. Over time, the U.S. commitment to effective governance in Afghanistan increased, but not because strategy was clarified. Instead, it resulted from ad hoc decisionmaking in response to the reconstitution of the Taliban as an effective insurgent force. . . . As General Stanley A. McChrystal, USA (Ret.), notes, the United States never had a “clear strategic aim” in Afghanistan. Instead, it backed into counterinsurgency to prevent tactical reversals to its counterterrorism agenda.<sup>135</sup>*

The micromanagement myth helps explain the broken civil-military dialogue over strategy. It undermined a vibrant civil-military dialogue that would hammer out strategic objectives and the likely costs of achieving them, and instead encouraged civilian and military leaders to stick to their bifurcated roles. Among other things, this meant no strategy or attendant strategic guidance, but also poorer operational performance. Absent good oversight, the Pentagon did not conduct operations to good effect or even in keeping with its own principles. Secretary Gates, for example, notes in his memoirs that the Pentagon produced multiple layers of command in Afghanistan and was not able to achieve unified command of all military forces there until more than 10 years of war had passed—despite unity of command being a principle of war. And as will be argued below, exaggerated concerns about micromanagement also contributed to limited tactical excellence.

## Historical Observations

This historical review yields several significant insights. On the whole, it is clear that insufficient oversight is a better explanation than micromanagement for the limited strategic successes revealed in the cases above. Insufficient oversight was evident in the failure to provide any strategy or resolve outstanding operational differences in Vietnam; the poor joint operational planning in the *Mayaguez*, Iranian hostage, and Grenada cases; the poor politico-military coordination and security posture during the Beirut bombing; the White House detachment from operations during the Haiti, Iran-Contra, Panama, Somalia, and Iraq interventions; the failure to provide unified command and purpose in Afghanistan; and the unwillingness or inability to resolve critical differences between State and Defense on how to transition Iraq to indigenous rule as soon as possible. In all these cases, the lack of active, engaged oversight was much more egregious and consequential a failing of civilian leadership than micromanagement.

Significantly, the failure of civilian oversight is linked to the civilian micromanagement myth. Most Presidents now accept the widespread view that their role should be limited to setting broad policy goals. No President wants to be accused of Lyndon Johnson-type micromanagement, and often Presidents explain their oversight failures in just those terms. Military leaders have encouraged this trend by applauding passive Presidents and promoting the false narrative that any failed military operations can be explained by civilian micromanagement. Military leaders in effect have conditioned incoming Presidents not to exercise oversight, which is interpreted as micromanagement. This narrative resonates with the public, which believes detached White House leaders are unwilling to listen to military advice.<sup>136</sup> Polls now indicate that more than 80 percent of the public believes civilian leaders do not rely sufficiently on military advice.<sup>137</sup>

What makes this trend so alarming is that detached Presidents are not inclined or able to generate strategy or ensure its implementation with unified effort. This is not surprising. Presidents are very busy, and the majority know nothing about the national security system when they enter office. Only two post-World War II Presidents have had any senior leader experience in the huge, labyrinthine national security system.<sup>138</sup> Given demands on their time and the escalating political costs of being charged with micromanagement, most Presidents are inclined to pay close attention to military operations only when they go off the rails. The problem with Presidents is that the national security system is President-centric and does not work well without Executive attention. Only the President is able to compel Cabinet secretaries to collaborate in a unified effort.<sup>139</sup> Only the President can resolve contentious strategy issues among

his subordinates or direct the behaviors of the departments and agencies, as argued extensively elsewhere.<sup>140</sup> Without the President engaged, the system does not and cannot produce strategy or unified effort to implement it, which explains the limited strategic successes from otherwise highly competent military operations. The putative cure—holding the White House at arm’s length—has been worse than the perceived disease: micromanagement. Put differently, the Pentagon cannot have it both ways. It cannot have an engaged White House making and executing national strategy that gives meaning to military operations without the prospect that the White House will intervene on occasion to ensure operations generate desired strategic outcomes.

### **Part II: Leadership, Micromanagement, and Mission Command**

History demonstrates civilian micromanagement is not as frequent or harmful as the military believes, especially compared to the larger problem of insufficient oversight. However, that is only one part of the argument made here. Embracing false lessons about micromanagement entails other costs for the Pentagon besides distancing Presidents from the military operations they approve. Hypersensitivity to civilian micromanagement makes military leaders more alert to the danger of micromanaging their own subordinates, which helps explain the current bias against micromanagement in mission command doctrine. The argument made in this section is that embracing the civilian micromanagement myth uncritically has distorted the military’s own understanding of what constitutes good leadership. Before explaining why, it helps to consider the other factors reinforcing Pentagon sensitivity to micromanagement and their impact.

#### **Contributing Factors and Pentagon Culture**

As we have seen, the concern about micromanagement is exaggerated and sometimes false.<sup>141</sup> This raises questions as to why the myth remains so pronounced and disproportionate to its actual impact. Mistaken lessons from previous experience is a big part of the explanation, but the “micromanagement myth” is reinforced by other factors, including human nature. It is natural, if not healthy, to want to shift blame for poor performance. For example, prior to Goldwater-Nichols, military performance was compromised by poor joint planning, risk assessments, and tactics, but the results were often blamed on civilian micromanagement.<sup>142</sup> It is also true more generally that people do not like being supervised closely or having their competence seemingly questioned by superiors looking over their shoulder.<sup>143</sup>

Another reinforcing factor is organizational culture. Organizations seek autonomy and are predisposed to resent oversight.<sup>144</sup> Pentagon resentment of White House direction is therefore not surprising. However, in the Pentagon’s case, the resentment runs deeper than otherwise

would be the case because U.S. military culture traditionally sees its only legitimate mission as fighting and winning America's wars by focusing on conventional operations, weapons systems, and targeting.<sup>145</sup> Thus, the military for the most part does not appreciate its much broader legal responsibility to support the policies of the President through diverse military actions and is quick to attempt to channel the President's decisions toward its own preferred mission.

Perhaps most important, the changing nature of the security environment has amplified concerns about micromanagement. The security environment is now so chaotic and fast-evolving that many believe "wicked" problems can only be comprehended by wrestling with them in real time. In response, some advocate "networked" organizations with decentralized control, meaning maximum initiative by those closest to the problem and minimum senior leader interference. This is a very popular point of view,<sup>146</sup> and micromanagement is an especially corrosive influence according to this school of thought. General Stanley McChrystal is often cited on this point. In his book *Team of Teams*, McChrystal explains how he transformed SOF to move and strike faster than insurgent or terrorist organizations. He argues the security environment now requires maximum delegation of authority. He dubbed his approach to such decentralized control "eyes on, hands off," arguing leaders need great visibility over subordinate operations but must keep their hands off, allowing those conducting the operations to make their own decisions.<sup>147</sup>

All of these factors encourage sensitivity to micromanagement. Combined with the long history of exaggerated micromanagement charges, they reinforce the conviction that civilian interference is deleterious and a constant threat. The military exhibits such frequent sensitivity to the threat of civilian micromanagement that it can be claimed to constitute one of the key beliefs that help define Pentagon culture today. The belief also has spread to the broader national security system, so that it is now widely though not universally accepted even by Presidents.<sup>148</sup> However, the fact that the belief is well-entrenched does not mean it is well-founded, as we have demonstrated. The belief is not historically justified, and it does not make sense conceptually either.

### **Conceptual Confusion**

***Civilian Micromanagement Is Rare.*** The exaggerated concern with civilian micromanagement is not supportable for several additional reasons. To begin with, deleterious civilian micromanagement of the military is much rarer than supposed. This is true historically but also for structural reasons. Except for the President and Secretary of Defense, civilians are not legally part of the military chain of command. Moreover, in the relatively few cases where Presidents

and Secretaries of Defense do intervene in the details of military affairs, they often have good reason for doing so—and again, for structural reasons. Both points bear a bit of elaboration.

NSC staffers and other civilian officials cannot legally issue orders to Pentagon personnel. Thus, when any civilians other than the President or Secretary of Defense try to inject themselves into the military decision process, there is a readily available, iron-clad, and polite response to deflect the unwanted supervision: “I’m sorry, you are not in my chain of command.” This response works at all levels. Secretary Rumsfeld deflected National Security Advisor Rice this way,<sup>149</sup> and many lower ranking Defense personnel have done the same thing.<sup>150</sup> Thus, civilian micromanagement really only exists at the strategic level—that is, in directions issued by the President and his Cabinet official, the Secretary Of Defense. Everything else is normal interagency communication and oversight of policy implementation, which may be irksome but does not oblige the Pentagon to do something it does not want to do.

More important, when the President does interject himself in the management of military operations, it often is justified, particularly in smaller contingencies where even tactical actions can have strategic effects. Brent Scowcroft, a former flag officer and National Security Advisor, has explained how political considerations drive Presidents to insist on more control in such circumstances. There is a tension, he states,

*between the need for the President to manage these sorts of things, and the utility of the man on the scene being told what it is he is supposed to do and then letting him do it. As a military man, of course, I am attracted to the latter. As a practical matter, however, as I watch what is involved in these isolated kinds of military situations—I am not talking about a general conflict or anything—the President’s political neck is on the line. As a matter of course, he is going to be very reluctant to leave in the hands of some unknown military commander decisions which could have a great impact on his political well-being. Therefore, the military has to expect that it is going to be subject to intense scrutiny in carrying out crisis interventions. Whether it is optimally the better way to do it is almost beside the point. . . . An incumbent President is simply not going to leave these things up to the vagaries of the local U.S. military commander.<sup>151</sup>*

The President’s political fortunes may be at stake in crises, but so are his objectives for the military action and thus the Nation’s strategic fortunes—for better or worse. Presidents should want oversight of such operations to ensure they create intended outcomes. During a major war,

great precedence is given to conventional military success because, generally speaking, political objectives hinge on defeat of enemy forces. In such circumstances, the assumption that the President and his Cabinet officials should focus on broad strategy decisions and leave military details to subordinates holds for the most part.<sup>152</sup> However, all the great students and practitioners of operations other than war (that is, small wars, irregular wars, low-intensity conflict, and so forth) believe one of their defining characteristics is that even tactical actions can have strategic significance. Thus, they require greater scrutiny by senior leadership concerned with details that might determine the fate of the enterprise. For example, in small contingencies such as Panama, where it was clear from the beginning that U.S. forces would defeat Panamanian forces, it was incumbent on the President to pay greater attention to what followed major combat operations—that is, to postwar planning.

Because only the President or Secretary of Defense can micromanage the military, and because by definition lesser military operations requiring detailed oversight are more frequent than near-peer wars, it stands to reason that there are few actual cases of inappropriate and harmful civilian oversight. Implicit in this discussion, however, is an even more important point, which is that micromanagement cannot be defined as harmful a priori. The effects of micromanagement must be assessed in each case to determine whether leaders were right or wrong to intervene.

***Oversight Is an Inherent Leadership Function.*** One of the best accepted rules of management is that authority should be commensurate with responsibility. This axiom ensures accountability. Someone cannot be held responsible for outcomes if he or she does not have the authority to control the factors that determine those outcomes. One sure-fire way to destroy morale and undermine organizational effectiveness is to assign accountability without authority.<sup>153</sup> For this reason, the military gives its leaders the authority to direct all aspects of their organizations' performance. It does so because it wants to hold leaders responsible for that performance.

