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433

American
Perspectives on
Civil-Military
Relations and
Democracy

By the Honorable I. Lewis Libby



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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002-4999
U.S.A.
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American Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations and Democracy

By the Honorable I. Lewis Libby

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the members of this conference and to exchange ideas with you about the role of the military in a democratic political system. I have spent several years observing and participating in civilian leadership of our Department of Defense, and over the same time I have watched the evolution of democratic civil-military relations in states of Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. I look forward in particular to discussing these questions today with our distinguished Russian participants, who are grappling anew with questions that have bedeviled governments not only in modern times but throughout the course of Western civilization.

These issues have a rich history as a subject in Western political theory. In Plato's *Republic*, for example, Socrates argued that while a city's guardians would protect the city from external attack, they themselves represented a potential threat. Only by instilling the guardians with the right philosophical ideas about their role in society, Socrates taught, could this danger be averted. Thus, our discussions today take place against an impressive historical backdrop.

Yet the issue is not simply one of placing the military within the framework of civil society. It also involves structuring civil-military relations in such a way that produces an effective military. The history of Western civil-military relations shows that civilian control enhances the military. Citizens view the military as their own. Having defined democratically their vital interests, they will commit their children and their resources to defend them, and they insist that this be done wisely.

Finally, the evolution of democratic control is critical for the broader scheme of international relations in Eurasia. These are not merely domestic political issues, but issues of world peace. In closing, I would like to reflect more broadly on some of the areas of common interest that our two countries can pursue as a democratic Russia pursues its course.

Constitutional Structure In the U.S.

No government is free from the need to grapple with issues of civil-military relations. The leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution were obsessed with the need to maintain civilian—that is, Communist Party—control over the military. This was achieved through the cadres of political officers, the penetration of the armed services by the KGB, and the dual system of command that our Russian participants know all too well. The costs to society are today well known.

In our history, two intertwined questions dominate the debate about civil-military relations: What measures are necessary to ensure the control of a democratic, civilian leadership over its military establishment? And what measures does prudence dictate that civilian leaders observe in their management of the military so that the armed forces are able to develop and exercise their expertise in the best interests of the nation. American leaders have almost always been sensitive to both issues.

The Honorable I. Lewis Libby, at the time of this lecture, was Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

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Civilian control of the military has been a matter of concern since the founding of our country. Because of their memories of military repression under English rule, the drafters of the U.S. Constitution were wary of authorizing or raising a large standing army in peacetime. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in *Federalist Paper 26*, the American people may be said to have "...[a] hereditary impression of the danger to liberty from [maintaining] standing armies in peace." Many of the framers of the Constitution feared that the military might move to take power or that a government facing electoral defeat might use the military to hold power by force.

In response to these fears, the framers created constitutional structures that provided two layers of civilian control of the military. The first is the clear subordination of the military to civilian authority, and the second is the divided control of the military and security policy between the executive and legislative branches. The American Constitution assigns the President, the elected head of the civil government, the role of Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. But it also reserves for the Congress the power to declare war and the power to raise and equip armed forces. And to ensure that military policy is continuously scrutinized and publicly debated, the Constitution prohibits the Congress from appropriating funds for the Army for any period longer than two years.

This constitutional structure has been in place for more than 200 years. But American leaders have continually adjusted specific aspects of civil-military relations within that framework. Until the Cold War, the United States did not maintain large military forces during peacetime. Instead, the U.S. mobilized forces when necessary to fight a war. In fact, when war broke out in Europe in 1939, the United States ranked eighteenth in the world in military power, below, among others, the Netherlands and Romania. Only the Cold War and its new position of global leadership compelled the United States to retain peacetime force levels of unprecedented size. This change, in turn, required new structures for directing the military and formulating security policy, while at the same time ensuring civilian control.

The organization of American's military was significantly changed in the postwar period by the National Security Act of 1947. Its stated purpose is to "provide for the authoritative coordination and unified direction [of the armed forces] under civilian control." The law brought the armed services into one governmental agency, now called the Department of Defense, in part to overcome shortcomings demonstrated during World War II in our ability to plan and conduct operations involving more than one branch of the armed services.

The 1947 law also sought to ensure that the new organization be designed in such a way that effective control would still be exercised by civilians. As a result, the idea of creating a general staff for the armed forces was explicitly rejected, and all of the key positions associated with military policy were reserved for civilians. The law further stipulates that the head of this department be a civilian nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. To ensure that the new Secretary of Defense would be a true "civilian," the law disqualifies anyone who has served as a military officer within the past ten years from serving in that office.

The National Security Act grants the Secretary of Defense full "authority, direction, and control" over all aspects of the Defense Department and its military components. He exercises that control with regard to policies, programs, budgets, and military operations. The law stipulates that the chain of command runs from the President, as Commander-in-Chief, through the Secretary of Defense to the commanders of our Unified and Specified Commands.

