

Briefing Memo

The Role of Civilian Defense Officials

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Introduction

When discussing civilian control of the military, our focus tends to be on a dyadic relationship between “civilians” as the controlling and “the military” as the controlled. In democracies, “civilians” refer to elected politicians and their appointees. It is them who take on the duty of overcoming “a simple paradox: the very institution created to protect the polity is given sufficient power to become a threat to the polity” (Feaver 2004, 4). Therefore, not surprisingly, how political leadership controls the organization and use of armed forces has been at the heart of debate. Meanwhile, civil servants in the Department of Defense do not appear in this dichotomy. They are civilians in that they are not in uniform, but they are not “civilians,” since they are not political leaders but permanent public servants. That civilian defense officials have no place in the most simplified—thus, the most important—element of civilian control suggests there exists ambiguity as to what they work for in their department. How can their role be understood? This paper aims to review arguments useful when considering this issue.

Support for political responsibility

One type of thought that emerged in the relatively early years of the postwar period is that civilian defense officials are to support political leaders in fulfilling their responsibility. In his famous book *The State and the Soldier*, Samuel Huntington (1957, 449-53) highlights the significance of a “defense policy staff” that stands above stove-piped interests and serves only the secretary of defense. According to Huntington, a defense policy staff has to be established to help the secretary integrate the conflicting interests of economy and security and the conflicting interests of the service branches into a comprehensive policy as a consequence of existing civilian and military staff organs being given narrowly defined missions. What is needed is the “institutionalization of the secretarial viewpoint (450),” and the defense policy staff works for this purpose. He presents the idea that staff members would be drawn from three sources: civil servants, military officers, and experts and consultants from outside the government, and that a civil servant would be appointed as the head.

Paul Appleby (1948) may be included in this type of thought. Like Huntington, he considers the necessity of a staff dedicated to assisting the secretary of defense in order to support their control. Yet, pointing out that the secretary cannot manage national defense organization alone or by only relying on military officers, Appleby stresses that if the principal purpose of secretarial control is civilian control, then there must be civilian staff. Whereas Huntington assumed a defense policy staff would be made up of mixed teams, Appleby’s argument went on to assert that a civilian staff should play a major role in aiding the secretarial viewpoint.

Appleby observed the growth of the armed forces and the fragmented nature of their organization. At the same

time, he was aware of an increase in the size and complexity of the administration caused by the increasing size and complexity of society, which in turn had made civilian control of the military an even more complex process. Civilian control must overcome the issues of comprehensiveness and complexity. In Appleby's view, the civilian staff is expected to offer plans and alternatives on organization and policy to political leaders such as the president and the secretary of defense. The reason that he thinks it appropriate to have civilian staff involved in broad areas of responsibility is because the advice political leaders need is not limited to any specific area. To borrow his words, the staff that assists political leaders should be a "general staff of civilian character (85)" rather than civilian experts or the military general staff.

An oversight mechanism

A second image of civilian staff is as a tool used to enable political leaders to control the military. This view is typically derived from arguments that employ Agency Theory to explain civil-military relations. Peter Feaver (2004) offers a useful understanding of civilian control by developing a two-party game between a civilian principal and a military agent. Here is a much simplified of this game with the aim to provide a brief picture of agency theoretical argument (for the precise description of this theory, see Feaver, 102-12).

The civilian principal and the military agent are assumed to have different preferences; the military chooses whether to act in the civilian's interests or prioritize its own. In other words, the military chooses between working and shirking. Another assumption is that the military payoff of working (w) is smaller than the payoff of shirking (s) ($w < s$). Feaver also introduces variables such as the probability of detecting military shirking (a), the probability of punishing shirking (g), and the severity of the punishment (p). Since these three variables multiplied together (agp) stand for the risk of shirking, the expected gain for the military from shirking is $s - agp$. In the situation of $w > s - agp$, the military works for the civilian. Therefore, the civilian needs to maintain this situation by adopting a policy of giving rewards (increasing the value of w), intensifying monitoring (increasing the value of a), or inflicting punishment should the military not follow civilian directions (increasing the value of p). However, it might be difficult for the civilian to freely set the values of a and p . For one thing, intense oversight may cause higher costs of administration and supervision. For another, the military's possible resistance to punishment could bring about a political risk.