In practice, this means that the larger the organization is, the more the leader has to delegate to—and thus rely on—subordinates. This is true all the way up the chain of command to the Nation's commander in chief: the President. As Senator Henry Jackson observed long ago, a "President can make only the smallest fraction of the total number of decisions relating to national security. His are the guiding . . . decisions, but millions of supporting operational decisions, and associated actions, must be taken. . . . Delegation is therefore not merely desirable; it is unavoidable."<sup>154</sup> The more a leader delegates, the more he or she has to practice oversight—that is, monitor the organization's ability to perform its missions and/or functions well and intervene to eliminate any impediments to the same.

In high-performing organizations, a distinction is often made between management and leadership, the assumption being that managers exercise the oversight that keeps the organization running smoothly while leaders envision the future, communicate grand priorities, and the like. But leaders cannot attend to the future unless the present is well in hand. As a practical matter, a leader's attention therefore must be directed toward anything that threatens immediate performance enough to put mission success at risk. Whether the performance impediment originates in the leader's own person or office, or fourteen levels down, does not matter. Leaders must make sure the liability is corrected before mission success is compromised.

***Micro-Knowledge Without Some Micromanagement Makes No Sense.*** Thus, a "no micromanagement" dictum contradicts the basic requirements of leader oversight. Furthermore, an "eyes on, hands off," approach makes no sense unless the information available to the leader from "eyes on" is used occasionally for "hands-on" correction of subordinate behaviors. There is no point in knowing what your subordinates are doing if you are never going to intervene to correct behaviors with debilitating strategic consequences. The actual behaviors of even the most thoughtful and capable leaders arguing against micromanagement and in favor of decentralization demonstrate this.

For example, one of McChrystal's most capable subordinate officers argues that McChrystal needed "eyes on" so he could sometimes be "hands on." McChrystal thought manhunting on an industrial scale would "get the [terrorist and insurgent] organization to collapse in on itself."<sup>155</sup> He later changed his mind about this, but during the height of fighting in Iraq, he wanted a high-tempo manhunting effort against even lower ranking insurgent and terrorist cadres.<sup>156</sup> One of McChrystal's key special operations subordinates pursuing high-value targets, Chris Fussell, was slow to adopt this approach. Consequently, he received a call asking why he had not launched a mission to nab the cousin of someone on the target list who had crossed over into his battlespace. Fussell shrugged the question off, stating that "the cousin seemed to be of tangential significance at best." Fussell shares what happened next: "I was swiftly corrected, and the phone came alive in response to my brushoff. . . . Because of our inaction in this moment, he [Fussell's superior] had to shift from an *eyes on, hands off* mode of monitoring to a *hands-on* one of direct guidance." Fussell was not angry about being micromanaged, but rather was "eager to correct my error."<sup>157</sup>

Secretary Gates is another case in point. He has denounced Congress for "micromanagement masquerading as oversight"<sup>158</sup> and the Obama administration for "micromanagement of military matters."<sup>159</sup> Like McChrystal, Gates believes leaders must be well informed on what subordinates do, which he calls "micro-knowledge" and distinguishes from harmful microman-

agement.<sup>160</sup> Consistent with these views, Gates liked to meet personally with lower ranking officers when he visited Afghanistan and Iraq (unsupervised by their superiors so they would speak freely to him). However, Gates did not appreciate the White House gathering micro-knowledge. When he discovered White House staff seeking information about Department of Defense activities in the field, he emphatically cut off their communications (and was applauded for doing so).<sup>161</sup> More to the point, though, Gates used his micro-knowledge for micromanagement when he believed his organization was performing poorly. He was quick to intervene at much lower levels to safeguard mission success—as he did when he forced the Pentagon to buy mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles and in many other cases.<sup>162</sup>

Gates's micro-knowledge concept, like McChrystal's "eyes on, hands off" approach, only makes sense if the information gathered can be used to correct performance problems that impede mission success, regardless of the level or frequency of the interventions. In a high-performing organization, one would expect the interventions to be rare, but the point is that a blanket injunction against micromanagement is really an abdication of leadership. The real issue is whether a senior leader's intervention will help or hurt. Currently, not enough effort is made to determine whether this is the case. Instead, senior leader interventions multiple levels down the chain of command are now widely assumed to be wrong in principle and deleterious in effect and are pejoratively labeled micromanagement. This is true for not only White House oversight of Pentagon activities but also senior military leaders exercising oversight of military organizations.

### **Military Micromanagement and Mission Command**

At each level of military command, leaders must decide when direct intervention is required to ensure performance remains on track. There are, of course, many ways to accomplish such interventions, one being micromanagement—that is, intervening several or many layers down in an organization. Arguably, a couple of decades ago, military micromanagement was a far greater concern,<sup>163</sup> with commanders considered more likely to manage from afar or stifle initiative at lower levels.<sup>164</sup> Today, however, the pendulum has swung the other way. The current bias in Pentagon culture is to consider micromanagement inherently wrong, thus circumscribing—in effect—traditional command accountability. The Pentagon's current understanding of micromanagement, which accords with the popular understanding, is expressed in the military's doctrinal concept for command and control: mission command.

The Chairman's capstone doctrine publications (Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* and Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*) emphasize the importance of mission command, stating that it "is the preferred method of exercising command

and control” and that it makes “unity of effort over complex operations . . . possible through decentralized execution of centralized, overarching plans.” The concept “demands that subordinate leaders at all echelons exercise disciplined initiative and act aggressively and independently to accomplish the mission.”<sup>165</sup> One concern, however, is that a commander taking aggressive, independent initiative at one level will issue directions that impinge on the ability of subordinates to do the same. To avoid this, the concept requires commanders to be on guard against micromanagement.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, the concept’s default position is for commanders to “demonstrate trust by exercising restraint in their close supervision of subordinates”<sup>167</sup> and to “delegate decisions to subordinates wherever possible.”<sup>168</sup> Thus, “mission command begins with a bias to decentralized decisionmaking,”<sup>169</sup> which many consider appropriate for the increasingly complex decisionmaking environment.<sup>170</sup>

Mission command emphasis on avoiding micromanagement introduces an element of tension into military command and control. The mission command encouragement to be more hands off, delegating as much as possible and intervening as little as possible, can clash with the longstanding dictum that leaders can only be held accountable for outcomes if they are empowered to exercise oversight over their entire organizations. This tension is manageable, and good leaders manage the tension. Formally, nothing in mission command prevents leaders from exercising oversight at their discretion; it just encourages them to default to less intervention and be careful when they do intervene.

Informally, however, the concern about civilian micromanagement is so deeply embedded that it encourages an equal aversion to military micromanagement, a concern that runs rampant through Army literature, including memoirs,<sup>171</sup> analysis,<sup>172</sup> and doctrine.<sup>173</sup> General Mark A. Milley, then Army Chief of Staff and now Chairman, also has expressed his belief that military micromanagement is prevalent:

*What we do, in practice, is we micromanage and overly specify everything the subordinate has to do, all the time. . . . It might be an effective way to do certain things. It is not an effective way to fight. . . . You will lose battles and wars if you approach warfare like that. . . . So we have to practice what we preach. We preach “mission command” but we don’t necessarily practice it on a day to day basis in everything we do.*<sup>174</sup>

Yet, as in the case of alleged civilian micromanagement, the question that needs to be asked is whether senior military leader interventions are helpful or deleterious. One indication that the

military may suffer less from military micromanagement than from insufficient military oversight can be found in the performance record of brigades deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. There are many well-documented cases of field Army commanders and special forces teams that were able to pacify their areas of responsibility in Afghanistan and Iraq, often despite the most difficult circumstances.<sup>175</sup> One advantage of decentralization is that it encourages innovation by field commanders, which is why mission command doctrine argues subordinates should be encouraged and given the latitude to innovate. However, when subordinates innovate and are successful, senior leaders need to recognize, reward, and replicate those successes—and do so quickly. This tended not to happen in Afghanistan and Iraq, as one internal comprehensive Army study concludes:

*Innovative commanders emerged during the war and were empirically successful, but the process of encouraging and institutionalizing innovations was uneven. It is also not clear that the Army rewarded their performance through the promotions process or by supporting the replication of their successful innovations. With only a few exceptions, it does not appear that the Army examined how the tactical leaders who innovated in Iraq became innovators in the first place. . . . it seems that the most successful innovators were actually inverting policy rather than operating within policy . . . and it seems possible that the Army in the Iraq War actually tended to penalize successful leaders who challenged their commanders.<sup>176</sup>*

The bias against senior leader interventions embedded in mission command philosophy might help explain this failure to reward and replicate success at the tactical level. Instead of rushing to determine the origin of the success and promulgating those best practices as new directives, senior leaders wanted to avoid micromanaging and thus let brigade commanders do as they saw fit. One close observer of British performance in Afghanistan argues this happened to British units. Every 6 months, a new brigade and its commander arrived and were free to choose how they approached their campaign, some emphasizing “a highly kinetic warfighting” and others “focused on the needs of the population”—a haphazard approach the observer called “mission command gone bonkers.”<sup>177</sup> It appears the same approach applied to U.S. brigades, which were allowed to follow their historic disinclination to use counterinsurgency tactics.<sup>178</sup> This also helps explain why as late as 2012, Soldiers deploying to Afghanistan encountered commanders with little to no knowledge of official counterinsurgency doctrine.<sup>179</sup>

The Pentagon's hypersensitivity to micromanagement, now codified in doctrine on mission command, seems odd because in some respects it is so "unmilitary." The first and most important leadership lesson the military teaches young recruits is that "it's not about you." It's about the team—the organization and its performance. A military leader's most important obligation is to correctly assess his organization—no matter how great or small—and its performance and elevate it, but at all costs to prevent it from deteriorating and compromising mission success. It has been argued that toxic leadership in the military has diverse attributes, one of which is micromanagement.<sup>180</sup> Perhaps a better definition would be leaders getting priorities reversed and thinking it is all about them rather than the team's performance.

Another irony in the Pentagon's sensitivity to civilian micromanagement is that when harmful micromanagement actually takes place, it is much more likely to be *military*, not *civilian*, leaders who do the micromanaging. Case studies have demonstrated this, and it stands to reason given the legal definition of the chain of command explained above.<sup>181</sup> Micromanagement by military leaders is also more common because they know military affairs well and are more likely to think they can see what needs to be done at lower levels. But as in the case of civilian micromanagement, military micromanagement cannot be defined as harmful a priori. Its effects must be assessed.