It is also significant to note who is not included in the operational chain of command. Neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff nor the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is included, though the President may direct the Secretary of Defense that orders to combatant commanders be passed through the JCS chairman. This is not to say that military advice from the chairman and the JCS is not an essential component of decisions regarding the use of force or the conduct of military operations. It

clearly is, and both the President and the Secretary of Defense have relied heavily upon it during every American military operation since this structure was created.

But the division of responsibilities intended in the law is clear: The civilian leadership sets forth the policy and the objectives, and the military commanders are tasked with using their professional judgment to execute the policy through the most effective and efficient means possible. It is important to underscore that ultimate control over the employment of military forces rests with an elected President and his principal civilian advisors, the Secretary of Defense, and with the Congress.

Finally, the 1947 law also provides that civilians must fill many subordinate offices throughout the defense establishment, including those of the deputy secretary, the under secretaries, and the assistant secretaries of Defense and even those of the military department secretaries. These officials have professional, largely civilian staffs, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense employing roughly 2,100 staff members, 1,500 of whom are civilians.

The second layer of civilian control of the military involves the division of responsibilities for national security between the executive and legislative branches. All funds for government operations—including the military—must be appropriated by Congress. The Department of Defense requests appropriations that are vetted by 50 to 70 professional staff members on the House and Senate armed services committees. To justify the funds requested, the President and his advisors must articulate a coherent strategic vision for the future, taking account of potential threats to the United States in coming years and proposing a defense program to meet those threats within available financial resources.

America is constantly adjusting its approach to these issues. We have not discovered a magic formula, but rather continue to devote ourselves to an ongoing process. We started our experiment with democracy more than 200 years ago, and we are still working on it.

Creative Balance

In recent American history, there are examples when the balance in our civil-military relations has been disrupted. During the Korean War, General MacArthur challenged President Truman's definition of our war objectives and policy. MacArthur was dismissed as a result, and the senior military leadership agreed with President Truman's decision to do so. Presidents Johnson and Carter have been criticized for overstepping the limits prudence suggests for civilian involvement in operational matters in the early years of the Vietnam War and in the Iranian hostage rescue attempt, respectively.

But in recent years U.S. civil-military relations have achieved a productive and creative balance. During the Persian Gulf crisis, the President, with his civilian advisors, set overall U.S. goals and policy and addressed specific issues such as how the United States would respond to the potential use of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the civilian leadership mobilized the alliance, secured U.N. Security Council authorization for the use of force, and won approval for such action from a divided Congress. The President left operational planning largely in the hands of his military leaders, though they were influenced by probing questions posed by the Secretary of Defense. This balance served us well in the stunning victory that our forces accomplished.

American decision makers have also maintained this creative balance in adjusting our strategy and military force posture to the realities of the post-Cold-War world. Over the last 45 years, American national security strategy was based on the assumption that the United States needed sufficient forces to respond to a short-warning Soviet attack into Western Europe, escalating to a worldwide confrontation. However, in the fall of 1989—well before the Warsaw Pact fell or the failed Soviet coup—the civilian leadership of the Defense Department, together with senior military advisors,

began to develop the elements of a new strategy and defense program. This new strategy was recommended to President Bush, who approved it and described its elements in a speech on August 2, 1990.

Based on the new strategic direction outlined by the President, the President's key civilian advisors, in partnership with the senior military leadership, developed a revised defense program that called for dramatic reductions in the planned size of U.S. forces and in U.S. defense spending. Guided by the new strategy, we are reducing our own forces significantly, eliminating almost a million personnel from the Pentagon's military and civilian rolls and another half million to a million from U.S. defense industries. These reductions have already cut force structure to its lowest level in terms of manpower since before the Korean War. Defense spending will decline almost 40 percent in real terms and, as a proportion of GNP, will fall to the lowest percentage since before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Through arms control agreements with Russia and other CIS states, the United States will reduce its strategic nuclear forces to one-quarter of their 1990 level by early in the next decade.

The new strategy focuses our defense planning away from global war against the former Soviet Union and toward the kinds of regional threats that we might face in the future. This review of U.S. defense strategy, policy, and defense planning has been as comprehensive and far-reaching as the one conducted at the outset of the Cold War and could not have been accomplished without close cooperation of both civilian and military leaders.

Building a New Relationship

One of the reasons we have been able to make such far-reaching changes is that we have high hopes for the success of democracy in Russia. We welcome opportunities like this conference to make available our experience in the area of civilian control of the military. We do not believe that we have arrived at the only valid answers to these issues; other nations have worked out different but equally useful civil-military structures. But we do believe that progress in this area is an important building block not only in the broader pattern of U.S.-Russian partnership, but also in shaping the peace and stability of the post-Cold-War world.

A democratic Russia would be an integral part of the community of Western democratic nations, a community bound together by a web of political, economic, and security ties. This "zone of peace" created through postwar cooperation offers a framework for security not through unstable balances of power or competitive rivalries in arms, but through cooperative approaches and collective security organizations. We will seek to maintain our alliances, avoid the renationalization of security policies, and to turn old antagonisms into new cooperative relationships. It is in the U.S. interest to bring the states of Central and Eastern Europe and Russia, Ukraine, and the other former Soviet republics into this community of nations. To this end, both bilateral contacts and membership in Western institutions, such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, are critical.