As oversight mechanisms to prevent and detect shirking, Feaver suggests: 1) "contract incentives," 2) "screening and selection" using human resources control measures such as recruitment and promotion as leverage, 3) "fire alarms" that inform the civilian if shirking is observed, 4) "institutional checks" that establish checkpoints and even veto powers in the decision-making process, 5) "police patrols" that continually monitor the movements of the military, and 6) "revising delegation decision" that intervenes in military's delegated authorities. 1) can increase the value of w , 3) to 5) can increase the value of a , and 6) can increase the value of p . 3) may also have the effect of decreasing the value of s . In addition, by recruiting and promoting military officers loyal to the civilian principal, 2) results in s approaching w . If political leaders intend, civilian defense officials can aid them in some way with these means of oversight. For example, Feaver regards the size of the civilian secretariat in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the service secretariats as indicators of 5). Civilian defense officials may be tasked to produce drafts for

1) and 2), and also may function as a body for checks, as in 4).

A group of experts

Third, there are arguments that consider civilian defense officials as a group of experts. The first and second arguments explore where civil servants can be placed in the civilian-military dichotomy. However, based on the principle of democratic control of public administration, civil servants in defense departments are inherently an object of control. The relationship between the civil bureaucracy and the military staff, also an object of control, is fundamentally horizontal. If one believes that the two groups of experts each have their own different expertise, this horizontal relationship becomes an issue of the demarcation of responsibilities in the Department of Defense (functionally separatist approach). There is also a way of creating an organization in which responsibilities are not divided up but shared (functionally fusionist approach).

Douglas Brand's (1999) "integrated ministry" and "unified ministry" are relevant concepts in this regard. In an integrated ministry, views of civil staff and military staff are integrated at the ministerial level. Brand sees it useful for ministers to have and test different advice from the two different groups of experts. The tension between the two is a "natural phenomenon (39)" and even desirable for political leaders in terms of controlling them. On the other hand, Brand emphasizes the danger to political leaders from a unified ministry in which the authority and expertise of the civilian staff and the military staff is combined into one below the ministerial level. In such a Department of Defense, political leaders are presented with, or in a worse case boxed in by, the unified ideas of civil servants and military officers, and thus decisions are virtually made during prior stages. Yet an integrated ministry is not an easy organization to run either, since political leaders must control by themselves groups of experts who tend to be mired in narrow institutional interests.

In contrast to Appleby, who hoped for a civilian staff detached from specific organizational interests, Brand, who has stated that "the best defense counter-experts reside within defense ministries (39)," acknowledges that the civilian defense bureaucracy could possibly provide a counterbalance for the military staff. Richard Kohn (1997, 149-52) notes that political leaders should be supported by a "civilian bureaucracy with sufficient experience and technical expertise," and argues for the necessity of gathering information and advice independent of the military, and at a minimum, having a "second opinion." So, what is the expertise of the civilian defense bureaucracy? While Brand does not seem to go further than saying its responsibility is defined in law, Kohn refers to "[j]udgments about the size and character of the risks a nation faces, whether to institute or practice conscription, what weapons to purchase, and a variety of other choices that invariably possess social, economic, and political implications that go beyond narrow security considerations (150)" as examples of decision questions for which information and advice independent of the military is needed. These can be considered parts of the role of the civilian staff.

Conclusion

This paper has touched upon three types of thought that indicate the possible role of civil servants in the defense department in broad terms. The first type mainly looks at what staff would be needed in order for political leaders to formulate and implement comprehensive policy. For this reason, civil servants, if they assume this role, are required

to be equipped with wide-ranging perspectives and considerations so that they can overcome individual organizational interests. The second type of argument frames the civilian staff as a tool to assist political control. Thus, the issue is one of designing a control and oversight mechanism in the civilian-military dichotomy. In the third type of thought, civil servants are placed under the control of political leaders as a group of experts, the same way as the military staff is controlled. However, what kind of expertise the civilian staff should have is not obvious. During the latest organizational reform of the Ministry of Defense in Japan, the Government presented its understanding that civilian director-generals would advise the Minister from a policy perspective while chiefs of staff would advise from a military professional perspective. What support should civil servants provide, including what “policy perspective” means, and what role is expected of them—these all depend on the will of political leaders and voters. Arguments reviewed in this paper will continue to offer many suggestions when we consider the management of defense departments and the role of civilian defense officials in particular.

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