Some military leaders already understand these points and their implications for civil-military relations.<sup>182</sup> Consider, for example, this excellent point made in the Army's comprehensive study of its performance in Iraq. On the topic of strategic leadership and political and military boundaries, the study concludes:

*A better concept for the role of military leaders in war might be that of shared responsibilities of senior political and military leaders. The belief in a hard line between the civil and military spheres is a mistaken one, and the experience of the post-9/11 wars has shown that, while civil leaders unequivocally retain final decision authority, military leaders should share the responsibility for ensuring the quality of important decisions. Specifically, military and civil leaders who embark upon war have a shared responsibility to ensure that war aims are achievable and that strategies, policies, and campaigns are tied to those aims and have a reasonable probability of success. It is also incumbent upon them to ensure, together, the integrity of the decision-making process and the fidelity of the information used in that process; the organizational capacity to execute in a*

*sufficiently coherent way, then adapt quickly enough as change happens; and the sustained legitimacy of the war.*<sup>183</sup>

This is good advice, and it is substantiated not only by the history of the U.S. occupation of Iraq but also by the larger set of post–World War II military contingencies reviewed here. These military interventions have been far less effectual than others because of insufficient oversight—both civilian and military—and not, as so often assumed, because of micromanagement.

## Recommendations

The insights from this research have significant implications for leadership development in both civilian and military educational programs. Leaders at all levels—strategic, institutional, and operational—require information and performance feedback so they can perform their oversight function effectively. The required degree and level of intervention varies. From the President down to field commanders, senior leader intervention in a high-performing organization such as the U.S. military ought to be rare, but only as rare as threats to high performance. Put differently, leader interventions should occur only when subordinate decisions and behaviors put mission success at risk—but no less often. At issue is how to make the determination that intervention is necessary. As others have argued, there is “no mathematical formula” for determining “precisely where strategic supervision ends and improper micromanagement of military operations begins”<sup>184</sup> or how leaders can “avoid the extremes of disengagement and micromanagement.”<sup>185</sup> However, some rules of thumb can help.

The first point is to reiterate an admonition from an excellent Army War College study on micromanagement: “Don’t exaggerate instances of civilian interference.”<sup>186</sup> Like the old adage goes, “If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.” For too long, Pentagon culture has embraced the micromanagement myth, complaining of civilian interference real or imagined, when the much greater problem is civilian leader detachment. An engaged commander in chief is a good thing for the military, indeed, essential if there is to be any hope of formulating national strategy and unified effort to implement it. It far better serves the Pentagon’s interests to have the President and his staff involved in “creative collaboration” with military leaders, which is another recommendation from the study.<sup>187</sup>

Second, it is important to note that McChrystal and Gates are right in arguing that leaders need to be well-informed, digging to find ground truth on any topic that threatens their organization’s performance. Since it is agreed that authority can be delegated but responsibility cannot,<sup>188</sup> it is incumbent on leaders to stay informed about progress toward objectives, iden-

tifying anything or anybody that is impeding success. The point is not for leaders to randomly seek detailed knowledge in an overbearing way, but to form an idea of how they would know their organization is succeeding or failing, and then supervise to be sure it is the former and not the latter. It could be argued that senior leaders who do not know how to do this are not ready for command.

The corollary is that senior leaders should not resent it when their superiors do the same thing to keep abreast of larger organizational performance: gather information.<sup>189</sup> In a high-performance system or organization where mission success is the overriding concern, no one should refuse information to superiors exploring performance issues. What should be desired is the kind of open, collaborative, no-jeopardy, “just the truth from your viewpoint” culture pioneered by the military for its after-action review processes. A culture supporting this kind of honest exploration of issues is just as important prior to operations (when they are being planned) as it is during operations (when they are being executed) and afterward (when they are being reviewed to determine why things went the way they did). As noted elsewhere, successful mission command is in large part a function of organizational culture,<sup>190</sup> and in a high-performance military culture, everyone, like Fussell, should be “eager to correct errors.”<sup>191</sup> This is why leaders should take to heart yet a third admonition from the Army War College study on micromanagement: “Don’t confuse requests for information with control.”<sup>192</sup>

When leaders fear micromanagement and being accused of it, they tend not to explore performance problems as they should and may even delegate essential command functions.<sup>193</sup> Subordinates, for their part, can also be reluctant to query leaders on their thinking in order to better understand their intent and desired outcomes—and that includes military leaders wanting to understand what a President hopes to achieve through the use of military force. In the case of the *Mayaguez* crisis, at critical decisionmaking junctures, both the Marine assault commander and the Joint Chiefs of Staff went along with what they supposed their superiors wanted rather than querying them to be sure, a phenomenon that can be termed *anticipatory compliance*. Anticipatory compliance can be just as fatal to the mission command approach as micromanagement, and leaders should be equally on guard against it.<sup>194</sup>

When leaders do decide to go beyond information collection to intervention, they need to do so for the right reasons. They should override subordinates only when they are convinced their broader field of vision gives them insights that those further down the chain of command lack—that is, when their privileged perspective allows them to see the larger enterprise is at risk if some particular actions are not taken. Good oversight is thus based on contextual insights derived from a broader set of responsibilities and resultant field of vision. In contrast, deleterious

micromanagement second-guesses a subordinate based on a senior leader's personal past experience or some other prejudice rather than their broader field of vision.

The Joint Staff should consider addressing these issues in joint professional military education (JPME) as part of established instruction on civil-military relations, particularly in senior leadership courses such as CAPSTONE. A case could also be made for incorporating insights from the historical cases reviewed here in both intermediate- and top-level JPME schools as part of the curricula on civil-military relations during complex contingencies. In addition, the Joint Staff should revisit extant guidance on the mission command concept to ensure a broad understanding that the concept does not negate the inherent leadership responsibility for mission success, including the obligation to intervene at much lower levels on occasion when it is clear that doing so is justified by a leader's broader field of vision and understanding of conditions for success.

Finally, JPME curricula need to emphasize the truth displaced by the micromanagement myth. Casting Presidents as callous micromanagers misrepresents their leadership record and, worse, displaces the truth that Presidents and Secretaries of Defense care deeply about the welfare of Servicemembers and, on the whole, have been loath to interfere with anything that might compromise their welfare or success. Contrary to popular opinion, major civilian leader interventions in military operations have been infrequent and often more reasonable than commonly supposed.

The *Mayaguez* crisis is a perfect case in point. The allegations of civilian micromanagement during that crisis were rampant, persistent, and wrong. In reality, as the NSC minutes illuminate, civilian leaders were careful when it came to the issue of military risk and acted in complete accord with Pentagon preferences.<sup>195</sup> What micromanagement there was came from military leaders, and it was not consequential in terms of outcomes. What was consequential, and might have reduced or eliminated the tragic loss of life during the crisis, was better joint military planning and risk assessments.

Despite all the false allegations, a series of military leaders involved in the crisis—Gary L. Weikel, an Air Force HH-53 pilot; Admiral James L. Holloway, Chief of Naval Operations; Robert McFarlane, Marine and NSC staffer; and General David C. Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—set aside the scapegoating and identified and helped correct the real problems inhibiting performance.<sup>196</sup> They all played important roles in later reforms that improved joint operations and established the U.S. Special Operations Command. They were, of course, castigated for encouraging micromanagement of military affairs.<sup>197</sup> But in the end, the record demonstrates that the reforms they supported made the U.S. military better. Fixing problems that

impede mission success is what good leaders do, and it is what these leaders did. That historical reality should be emphasized in JPME.

### Conclusion

The myth of deleterious civilian micromanagement is too deeply embedded to be easily excised, but it is in the Pentagon's interest to do so. As a sage long ago remarked, the penalty of untruth is untruth, and that is the case for misrepresenting the impact of micromanagement. Because of the micromanagement myth, Presidents now feel less responsible for ensuring the military operations they initiate are a success.<sup>198</sup> They can say, and often do, that they do not want to micromanage, a stance that garners praise, relieves them of responsibility for results, and implicitly puts the blame for any misfortune on the military. The civilian micromanagement myth has penetrated the body politic so thoroughly that it has become an overused rhetorical device devoid of meaning. When Congress debated a resolution on the Bush administration's decision to surge forces in Iraq, both sides on the issue accused the other of exactly the same sin: trying to "micromanage the war."<sup>199</sup>

Even within the military, where leader accountability is a time-honored tradition, the concern with micromanagement has grown to the point that senior leaders are disinclined to dictate proven approaches for success in the field. Courageous field commanders who successfully adapted practices to stabilize violent regions of Afghanistan and Iraq had to watch the larger enterprise falter and often see their own areas of success deteriorate once they left and were replaced by new commanders and units left free to throw the rules for success out the window and do it their own way. The larger organizational inability to exploit such hard-won successes is not indicative of the high-performing, learning organization that the U.S. military wants to be.

Concerning mission command specifically, the argument is not that the bias toward decentralization should be abandoned but that it should be put in proper context. The mission command concept should emphasize that decentralization is not an end in itself but rather a means to higher performance. A leader's most important obligation is to correctly assess his organization—no matter how great or small—and its performance and elevate it, but at all costs prevent it from deteriorating and compromising mission success. When the entire enterprise is instilled with professionalism, and trust is high that each component knows its job and can do it well, leader interventions will be correspondingly rare. And when all concerned are trusting others to focus on mission success, leaders and subordinates can explore the reasoning behind decisions without raising concerns about competence, confidence, or credibility that tend to complicate communication in the chain of command—and that includes the dialogue between

the Pentagon and the White House, which is really the only place that harmful civilian micro-management can occur.

In sum, the “role gap” in civil-military relations exists and is a strategic handicap of the first order. The false narrative that military setbacks have been primarily due to civilian micro-management needs to be replaced with the realization that the most egregious error made by Presidents is detachment from strategic thinking and oversight of the military operations they initiate. Military leaders must ensure their operational plans support White House strategic objectives instead of distancing themselves and their operations from White House oversight and picking and choosing the aspects of missions they prefer. On those occasions when military performance has not been as good as circumstances demand, the best leaders—to their great credit—have found ways to make the necessary corrections and improve future performance.

That is something to celebrate and share with the young Servicemembers we send in harm’s way. It is better to arm them with the knowledge that their leaders care deeply about their welfare and success and want them equipped second to none and employed with every chance of success than it is to sustain the false lesson that every military operation is in imminent danger of being micromanaged to disaster. The truth is much more uplifting and reflective of the American spirit and the actual leader ethos that predominate than the historically unfounded and damaging micromanagement myth.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I consider the survey of historical cases here consistent with Michael Evans's argument for "useable history" that informs the military profession: "As a subject, history must be usable in the sense of probing the relationships across time and space between possibility and actuality, between experience and expectation, and between singularity and repetition. The cultivation of historical sensibility by the military profession is particularly important, for its senior members must be able to discriminate between phenomena, enlarge their contextual knowledge, and develop a cognition for wise decision-making." Michael Evans, "A Usable Past: A Contemporary Approach to History for the Western Profession of Arms," *Defense and Security Analysis* 35, no. 2 (April 2019), 133–146, available at <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1600813>>.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Trump, national address on Afghanistan, August 21, 2017, available at <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lapp65o8l2A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lapp65o8l2A)>.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Leave It to the Generals: A Nonstrategy for Afghanistan," *The New Republic*, November 8, 2017, available at <<https://newrepublic.com/article/145418/leave-generals>>.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, USA, commander of the U.S.-led coalition fighting the so-called Islamic State, stated in response to a question about the "Trump administration's relatively decentralized military decision-making" that "the current administration has pushed decision-making down into the military chain of command. And I don't know of a commander in our armed forces that doesn't appreciate that. A key result of that is that we don't get second-guessed a lot. . . . We don't get 20 questions with every action that happens on the battlefield and every action that we take." Some concerns, however, have been raised to the effect that "the military staff at the Pentagon is dominating deliberations over strategy and the deployment of forces to such an extent that it is undermining the principle of civilian control of the armed forces." For Townsend's comments, see Micah Zenko, "Does the Military Need a Micromanager?" *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2017, available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/12/does-the-military-need-a-micromanager/>>. See also Michael T. Gordon, "Trump Shifting Authority over Military Operations Back to Pentagon," *New York Times*, March 19, 2017, available at <[www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/us/trump-shifting-authority-over-military-operations-back-to-pentagon.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/us/trump-shifting-authority-over-military-operations-back-to-pentagon.html)>. For concerns about the military staff predominating, see Michael Gordon and Gordon Lubold, "Military Sway at Pentagon Undermines Tenet of Civilian Control, Study Finds," *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Although the case is made here that micromanagement is widely condemned by both parties and is a sentiment that is, on the whole, firmly established, concerns have been expressed that the opposite is the case, particularly at the end of the Obama administration when it was expected that Hillary Clinton would win the Presidency and bring in senior civilian leaders in favor of micromanagement. See Thomas Donnelly, "Testing the 'Flournoy Hypothesis': Civil-Military Relations in the Post-9/11 Era," in *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military*, ed. Kori Schake and Jim Mattis (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2015), 586–587.