In building our new relationship, we must look—as we did in the Washington Charter on the U.S.-Russian relationship—toward shared principles and interests. Democratic Russia is in the process of redefining its national interest. How the new Russia does so will decisively shape the character of its relations with the United States and the other democracies.

Both of our countries view the world through a wide lens. By virtue of geography and other factors we both have major interests in critical regions of the world. A democratic Russia shares common interests and perspectives with the United States that the previous relationship obscured or even turned into causes of conflict:

- ◆ Even at the height of the Cold War, we had a common interest and special responsibility for the prevention of nuclear war. In the last twelve months, we have made more progress toward reducing nuclear weapons than we achieved in 24 years of nuclear arms control negotiations. Most important, we have started to discuss cooperation on ballistic missile defense, recognizing our common interest in protection against limited attacks.
- ◆ As Pacific nations, we share a common interest in preserving stability in Northeast Asia. Increasingly, our policies in Korea are working in parallel to support a peaceful evolution on the peninsula and to halt North Korea's nuclear weapons efforts. We believe that America's security relationship with Japan remains a linchpin of stability in the region and that a democratic Russia need not feel threatened by it. We both have an interest in seeing China evolve along a path that sees its growing economic strength used to benefit its people, and not be diverted for military purposes. And, of course, we both share the risks if events in Asia go dangerously wrong.
- ◆ For different reasons, we both have an interest in stability in the Persian Gulf. This common interest already began to emerge after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, when the United States achieved a level of political cooperation with the former Soviet Union that would have been inconceivable at the height of the Cold War. But such cooperation could be even stronger in the future with a democratic Russia. Already today Russian ships are participating in the effort to enforce the U.N. resolutions on Iraq.
- ◆ Given the enormous influence of Islam in vast regions of the world, we both have an interest in seeing the success of moderate, democratically oriented forces as opposed to aggressive religious fanaticism. The majority of the Muslim world wants to be part of the modern, progressive world, and both of our countries should work to keep the door open to them. In this regard, the United States believes Turkey has a particularly important and positive role to play in the countries of Central Asia.
- ◆ In Western Europe, the integration of the liberal democracies, under the leadership of the United States, into a system of collective defense that has no historical precedent is one of the major achievements of the last forty years. It is also one that no one should take for granted. One of the ironies of the end of the Cold War is that, by preventing the rise of competition or rivalries among the major European powers, NATO and the other integrating institutions of Western Europe introduce a stability that serves the interests of Russia, as well.
- ◆ Perhaps our greatest common challenge lies in extending this democratic zone of peace to include the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. We do not want to find that we have torn down one wall only to erect another that divides Europe into stable and unstable halves.
- ◆ We also have an interest in halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery, particularly to dangerous countries like Iraq and North Korea.
- ◆ We have a common interest in one another's prosperity. The United States wants to do its part in helping Russia make the difficult transition to a market economy. But the main responsibility for Russia's future lies with the Russians themselves. It is a difficult process that no nation has gone through before. The final curse of a communist economy that impoverished Russia is the lack of resources or a legal framework that could ease the pain of transition to the free market system that can rejuvenate Russia.

- ◆ Finally, among the common interests of the United States and a democratic Russia is our joint belief in the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in diverse societies. These rights apply to all, including ethnic Russian minorities, and the respective obligations to protect them rest on all governments. Victims of past repression must be especially careful not to turn on others deprivations they suffered, while others must be sensitive to historic concerns. The military bears a special burden in this area. It is tempting to turn to them to redress wrongs: they hold in their hands instruments of retribution. But long-term peace requires protection of rights that must be guaranteed by civil society.

Conclusion

A democratic Russia, with a military establishment clearly accountable to elected, civilian leaders, is a critical step in the process of building U.S.-Russian cooperation to achieve those objectives.

The Russian military, as well as the Russian people as a whole, deserve praise for the sacrifices they are enduring to bring about the transition to democracy.

Who benefits most from the successful end of the Cold War? Surely the people of Russia, Ukraine, the rest of the former Soviet Union, and Central Europe do. But the West benefits as well. It is clear that the West needs Russia positively engaged in the world. We need Russian reform to succeed.

The question is sometimes asked: Does America want a strong or weak Russia? America wants a strong, democratic one. A weak Russia is still dangerous and more likely to be a problem. We want the global trend toward democratic reforms and free markets to continue to spread throughout Eurasia. The most ambitious plans for prosperity and cooperation cannot come to pass if the Eurasian landmass is an area of crisis and instability. We want a democratic, rejuvenated Russia to take its rightful place on the world stage and to add its voice and its power to the existing community of nations that seeks peace and, when necessary, opposes aggression.