<sup>7</sup> "Hagel's Predecessors Decried White House 'Micromanaging,'" CBS News, November 24,

2014, available at <[www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/hagels-predecessors-decried-white-house-micromanaging-n255231](http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/hagels-predecessors-decried-white-house-micromanaging-n255231)>.

<sup>8</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “Dereliction of Duty Redux? Post-Iraq American Civil-Military Relations,” *Orbis* (Spring 2008), 217–35. Hoffman cites the Vietnam War, the 1989 U.S. intervention in Panama, and the U.S. 2003 intervention in Iraq in particular.

<sup>9</sup> Francis G. Hoffman, “History and Future of Civil-Military Relations: Bridging the Gaps,” in *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 247–265.

<sup>10</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 206, cited in Hoffman, “History and Future of Civil-Military Relations,” 258. The notable French leader Charles de Gaulle made a similar point many decades earlier: “In the theater of peacetime, it is the statesman who plays the main role. Then suddenly war calls another actor from the wings, pushes him to the middle of the stage, and trains the limelight on him: the military chief appears. . . . So closely interwoven is their dialogue that nothing said by either has any relevance, point, or effect except with reference to the other. If one of them misses his cue, then disaster overwhelms them both. However widely, in fact, the work of the civil government differs from that of the military, no one would seriously question the interdependence of the two authorities. What policy can hope to succeed if the country’s army is brought low? Of what use is strategic planning if the means of carrying it out are not forthcoming?” See Charles de Gaulle, *The Edge of the Sword* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman, “History and Future of Civil-Military Relations,” 260. Hoffman argues this applies for all warfare but is especially true for military operations in “savage wars of peace,” or low-intensity conflict, irregular war, or any of the other labels sometimes applied to use of military forces in contingencies short of large-scale force maneuver warfare.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 254–256.

<sup>13</sup> An excellent source making precisely these points is George C. Herring, “Cold Blood: LBJ’s Conduct of Limited War in Vietnam,” Harmon Memorial Lecture 33, U.S. Air Force Academy, 1990, available at <[www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Harmon33.pdf](http://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Harmon33.pdf)>. Also see Herring’s excellent history of the Vietnam War, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Herring, “Cold Blood.”

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Terence Smith, “Bombing Hotly Debated in the Johnson Period,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1972: “The Pentagon’s history of the Vietnam war reveals that there was a constant tugging match at the highest levels in the Administration between those who doubted the value of the bombing and feared its political repercussions and those who regarded it as an invaluable weapon that should be employed to the fullest.”

<sup>17</sup> President Lyndon Johnson once threw General Krulak out of his office for making the point about bombing too emphatically. Robert Coram, *Brute: The Life of Victor Krulak, U.S. Marine* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2011), 313.

<sup>18</sup> Oddly, despite the historical consensus and his own detailed history, H.R. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998) has helped popularize the notion that in Vietnam,

military leaders needed to speak up to civilian leaders more vociferously. It has been argued for this reason that the book should be required reading for anyone aspiring to hold the office of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, official Joint Staff history reaches a different conclusion. Compare Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam, 1960–1968, Part III* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2009), 253–256, to the closing chapter, “Five Silent Men,” of McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*. For General Hugh Shelton recommending McMasters’s book as required reading for prospective Chairmen, see David Ignatius, “Rumsfeld and the Generals,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 2005, 15.

<sup>19</sup> The quotation is usually attributed to Major John Keeler, USAF, in Joe Patrick, “Testing the Rules of Engagement,” *Vietnam Magazine* 10, no. 4 (December 1997), 46.

<sup>20</sup> Hays Parks, “Rolling Thunder and the Law of War,” *Air University Review* (January–February 1982), 2–23. Parks does an admirable job of documenting the degree of micromanagement of the air campaign as well as refuting any moral or legal justification for such restrictions.

<sup>21</sup> For an assessment of what this false faith in strategic bombing has cost the Nation, and specifically the Air Force and its personnel, see Michael M. Trimble, “Air Force Strategic Bombing and Its Counterpoints from World War I to Vietnam,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 91 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2018), especially 87–89.

<sup>22</sup> This point finally occurred to McNamara, who just before his tenure as Secretary of Defense ended, exclaimed the Air Force was “dropping more on North Vietnam than we dropped on Germany in the last year of World War II, and it’s not doing anything!” Thomas A. Reinstein, “Seeking a Second Opinion: Robert McNamara’s Distrust of the U.S. Intelligence Community during Operation Rolling Thunder,” *Federal History* 8 (2016), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Clodfelter, *Vietnam in Military Statistics: A History of the Indochina Wars, 1772–1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1995), 225.

<sup>24</sup> As Andrew Krepinevich argues in commenting on the incremental approach, having “fought on after the French had returned to occupy Indochina at the end of World War II, how likely was it, then, that they would cave in before a limited American military action or even, for that matter, a new reoccupation of North Vietnam?” Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 99.

<sup>25</sup> As Dennis Drew has argued, it is far more consequential that the civil-military dispute over bombing poisoned the civil-military dialogue over strategy. See *Rolling Thunder 1965: Anatomy of a Failure* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press), 1986.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Smith, “Bombing Hotly Debated in the Johnson Period.” See also Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 382.

<sup>28</sup> Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 16, 96–98.

<sup>29</sup> In 1961, General Curtis LeMay argued that U.S. airpower alone could force the communists to come to terms, but Secretary McNamara thought nuclear weapons would be required to achieve such an end. General George H. Decker, Chief of Staff of the Army, also raised the question of nuclear weapons, stating, “If we go in, we should go in to win, and that means bombing Hanoi, China, and maybe even using nuclear bombs.” See Jack Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam*,

1960–1968, Part 1 (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2011), 79.

<sup>30</sup> According to Theo Milonopoulos, citing Michael Beschloss's book *Presidents of War* (New York: Crown, 2018), Johnson was furious to discover William Westmoreland had contemplated possible use of chemical weapons and tactical nuclear weapons. The case is made that in 1968, and without Presidential authorization, senior military leaders prepared for the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam. See Milonopoulos, "How Close Did the United States Actually Get to Using Nuclear Weapons in Vietnam in 1968?" *War on the Rocks*, October 24, 2018, available at <<https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/how-close-did-the-united-states-actually-get-to-using-nuclear-weapons-in-vietnam-in-1968/>>.

<sup>31</sup> The B-54 Special Atomic Demolition Munition entered the Army's arsenal in 1964. Special forces could be delivered behind Warsaw Pact lines by parachute. See Adam Rawnsley and David Brown, "The Littlest Boy," *Foreign Policy* (January 30, 2014), available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/30/the-littlest-boy/>>.

<sup>32</sup> Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 255.

<sup>33</sup> Coram, *Brute*, 289, 303.

<sup>34</sup> Historiography continues to evolve on this contentious topic. Dale Andrade, for example, takes a more sympathetic view of Westmoreland, arguing that his approach was appropriate based on the substantial threat of enemy main-force battalions as well as insurgents threatening South Vietnam. However one views that issue, the point about differing and unresolved approaches between the U.S. Army and Marines remains valid. See Andrade, "Westmoreland Was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars and Insurgency* 19, no. 2 (June 2008), 145–181. See also Nicholas J. Schlosser, "Reassessing the Marine Corps' Approach to Strategy in the Vietnam War, 1965–1968," *International Bibliography of Military History* 34, no. 1 (2014), 27–52.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2006); see also Coram, *Brute*, 321. For a more recent, competing point of view, see Erik Villard, *Combat Operations: Staying the Course, October 1967 to September 1968* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2017.)

<sup>36</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>37</sup> Hoffman, "History and Future of Civil-Military Relations," 255–256.

<sup>38</sup> This took place over the course of the 1980s. See Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 61–63, 67, available at <<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB939.pdf>>.

<sup>39</sup> Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell is typically cited in this respect, and particularly for his debates with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during the 1990s. See Vicki J. Rast and Dylan Lee Lehrke, "Interagency Paralysis: Stagnation in Bosnia and Kosovo," in *Case Studies: Volume 1*, ed. Richard Weitz (Washington, DC: Project on National Security Reform, n.d.), 397–398.

<sup>40</sup> See Christopher J. Lamb, *The Mayaguez Crisis, Mission Command, and Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 2018), 271n1. The observations on the *Mayaguez* offered here are taken from this source.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–193, 213–215.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Richard Cheney, who was in the White House at the time of the crisis, later indicated that he learned the danger of micromanagement from the *Mayaguez* crisis. Because “he had seen first-hand the tendency of the people at the top—the President, the national security advisor, the Secretary of Defense—to meddle needlessly and counterproductively,” he was determined during the Panama intervention, when he served as Secretary of Defense, that there would be “no meddling from the top” and that he would “stay out of their hair.” In reality, during the *Mayaguez* crisis, it was senior leader attention (particularly by Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger) to minute detail that saved the crew and President Ford’s reputation, and delivered the strategic results key leaders wanted from the crisis. For Cheney’s comments, see Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 175–176, and for the analysis of senior leader decisionmaking in the *Mayaguez* crisis, see Lamb, *The Mayaguez Crisis*.

<sup>43</sup> Richard A. Mobley, “Revisiting the Korean Tree-Trimming Incident,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 35 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2004), 108, 112, 115.

<sup>44</sup> A good source in this regard is John E. Valliere, “Disaster at Desert One: Catalyst for Change,” *Parameters* (Autumn 1992), 69–82, esp. 74–75. See also John T. Carney and Benjamin F. Schemmer, *No Room for Error: The Covert Operations of America’s Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 86.

<sup>45</sup> Colonel Charlie Beckwith, USA, who led the operation, told Congress that “as in Vietnam,” he “knew of three officers on the [Joint Chiefs of Staff] who were spending all their time writing ‘rules of engagement’ for him in Iran” and that “he was not to do this or that, especially endanger civilians.” Beckwith compared that kind of military oversight unfavorably with President Carter’s guidance: “Finally, I got my orders from Jimmy Carter. The President simply said I should use whatever force necessary to save the lives of the hostages. I didn’t need any more rules.” Cited in Barry M. Goldwater and Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> John D. Mini, “Forced Conversion: Civil-Military Relations and National Security Policy in the Carter Administration, 1977–1981” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), 367.

<sup>47</sup> Robert C. McFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell and Davies, 1994), 270–273.

<sup>48</sup> Major General David M. Goodrich, USAF, a member of the J3 on the Joint Chiefs of Staff during Operation *Urgent Fury*, cited in John Joseph Cummings, “Does Network Centric Warfare Equal Micromanagement? Minimizing Micromanagement at the Operational Level of War” (Master’s thesis, Naval War College, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Admiral Joseph Metcalf devoted a portion of his staff to sending two situation reports every hour because “Higher command authority must always have information, or they will remove control from the local commander.” Metcalf coined the term *six-thousand-mile screwdriver* after his experience in Vietnam, where he believed the Saigon evacuation was micromanaged from Washington. See Metcalf, “Decision Making and the Grenada Rescue Operation,” in *Ambiguity and Command: Organizational Perspectives on Military Decision Making*, ed. Pauline Ryan, James G. March, and Roger Weissinger-Baylon (Marshfield, MA: Pitman, 1986), 277–297. See also the discussion of Metcalf’s Vietnam experience in Raymond C. Bjorklund, *The Dollars and Sense of Command and Control* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1995), 79.

<sup>50</sup> Ronald H. Cole, *Operation URGENT FURY: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Grenada, 12 October–2 November 1983* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1997), 6–7.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Adkin, *Urgent Fury: The Battle for Grenada* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), 333. See 337–339 for Adkin's assessment of the Pentagon's denial about how poorly operations went.

<sup>52</sup> For the definitive account of the legislation, see James R. Locher, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 45–48, for the impact of the Iranian hostage rescue, and 305–314, for Grenada.

<sup>53</sup> Telephone interview of Locher by author, April 10, 2019; Locher, "Congress to the Rescue: Statutory Creation of USSOCOM," *Air Command Journal* (Spring 2012), 36; Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 493n22.

<sup>54</sup> Barry Goldwater emphasizes the impact of the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut in addition to the failed rescue attempt in Iran and the Grenada operation. See Goldwater and Casserly, *Goldwater*.

<sup>55</sup> John Benson Matthews, "United States Peacekeeping in Lebanon, 1982–1984: Why It Failed" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1994), 207–208.

<sup>56</sup> To get a sense of how deeply embedded the "lesson" of Iran-Contra is, consider the experience of Condoleezza Rice and Stephen Hadley. Even though Rice and Hadley together managed the President's decisive intervention into the details of military operations in Iraq, they both remain committed to the "no micromanagement" proposition. Rice explains in her memoir how Iran-Contra informed her views and those of her deputy, Hadley, who had served as counsel to the Tower Commission. They resolved to carry out the President's agenda through and not around Cabinet secretaries. Similarly, Hadley remains convinced that the Tower Commission's injunction against National Security Council (NSC) staff getting involved in operations remains "absolutely true." However, he does acknowledge that "the one thing we've learned since the Tower Commission report" is that "the NSC has the responsibility to ensure that policy decisions . . . are actually implemented and executed effectively." Hadley considers effective oversight of decision implementation (that is, operations) a "new frontier for the interagency process," and he experimented with alternative means of providing it. Christopher J. Lamb with Megan Franco, "National-Level Coordination and Implementation: How System Attributes Trumped Leadership," in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2015), 265n159.

<sup>57</sup> The entire scheme is sometimes justified as an attempt to free Americans held hostage by Hezbollah, but that explanation is complicated by the timing of the first sales to Iran, which preceded the taking of the hostages in question.

<sup>58</sup> Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 299.

<sup>59</sup> John Tower, *Tower Commission Report* (New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, 1987), sec. III-8.

<sup>60</sup> In response to a question about his relationship with Oliver North, John Poindexter stated that it was good and went on to describe his management philosophy, stating, "you pick the very best people that you can, you give them objectives and give them the broad authority that goes with that. You require general reports, you keep the responsibility and you don't micromanage what they're doing.

You have trust and confidence in your people.” See Poindexter, testimony on the Iran-Contra investigation, day 29, July 15, 1987, available at <[www.c-span.org/video/?9539-1/iran-contra-investigation-day-29](http://www.c-span.org/video/?9539-1/iran-contra-investigation-day-29)>.

<sup>61</sup> Innumerable senior officials with great experience in the national security system cite Iran-Contra as a cautionary tale of the dangers of NSC micromanagement—that is, evidence that any NSC staff activity beyond the making of policy constitutes interference in the operations of the departments and agencies and thus deleterious micromanagement. See note 63 for a few examples.

<sup>62</sup> Tower, *Tower Commission Report*, sec. V-3. Arguably the report sets a low bar for the NSC process assisting the President, stating, “Using the process will not always produce brilliant ideas. But history suggests it can at least help prevent bad ideas from becoming presidential policy.”

<sup>63</sup> There are many references to precisely this lesson learned from Iran-Contra in senior leader memoirs and interviews. For example, see Gerald R. Ford, in Thomas M. DeFrank and Gerald R. Ford, *Write It When I’m Gone: Remarkable Off-the-Record Conversations with Gerald R. Ford* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2007), 91; George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 354; Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown, 2011); L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope*, with Malcolm McConnell (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 245; Gates, *Duty*, 352. Gates asserts that “no one in the White House had any business going to the president with such a recommendation without going through the established interagency process. This was part and parcel of an increasingly operational National Security Staff in the White House and micromanagement of military matters—a combination that had proven [sic] disastrous in the past.”

<sup>64</sup> See the overview of nine blue-ribbon commissions and studies in Christopher J. Lamb and Joseph Bond, *National Security Reform and the 2016 Election*, Strategic Forum 293 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, March 2016), 4. The Project on National Security Reform’s report *Forging a New Shield* was based on more than 100 such case studies of inadequate interagency collaboration.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, it is widely conjectured that the Central Intelligence Agency director supported North’s role in the Iran-Contra affair, helping him circumvent objections from Defense and State. Later, James Pavitt, the head of the CIA’s Directorate of Operations, told investigators from the 9/11 Commission that “one lesson from the Iran-Contra scandal of the 1980s is that ‘we don’t do policy from [Langley] . . . and you don’t want us to.” Quoted in Mark Mazzetti, *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 13.

<sup>66</sup> See note 49.

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence A. Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management, June 1987–December 1989* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2008), 28.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, 198–200.

<sup>69</sup> Woodward, *The Commanders*, 179.

<sup>70</sup> Ronald H. Cole, *Operation JUST CAUSE: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988–January 1990* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1995), 71.

<sup>71</sup> Hoffman, “History and Future of Civil-Military Relations,” 256.

<sup>72</sup> Richard H. Shultz, *In the Aftermath of War: U.S. Support for Reconstruction and Nation-*

*Building in Panama Following Just Cause* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> This included an egregious lack of interest in public affairs, which exacerbated post-combat news media reporting. See Pascale M. Combelles, “Operation *Just Cause*: A Military-Media Fiasco,” *Military Review*, May–June 1995, 77–85.

<sup>74</sup> See Nathaniel Sheppard, Jr., “Looters Deal Crushing Blow to Panama’s Troubled Economy,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 1989; and “U.N. Assembly Condemns the Invasion of Panama,” Associated Press, December 30, 1989, available at <[www.deseretnews.com/article/78973/UN-ASSEMBLY-CONDEMNS-THE-INVASION-OF-PANAMA.html](http://www.deseretnews.com/article/78973/UN-ASSEMBLY-CONDEMNS-THE-INVASION-OF-PANAMA.html)>.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Hoffman, “History and Future of Civil-Military Relations,” 257.

<sup>77</sup> According to Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, widely considered the best historians on national-level decisionmaking during the Gulf War, the similarities between Panama and the Gulf War are due to the senior leaders who directed both conflicts: President Bush and General Powell. Replicating his behavior in Panama, they argue Bush gave his generals “enormous leeway in prosecuting the war” and turned to Powell to make the decision on when and how the war would end. Powell’s decision reflected his lessons from Vietnam and the approach he promoted in Panama: go in with overwhelming force for very limited objectives and get out quickly. See Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), xii–xv.

<sup>78</sup> General Max Thurman was a member of the so-called Special Operations Policy Advisory Group (SOPAG), instituted by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict ASD (SO/LIC) to provide advice on special operations and low-intensity conflict. Thurman, to his credit, recognized his failure in postwar planning in Panama and tried, without success, to get civilian and military leaders to pay greater attention to the topic in the Gulf War. The author, then serving as director of policy planning for ASD (SO/LIC), supported the SOPAG meetings.

<sup>79</sup> In General Norman Schwarzkopf’s biography, he recounts how he went to negotiate the cease-fire with Iraqi leaders without political guidance. Despite having 6 months to figure out what they wanted from the war effort, civilian leaders were unable to give Schwarzkopf timely and definitive guidance on the topic. See Schwarzkopf and Peter Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero: The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 552–569.

<sup>80</sup> As Gordon and Trainor argue, the result was that “half the Republican Guard forces in the Kuwaiti theater of operations, the most powerful element of the Iraqi army and a force that USCENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] had earmarked for destruction, had escaped. . . . [They] would cross the Euphrates, be reorganized, and join Saddam Hussein’s effort to quash the Shiite and Kurdish rebellions that challenged his rule. More than four years later, the Iraqi president’s hold on power would be as firm as ever.” See Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War*, x.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Perry, *The Pentagon’s Wars: The Military’s Undeclared War Against America’s Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 293.

<sup>82</sup> Shortly after the war ended, Bush responded to a reporter’s question about why he seemed so subdued by stating, “we have Saddam Hussein still there—the man that wreaked this havoc upon his neighbors.” Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War*, xv.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon and Trainor cite three problems the Gulf War revealed about the Powell doctrine—

that is, the “military impulse to end the war as soon as a victory was achieved” and “to get out as quickly as possible.” It precluded deterring Saddam in the first place, as Powell rejected State Department and Pentagon recommendations for demonstrations of American power prior to the war. It “contributed to the decision to bring the war to a premature close into the muddled ending and left Washington without a means for influencing events in postwar Iraq.” And finally, “Powell’s all or nothing doctrine of decisive force not only is insufficient for many of the smoldering conflicts the United States faces today, where the military is called on not to win a decisive ‘victory’ but to support diplomacy, protect peacekeepers, or carry out humanitarian task, it also has its limitations when it comes to ending major ‘high intensity’ wars.” Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War*, 469.

<sup>84</sup> *United States Forces, Somalia After Action Report and Historical Overview: The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2003), 12.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in the chapter on Somalia in David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 138.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–142.

<sup>87</sup> After the October 3 combat, President Bill Clinton fired Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Aspin had made a name for himself on Capitol Hill as a strategic thinker. He chided his colleagues for too much “micromanagement” and not enough “macromanagement” or, as he explained, too much “detailed congressional instructions to the executive branch on the management of the defense program” and not enough attention to strategy. Ironically, he lost his job for lack of attention to the details of how his special mission units were performing in Somalia. See the House Armed Services Committee pamphlet containing four Aspin speeches, titled “Searching for a Defense Strategy,” September 1987, in the author’s possession.

<sup>88</sup> Michael G. Patman acknowledges that Clinton’s later comments “may have been self-serving,” but offers evidence the President was genuinely taken by surprise. He asserts Clinton concluded “the military had let him down,” stating in his autobiography that “what plagued me most was that when I approved the use of U.S. forces to apprehend Aideed, I did not envision anything like a daytime assault in a crowded, hostile neighborhood.” See Patman, *Strategic Shortfall: The Somalia Syndrome and the March to 9/11* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 81; and Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Random House, 2004), 553.

<sup>89</sup> “President Responds to Recent Violence Against U.S. Forces,” *Washington Times*, October 7, 1993.

<sup>90</sup> Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 161.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Andrew J. Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2017), 157.

<sup>92</sup> Some, like Eliot Cohen, have argued Somalia demonstrated the need for more oversight, but military commentators, and particularly those involved in the fighting, widely hold the view that the operation was micromanaged by civilians. See Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 201. For the military view, see, for example, Michael J. Durant, *In the Company of Heroes* (London: Transworld Digital, 2014), 11.

<sup>93</sup> Despite Clinton stating that he did not blame Garrison and had a lot of “sympathy for General Garrison and the men . . . who wanted to go back and finish the job,” what he learned was that try-

ing to avoid micromanagement did not relieve him of his responsibility for oversight of military operations. In his memoirs, Clinton lamented not requiring more oversight: “when I gave my consent to Gen. Powell’s recommendation, I should also have required prior approval of the Pentagon and the White House for any operations of this magnitude.” And again, “After Black Hawk Down, whenever I approved the deployment of forces, I knew much more about what the risks were, and made much clearer what [military] operations had to be approved in Washington.” See Patman, *Strategic Shortfall*, 81, 84, 87; and Clinton, *My Life*, 553–554. For the military’s sense of betrayal, and the details of the Washington and field decisionmaking processes, see the previous note and the author’s chapter on Somalia in Tucker and Lamb, *U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 107–142.

<sup>94</sup> Ralph Pezzullo, *Plunging into Haiti: Clinton, Aristide, and the Defeat of Diplomacy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 183.

<sup>95</sup> Donald E. Schulz and Gabriel Marcella. *Reconciling the Irreconcilable: The Troubled Outlook for U.S. Policy Toward Haiti* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1994), 1.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Schultz, “Explaining the Harlan County Debacle: A Failure of the Interagency Process,” unpublished paper; and Kevin A. Baugh, “Vested Interests: The Making of a Foreign Policy Failure,” unpublished paper. The author was director of Policy Planning for OASD (SO/LIC) at the time and had contacts involved with the interagency decisionmaking.

<sup>97</sup> See Pezzullo, *Plunging into Haiti*, 186–203.

<sup>98</sup> Walter Slocombe, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, claimed that “he had helped save the United States from a small war” and that “the Pentagon would not risk American soldiers’ lives to put ‘that psychopath’ [Aristide] back in power.” See Christopher Paul, *Marines on the Beach: The Politics of U.S. Military Intervention Decision Making* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 90.

<sup>99</sup> Chris Bury, interview with former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, *Frontline*, September 2000, available at <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/clinton/interviews/lake.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/clinton/interviews/lake.html)>. For an inside account of how upset President Clinton was over the Harlan County episode, see David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 272–273.

<sup>100</sup> Anthony Lake, quoted in Bill Gertz, “Today’s Top Generals March to Gettysburg,” *Washington Times*, March 4, 1995, 83, cited in Hoffman, “History and Future of Civil-Military Relations,” 257. Hoffman stated the National Security Advisor’s comment revealed “an astonishingly poor grasp of history.” Lake intones the standard shibboleth about Johnson’s micromanaging bombing targets in Vietnam but also, not apparently appreciating Eliot Cohen’s larger points, cites Cohen for the example of use of telegraphs by the civilian secretary of war during the Civil War to “monitor—and meddle in—the affairs of his military leaders.” Lake goes on to claim that Clinton “wisely stayed out of tactical decisions” but “reviewed general military plans,” and then notes that “in any case, it always took too long to get information on an ongoing operation for the President to have interfered,” which he explains was, in part, “because the Pentagon resisted sharing details that were still in doubt.” See Lake, *6 Nightmares: Real Threats in a Dangerous World and How America Can Meet Them* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 90.

<sup>101</sup> For example, Clinton’s Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, agrees with Lake that Clinton’s management style was “to lay guidelines, then give broad authority to implement them. He wants

to know what's going on but not micromanage." See Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 147.

<sup>102</sup> Among other things, the White House dispatched the President's lifelong friend and counselor, Thomas "Mack" McLarty, to the Gulf states to convey his personal request for assistance in funding the training and equipping of Bosnian forces, as stipulated in the Dayton Agreement. See Christopher J. Lamb, *The Bosnian Train and Equip Program: A Lesson in Interagency Integration of Hard and Soft Power*, with Sarah Arkin and Sally Scudder, Strategic Perspectives 15 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, March 2014).

<sup>103</sup> There are numerous insider accounts of the tensions between the Pentagon and White House over Bosnia and Kosovo. The Pentagon's position had undergone a 180-degree change since Vietnam, from a boundless enthusiasm for bombing to the view that it could never make a difference. One senior Pentagon representative asked the Secretary of State, "What is it with you people at the State Department, always wanting to threaten force and bombing?" When bombing did occur, the lack of coordination between bombing and diplomacy was an ongoing problem. Concerning Kosovo, the Pentagon drew the line at the introduction of ground troops, which had a profound impact on the efficacy of the air war. See Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 52; Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 349–350, 434–447, 477–480; Rast and Lehrke, "Interagency Paralysis," 427, 436, 440–444, who cite Sidney Blumenthal, *The Clinton Wars: An Insider's Account of the White House Years* (London: Viking, 2003); and Wesley R. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 2003).

<sup>104</sup> See Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, esp. 64–110. Clark had his say in his memoirs, *Waging Modern War*, 408–412.

<sup>105</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section, including quotations, comes from Lamb, "National-Level Coordination and Implementation."

<sup>106</sup> Paul D. Miller, "Bush on Nation Building and Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy*, November 17, 2010, available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/17/bush-on-nation-building-and-afghanistan/>>.

<sup>107</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 194–195.

<sup>108</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, *Leap of Faith: Hubris, Negligence, and America's Greatest Foreign Policy Tragedy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 395.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>110</sup> Lamb, "National-Level Coordination and Implementation," 181–182.

<sup>111</sup> Ricardo S. Sanchez and Donald T. Phillips, *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story* (New York: Harper, 2008), 29, 146–147, 177–179, 454.

<sup>112</sup> Michael C. Desch, "Bush and the Generals," *Foreign Affairs* (May–June 2007), available at <[www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2007-05-01/bush-and-generals](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2007-05-01/bush-and-generals)>.

<sup>113</sup> Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, 163–165.

<sup>114</sup> Most charge Condoleezza Rice with not running the process competently, but her rejoinder was that State and Defense disagreed about so much and so often that the system would have ground to a halt if it had tried to elevate every such issue to the President. See the discussion in Lamb, "National-Level Coordination and Implementation," 212–214.

<sup>115</sup> Mazarr, *Leap of Faith*, 225.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> This point is broadly made in James Fallows, “On George W. Bush: The ‘Decider’ Who Didn’t Decide?” *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2013, available at <[www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/on-george-w-bush-the-decider-who-didnt-decide/273785/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/on-george-w-bush-the-decider-who-didnt-decide/273785/)>.

<sup>118</sup> Lamb, “National-Level Coordination and Implementation,” 183–185.

<sup>119</sup> John Gans, *White House Warriors: How the National Security Council Transformed the American Way of War* (New York: Liveright, 2019), 156.

<sup>120</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 243–45. For Hadley, see Gans, *White House Warriors*, 158–163. See also Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper, 2008), 470; and Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 526.

<sup>121</sup> Frank G. Hoffman and G. Alexander Crowther, “Strategic Assessment and Adaptation: The Surges in Iraq and Afghanistan,” in *Lessons Encountered*. Most people focus on the decision to increase forces, but changed tactics were also a critical element of the success. See Dale Andradé, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2010), 388; and Liam S. Collins, “Military Innovation in War: The Criticality of the Senior Military Leader” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2014), 168.

<sup>122</sup> This happened even though it was widely understood that an end strength increase was unsustainable in light of modernization needs and other competing priorities. Army ground strength increased over the next few years and peaked around 2010. Thereafter, it declined and fell back to about 2005 levels by 2015. Lawrence Kapp et. al., *How Big Should the Army Be? Considerations for Congress*, R44612 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 2, 2016). For Bush’s offer of greater end strength to the Joint Chiefs, see Stephen J. Hadley, interview by Joseph J. Collins and Nicholas Rostow, October 7, 2014. According to Hadley, the Chiefs stated, “‘Well you know, we’ll break the force, we don’t have enough people,’ and the President said: ‘I will get you more people.’ And at that point, the Chiefs came out and [supported the Surge].”

<sup>123</sup> See the examples in Lamb, “National-Level Coordination and Implementation.”

<sup>124</sup> Micah Zenko makes the same point in his article, “Does the Military Need a Micromanager?” writing, “One person’s intrusive micromanagement is another’s proper attention to detail.” See Zenko, *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2017, available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/12/does-the-military-need-a-micromanager/>>.

<sup>125</sup> “Hagel’s Predecessors Decried White House ‘Micromanaging,’” CBS News, November 24, 2014, available at <[www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/hagels-predecessors-decried-white-house-micromanaging-n255231](http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/hagels-predecessors-decried-white-house-micromanaging-n255231)>.

<sup>126</sup> This is David J. Rothkopf’s verdict: “As the NSC became more operational throughout the Obama years in micromanaging counterterror operations, for example, or usurping from the State Department roles in interactions with senior international officials, or in conducting high-profile international missions, it faltered and was unable to perform its core functions of strategic planning, coordinating policy development, and overseeing policy implementation.” See Rothkopf, *National Insecurity: American Leadership in an Age of Fear* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 346.

<sup>127</sup> Rosa Brooks served as counselor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. See her chapter in Kori Schake and James Mattis, eds., *Warriors and Citizens* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2016), 48.

<sup>128</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 364–365, 367; Hillary R. Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 133. One of President Obama’s National Security Advisors, Thomas Donilon, has argued the emerging national security environment in part explains the necessity of a “White House–centric” national security decisionmaking system. See Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 164–167.

<sup>129</sup> Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 133. For more on how planning issues complicate civil-military relations, see 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).

<sup>130</sup> In a 2014 interview, Hadley referenced the “Goldilocks” problem, stating, “the military needs to give the President options that are real, even if they don’t believe in them. And if they don’t, the President will try to get them elsewhere. . . . He tried to get them, in some sense, from Doug Lute who should not have been asked, and he tried to get them from General James Cartwright. And it put Cartwright in a split with his Secretary and his Chairman, and it cost the careers of both men.” Hadley, interview by Collins and Rostow, October 7, 2014.

<sup>131</sup> Pentagon leaders were irritated that Lute was asking detailed questions rather than “making sure there was a political strategy” in place. See Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 171.

<sup>132</sup> Perry, *The Pentagon’s Wars*, 251–259; Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 173.

<sup>133</sup> See the author’s chapter on special operations forces (SOF) high-value target teams in David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>134</sup> See the summary of complaints about the Obama administration’s management of the Syria Train and Equip program in Konrad J. Trautman, “Strategic Negligence: Why the United States Failed to Provide Military Support to the Syrian Resistance in 2011–2014” (Ph.D. diss., University of South Florida, 2018), available at <<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8431&context=etd>>. For a shorter summary, see the shadow box on the topic in Christopher J. Lamb and Susan Stipanovich, “Back to Basics on Hybrid Warfare in Europe,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 81 (2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2016), 96–97.

<sup>135</sup> See Lamb, “National-Level Coordination and Implementation,” 174. A recent study from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) concurs with this assessment, stating, the United States “back[ed] into” Afghanistan “through a combination of good intentions, ‘can-do spirit,’ and hubris.” The author encourages civilian and military leaders to consciously choose a specific endstate with full awareness of what it will cost to achieve it. Toward this end, he recommends more emphasis on the topic of endstates in military doctrine, more congressional pressure on presidents (for example, via Authorizations for the Use of Military Force), and more military leaders who will speak their minds to Presidents. The research presented here suggests an improved strategic dialogue between civilian and military leaders will require something more than “can do” military leaders speaking candidly; it will require a different understanding of past history and a different conception of their proper roles as strategic advisors. See Mark F. Cancian, *Tell Me How This Ends: Military Advice, Strategic Goals, and the*

*Forever War* in Afghanistan (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2019), vii, 24–26, 41–44.

<sup>136</sup> Presidents charged with “having no strategy” are also often charged with “refusing to listen to military advice.” Lawrence Kaplan makes this case while examining leader culpability as defeat in Iraq loomed in 2006: “Unlike the version peddled in the U.S. after Vietnam, today’s ‘stabbed-in-the-back’ myth contains a kernel of truth. While there is enough blame to go around in Iraq for everyone, the military included, most of it lies squarely with America’s civilian leadership. Whether measured by the refusal to solicit (much less heed) military expertise or to devise even the broadest outlines of a coherent strategy, the problem in Iraq has never been lack of capability but confusion—at the top—over how to use it.” See Kaplan, “A Military Estranged from the Architects of War,” *Financial Times*, August 9, 2006.

<sup>137</sup> See Schake and Mattis, eds., *Warriors and Citizens*, 299: “83% of civilians without military experience believe civilian leaders did not rely sufficiently on military advice.” The author is indebted to Michael Bell for the observation that it has largely been forgotten that President Franklin D. Roosevelt overruled his senior military advisors on strategic decisions during World War II, to include shifting from the traditional focus on hemispheric defense, prioritizing aid to Great Britain and the Soviet Union, the decisions for the invasions of North Africa and Italy, and the timing of the cross-Channel attack in 1944 rather than 1942. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 3, *The Second World War* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 55–58.

<sup>138</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower and George H. Bush. See the discussion in Christopher Lamb and Joseph Bond, “National Security Reform and the 2016 Election,” *Strategic Forum* 293, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, March 2016).

<sup>139</sup> See Christopher J. Lamb, “National Security Reform,” in *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, ed. Richard J. Hooker, Jr. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2016).

<sup>140</sup> For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Christopher J. Lamb and Edward Marks, *Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration*, Strategic Perspectives 2 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, December 2010).

<sup>141</sup> Lloyd J. Matthews, in a good Army War College study that is otherwise quick to seize on evidence of micromanagement, acknowledges multiple cases of exaggeration or outright fabrication. See Matthews, *The Political-Military Rivalry for Operational Control in U.S. Military Actions: A Soldier’s Perspective* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, June 22, 1998).

<sup>142</sup> Military performance pre- and post-Goldwater Nichols is striking. Would anyone really choose the military performances in Vietnam, the *Mayaguez*, the Iran hostage rescue, and Grenada over those in Panama, the first Gulf War, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq?

<sup>143</sup> Daniel H. Pink has made a popular case that people are more motivated to do their best by being given autonomy and a sense of purpose than by financial and other inducements. See Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (London: Canongate Books, Ltd., 2018).

<sup>144</sup> James Q. Wilson, in his classic work on government, explains why organizations work strenuously to preserve “autonomy.” See Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 28.

<sup>145</sup> See, for example, Thomas G. Mahnken, *United States Strategic Culture* (Washington, DC: Science Applications International Corporation, 2006), 9–15, available at <[www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awc-gate/dtra/mahnken\\_strat\\_culture.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awc-gate/dtra/mahnken_strat_culture.pdf)>.

<sup>146</sup> John Arquilla is a major and influential proponent of this viewpoint. See *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1997), and *Networks and Networks: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001).

<sup>147</sup> For an example of how McChrystal's viewpoint has taken root, see the argument that "mission command may be about 'hands off,' but it must be, as a corollary, 'eyes on,'" in Brad Carson and Morgan Plummer, "Defense Reform in the Next Administration," *War on the Rocks*, September 12, 2016. For the McChrystal quotations, see Stanley McChrystal, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, with Tantum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell (London: Portfolio/Penguin, 2015), 217–218, 221–223, 232.

<sup>148</sup> Besides all the complaints identified in this paper, those associated with the military or who interact with military members frequently report that it is commonplace to hear tales of micromanagement. One such former official and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations reports, "I have interviewed hundreds of officials who were involved planning or conducting military operations, or in use-of-force debates. Every officer had many vivid anecdotes of ham-fisted civilian interference." See Zenko, "Does the Military Need a Micromanager?"

<sup>149</sup> His memorandum to Rice on chain of command is scathing. See "Donald Rumsfeld to Honorable Condoleezza Rice, Subject: Chain of Command, December 2, 2002," available at <<http://papers.rumsfeld.com/endnotes/chapter-24/>>.

<sup>150</sup> This includes the author, who used it in response to a National Security Council director who telephoned directions on strategic communication themes and messages in the war on terror, a portfolio the author temporarily managed for 6 weeks following the 9/11 terror attacks.

<sup>151</sup> Robert L. Pfaltzgraff and Jacquelyn K. Davis, *National Security Decisions: The Participants Speak* (Lexington, KY: Lexington Books, 1990), 276–277.

<sup>152</sup> Hoffman might dispute this, arguing all employment of military force is political at the strategic level, but he agrees civilian involvement is particularly needed in "savage wars of peace," or low-intensity conflict, irregular war, or any of the other labels sometimes applied to use of military forces in contingencies short of large-scale force maneuver warfare. See Hoffman, "History and Future of Civil-Military Relations," 260.

<sup>153</sup> For a recent exposition on this theme, see Wendi Peck and Bill Casey, "Accountability Without Authority: How to Drive Employees Crazy," Executive Leadership Group, April 12, 2015, available at <[www.elg.net/2015/04/accountability-authority-drive-employees-crazy/](http://www.elg.net/2015/04/accountability-authority-drive-employees-crazy/)>.

<sup>154</sup> Henry M. Jackson, *The Secretary of State and the Ambassador: Jackson Subcommittee Papers on the Conduct of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 7–8.

<sup>155</sup> Stanley A. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2014), 162.

<sup>156</sup> See the author's chapter on high-value target teams in Tucker and Lamb, *U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>157</sup> To be clear, the call was not from McChrystal himself, but from an intervening level of command pursuing McChrystal's priorities. See Chris Fussell, *One Mission: How Leaders Build A Team of Teams* (New York: Pan MacMillan, 2018), 170–171.

<sup>158</sup> Robert M. Gates, *A Passion for Leadership* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 10.

<sup>159</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 352.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 578. Others have made this distinction as well.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 482. For the applause, see Richard Sisk, “Gates and Panetta Blast Obama for Micromanaging Military,” *Military.com*, November 17, 2014, available at <<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2014/11/17/gates-and-panetta-blast-obama-for-micromanaging-military.html>>.

<sup>162</sup> For other examples of Gates’s interventions, see his personal account of his task forces in Gates, *A Passion for Leadership*. For a review of Gates’s drastic intervention on mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles and why it was the right thing to do, see Christopher Lamb, Matthew Schmidt, and Berit Fitzsimmons, *MRAPs, Irregular Warfare, and Pentagon Reform* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, June 2009), and “Acquisition Reform: The Case of MRAPs,” prepared statement of Christopher J. Lamb before the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, June 24, 2014.

<sup>163</sup> For example, stories of military micromanagement in Vietnam are legion, and also allegedly played a role in the failed Iranian hostage rescue mission. See note 45.

<sup>164</sup> See the excellent exegesis of mission command and its roots in the German military experience in Richard D. Hooker, Jr., *Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995), esp. 10–14.

<sup>165</sup> Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, July 12, 2017), V-15; JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, January 17, 2017), II-2. See also Martin E. Dempsey, *Mission Command White Paper* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 3, 2012), 1.

<sup>166</sup> Much discussion of mission command warns against micromanagement. Donald Vandergriff warns that “With the onset of increasingly advanced communications technology, the ever present tendency for senior officers to micro-manage their subordinates—rather than trusting them to accomplish a mission using guidelines and their own intelligence—will be increasingly difficult to avoid” and that “at any level the urge will always remain for the senior officer to micro-manage his subordinate, particularly given the legacies of the Army’s culture.” See Vandergriff, *Misinterpretation and Confusion: What Is Mission Command and Can the U.S. Army Make it Work?* Land Warfare Paper No. 94 (Arlington, VA: Association of the U.S. Army, February 2013), foreword, 1.

<sup>167</sup> *Mission Command White Paper*, 7.

<sup>168</sup> JP 1, V-15; JP 3-0, xi.

<sup>169</sup> Andrew Hill and Heath Niemi, “The Trouble with Mission Command: Flexive Command and the Future of Command and Control,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 86 (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2017), 94.

<sup>170</sup> A major spokesman for this point of view is McChrystal, *Team of Teams*, 217–223, 232.

<sup>171</sup> For example, General Wesley Clark notes angst in the Army about micromanagement got to the point that “People would brag about not answering their radios, or making themselves unavailable for telephone conversations.” Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 2003), 397.

<sup>172</sup> See the discussion in Gordon and Trainor on Schwarzkopf’s alleged micromanagement of General Tommy Franks in the first Gulf War. Schwarzkopf insisted he was not a micromanager, but Gordon and Trainor make the contrary case. Some, such as Carl H. Builder, have argued the Navy has the Service culture most hostile to micromanagement. Elliot Cohen also cites military sources when

arguing the belief that “it is inappropriate for civilian leaders to involve themselves in the details of military operations is pervasive in the military.” See Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War*, 464–650; Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 19; Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 13.

<sup>173</sup> Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership: Be, Know, Do* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, August 31, 1999), encourages leaders to develop subordinates “without micromanaging” (5-18) and notes good leaders “avoid micromanaging the staff” (6-21); and FM 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, June 2015), states good leaders “facilitate subordinate and team task accomplishment without over-specification and micromanagement.”

<sup>174</sup> Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., “Let Leaders Off the Electronic Leash: CSA Milley,” *Breaking Defense*, May 5, 2017, available at <<https://breakingdefense.com/2017/05/let-leaders-off-the-electronic-leash-csa-milley/>>.

<sup>175</sup> James Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005–2007* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Another particularly well-received account of an American unit’s success is Owen West, *The Snake Eaters: An Unlikely Band of Brothers and the Battle for the Soul of Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2013). Numerous articles and books document the successes of other commanders, including Colonel Julian Alford, Lieutenant Colonel William M. Journey, Lieutenant Colonel William Mullen III, all Marines; and Army officers Captain Jim Calvert, Colonel Robert Brown, Colonel H.R. McMaster, and Colonel Sean MacFarland. To the list of Marines, Frank Hoffman adds Lieutenant Colonel Michael S. Groen, an innovator in intelligence fusion. Hoffman also concludes mission command inhibited collective learning because senior commanders did not want to tell subordinates how to do their jobs. See Hoffman, *Mars Adapting* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, forthcoming).

For SOF successes, see Daniel R. Green, *In the Warlords’ Shadow: Special Operations Forces, the Afghans, and Their Fight against the Taliban* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017); Ronald Fry, *Hammerhead Six: How Green Berets Waged an Unconventional War Against the Taliban to Win in Afghanistan’s Deadly Pech Valley* (New York: Hachette Books, 2017); and Ann Tyson, *American Spartan: The Promise, the Mission, and the Betrayal of Special Forces Major Jim Gant* (New York: William Morrow, 2015). Also, Special Forces Captain Travis Patriquin’s role in Ramadi has been well documented. See William Doyle, *A Soldier’s Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq* (New York: New American Library, 2012); and Jim Michaels, *A Chance in Hell: The Men Who Triumphed Over Iraq’s Deadliest City and Turned the Tide of War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2011).

For accounts of how conventional and SOF collaborated for better results, see Christopher Lamb and Evan Munsing, *Secret Weapon: High-Value Target Teams as an Organizational Innovation*, INSS Strategic Perspectives 2 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, March 2011). For how Marine Lieutenant Colonel Dale Alford’s work in Qaim, Iraq, benefited from Special Forces Captain Jim Calvert and other Operational Detachment Alpha commanders, see William Knarr et al., “Al Sahawa—The Awakening, Volume III-A: Al Anbar Province, Western Euphrates River Valley, Area of Operations Denver—Al Qaim (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, November 2015). Knarr also has a monograph on SOF work done in Western Iraq near Qaim, See William Knarr, *The 2005 Iraqi Sunni Awakening: The Role of*

*the Desert Protectors Program*, JSOU Press Report 15-4 (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2015). For the work of Special Forces Major Jim Gavrilis in Ar Rutbah, see Mark Moyer, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). More generally, Bing West illuminates the roles played by former Special Forces officers Keith Mines and Kalev Sepp in Francis J. West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2009).

<sup>176</sup> Joel Rayburn, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2019), 621.

<sup>177</sup> I am indebted to Frank Hoffman for this observation in John Kiszely, “The Political-Military Dynamic in the Conduct of Strategy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42, no. 2 (2019), 246–247. Kiszely, a retired lieutenant general in the British army, goes on to note some military commanders may “hanker after an operational level free of any political ‘interference,’” but insists they need to be educated on the risks of “becoming detached from policy and from the achievement of strategic objectives.” He adds that such an attitude “flies in the face of ministers’ right to involve themselves at every level in the making of decisions for which they are ultimately responsible,” 253.

<sup>178</sup> General Casey is a case in point: George W. Casey, *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom, July 2004–February 2007* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2012), 62.

<sup>179</sup> See Scott R. Mitchell’s revealing article, “Observations of a Strategic Corporal,” *Military Review* (July–August 2012). The issue of whether commanders embraced counterinsurgency doctrine is reviewed at greater length in Christopher J. Lamb et al., *Human Terrain Teams: An Organizational Innovation for Sociocultural Knowledge in Irregular Warfare* (Washington, DC: Institute for World Politics Press, July 2013).

<sup>180</sup> George E. Reed, *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books: 2015), 26.

<sup>181</sup> For example, see the discussion of Chairman John Vessey directing General Schwarzkopf to take Calivigny barracks during the Grenada intervention “before dark,” even though it was not a priority from Schwarzkopf’s point of view. See also the discussion of Chairman Colin Powell’s adjusting bombing targets by 150 yards to minimize collateral damage in the Panama intervention. See Cole, *Operation URGENT FURY*, 53; Woodward, *The Commanders*, 176–77. For another example, a careful inspection of the various micromanagement charges in the *Mayaguez* crisis determined that “all the tangible examples of deleterious micromanagement came from military, not civilian, leaders.” See Lamb, *The Mayaguez Crisis*, 187.

<sup>182</sup> Former combatant commander General Anthony Zinni has argued the opposite: that it is shocking to see how uninformed Presidents are when making decisions: “There is a difference between simply making decisions and truly knowing that understanding the risk and consequences of the decision. That knowledge comes only from deep involvement and natural curiosity. I have briefed a number of [P]residents and senior political leaders. Some of them pushed me to explain details; others just skim the surface of the issues. Some [P]residents and their advisors are content with the bare minimum of information—a few PowerPoint slides with a set number of discussion points. Amazing! How can the biggest decisions be reduced to a handful of PowerPoint bullets? I find that shocking.” Similarly, responding to commentary on the Trump administration’s hands-off approach

to managing military affairs, James Stavridis, a former combatant commander, has argued, “We need to be cautious that we do not go so far in the other direction that we end up with rogue commanders.” In a similar vein, retired Lieutenant General David Barno, a former commander of allied forces in Afghanistan, has argued that commanders require a “reasonable degree of flexibility,” but “if the [P] resident continues to be hands off, he will ‘lose sight of his responsibility to execute the strategy.’” Wesley Clark has also argued for a balanced perspective on micromanagement, stating that it can reflect not only nervous superiors but also legitimate concerns and that he has found “success wasn’t as much a matter of rebuffing higher headquarters as of dealing with them constructively.” See, respectively, Zinni and Tony Koltz, *Before the First Shots Are Fired: How America Can Win or Lose Off the Battlefield* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 58; Stavridis, cited in W.J. Hennigan and Brian Bennett, “Trump Doesn’t Micromanage the Military—But That Could Backfire,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2017, available at <[www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-trump-military-20170602-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-trump-military-20170602-story.html)>; Barno, cited in Alex Ward, “Trump Is a Commander in Chief Who Doesn’t Command,” *Vox.com*, May 25, 2017, available at <[www.vox.com/2017/5/25/15632614/trump-military-generals-syria-yemen-afghanistan](http://www.vox.com/2017/5/25/15632614/trump-military-generals-syria-yemen-afghanistan)>; Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 397.

<sup>183</sup> Rayburn, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 621.

<sup>184</sup> Feith, *War and Decision*, 109.

<sup>185</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 324, 720.

<sup>186</sup> Matthews, “The Political-Military Rivalry for Operational Control in U.S. Military Actions.”

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> This thought runs throughout doctrine and classic literature on American military leadership. See, for example, FM 22-100, sec. 6-103; Edgar F. Puryear, *American Generalship: Character Is Everything: The Art of Command* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2000), 280–281; Karel Montor, ed., *Naval Leadership: Voices of Experience* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 391–392.

<sup>189</sup> Commenting on information-sharing in the Pentagon, two former officials observe “There is a fear among some at the Department of Defense that this type of data would facilitate micromanagement from leadership or—worse—from Congress. This is anathema to all in an organization that valorizes mission command.” See Brad Carson and Morgan Plummer, “Defense Reform in the Next Administration,” *War on the Rocks*, September 12, 2016, available <<https://warontherocks.com/2016/09/defense-reform-in-the-next-administration/>>.

<sup>190</sup> This is a point emphasized by Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 200.

<sup>191</sup> Fussell, *One Mission*, 170–171.

<sup>192</sup> Matthews, “The Political-Military Rivalry for Operational Control in U.S. Military Actions.”

<sup>193</sup> This might help explain, in part, Milan Vego’s finding that the U.S. military decisionmaking process has become bureaucratized. He points out that “it is the commander and staff’s responsibility to identify the enemy’s (and friendly) center of gravity. That critically important responsibility should not be delegated to the intelligence staff.” See Vego, “The Bureaucratization of the U.S. Military Decisionmaking Process,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 88 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2018).

<sup>194</sup> Lamb, *The Mayaguez Crisis*, 192.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–195.

<sup>196</sup> Senator Goldwater also asserts that “hundreds of military officers privately helped us in off-the-record and other briefings. Some risked their careers to do so.” Goldwater and Casserly, *Goldwater*.

<sup>197</sup> See, for example, Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 153, 270–271, 301–302, where he discusses, respectively, Pentagon shock that Congress would comment on the military chain of command’s lack of oversight as a primary cause of the Beirut bombing disaster, the Pentagon’s criticism of Goldwater-Nichols legislation as “overcentralization,” a case advocated most forcibly by Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, and the sense of Congress that there was insufficient oversight of joint operations.

<sup>198</sup> A recent major study on U.S. strategic posture raised the concern that “civilian voices have been relatively muted on issues at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy, undermining the concept of civilian control.” See *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2018), ix.

<sup>199</sup> One member of Congress stated a lesson “learned from Vietnam is that the only thing worse than micromanaging a war from the White House is micromanaging it from here in Congress.” See Congressional Record—House, H1705, February 15, 2007, available at <[www.congress.gov/crec/2007/02/15/CREC-2007-02-15-pt1-PgH1674-5.pdf](http://www.congress.gov/crec/2007/02/15/CREC-2007-02-15-pt1-PgH1674-5.pdf)>.

### About the Author

*Dr. Christopher J. Lamb* recently retired as a Distinguished Research Fellow in the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), at the National Defense University. He conducted research on national security strategy, policy, and organizational reform, and on defense strategy, requirements, plans, and programs. In 2008, Dr. Lamb was assigned to lead the Project for National Security Reform study of the national security system, which led to the 2008 report, *Forging a New Shield*. Prior to joining INSS in 2004, Dr. Lamb served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Resources and Plans, where he had oversight of war plans, requirements, acquisition, and resource allocation matters for the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Previously, he served as Deputy Director for Military Development on the State Department's Interagency Task Force for Military Stabilization in the Balkans; Director of Policy Planning in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict; and from 1985 to 1992 as a Foreign Service Officer in Haiti and Ivory Coast. He received his doctorate in international relations from Georgetown University in 1986. Dr. Lamb has received the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Distinguished Civilian Service Award, the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Senior Executive Service, the Superior Honor Award from the Department of State, and Meritorious Civilian Service awards from the Department of Defense.

The Joint Staff's Joint History Office recently published his book, *The Mayaguez Crisis: Mission Command and Civil-Military Relations*, in which he makes the case that alleged civilian micromanagement of the military operations to recover the Mayaguez and its crew is one of the most persistent and false lessons taken from the crisis.

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