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Soldiers and Legislators: A Common Mission

ROBERT R. IVANY

Two hundred years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville commented on the unique relationship between the American people and their government. "In democratic eyes, government is not a blessing," he wrote, "but a necessary evil."[1] Americans today would heartily concur. They have traditionally mistrusted politicians and the big government they symbolized. In a recent Harris poll, 53 percent of Americans queried said that Congress was not effectively fulfilling its responsibilities.[2] In a 1989 Gallup Poll, only 32 percent of those polled expressed "quite a lot" of confidence in Congress as an institution. For the past several years, Congress has consistently ranked near the bottom of major institutions in public confidence.[3]

If asked, soldiers would probably echo the sentiments of their countrymen. To a much larger degree than their civilian counterparts, soldiers feel the impact of legislation. Laws regulate every facet of military service. Professional officers generally understand the need to control the expenditure of tax revenues. While they may disagree with the square footage allocated for living quarters or the authorized weight allowance for the shipment of household goods, they accept such rules with a sense of resignation and a touch of humor that marks military service.

What has increasingly begun to rankle the nation's military leaders, however, is the growing propensity of Congress to use its constitutional mandate for regulating the military services as a pretext for micromanaging them. Last year Congress changed 60 percent of the line items in the Department of Defense's budget request.[4] In effect the legislators claimed that on 60 percent of everything the Pentagon wanted to buy, develop, or manage, they knew a better way to do it.

Congressional responsibilities stem from Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution, which requires the legislature "to raise and support armies" and "to make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces." During every working day in 1989, legislators on average made 2500 phone calls,

sent 450 letters, and demanded three separate reports each requiring over 1000 man-hours from the military services.[5] This intensive oversight has engendered a deep frustration among the military's senior leaders. In a recent interview Secretary of the Army Michael Stone flatly stated that congressional micro-management "makes an absolute mess out of what we [the Army] are doing here."[6] Defense Secretary Richard Cheney, meanwhile, in his report on streamlining the defense acquisition process, pointed tellingly to the existence of "30 committees, 77 subcommittees, and four panels" with "overlapping and duplicative jurisdiction over DOD affairs."[7] Newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* have joined the growing ranks of critics in urging a public presidential campaign to stop congressional meddling in military budgets.[8] At the heart of this uproar lies the perception that congressional tinkering benefits only a district or state while flagrantly harming the national good.

Legislators and soldiers share a common mission. Both have the responsibility, in their own way, for maintaining the national defense. But despite the deep inter-involvement of the two institutions, serious misconceptions cloud many senior officers' understanding of Congress's role in national defense. Most officers can vaguely recall their youthful civics classes that described the process by which a bill becomes law, but they are often unprepared to face the powerful clash of interests that forms the modern legislative process. Military officers must be willing to shed their cynicism, naïveté, and even hypocrisy by learning how the constituency, modus operandi, and professional bias of legislators must necessarily differ from those of the military. By arriving at an understanding of the uniquely American legislative process and by appreciating the complex pressures on Congress, senior military leaders will more effectively contribute to the nation's defense.

Conflicting Constituencies

Nowhere do legislators and soldiers differ as radically as in the constituencies which they represent. Military officers have virtually no ties to their home districts or states. The dictates of military service have moved them over the entire United States and often over the world. Ties to their place of birth become blurred with each new assignment. Legal residences are more

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apt to reflect a posting where state income taxes were low or where a home purchase made sense. When retirement time comes, a favorable climate and the presence of jobs are likely to influence the serviceman's decision.

Throughout their service, military officers view security issues from a national perspective. They see their nation as a competitor or ally of other nations, not as a kaleidoscope of individual states, regions, or interests. This global view, however, does not exempt admirals or generals from answering to powerful constituencies. One's armed service exerts a professional, emotional, and financial hold over its members. Often these orientations conflict with the positions of the Defense Department. Professional staff members who prepare legislation for members of the Armed Services Committees point out that the military establishment is not a monolith speaking with one voice. Even after the Secretary of Defense submits the President's budget to Congress, discordant voices flow through staff cubicles. Staff members claim that although the majority of service representatives loyally support the Department of Defense position, mavericks often appear pushing individual service programs or even branch programs within the services. In fact, staffers attribute numerous changes in the DOD budget request to service initiatives to circumvent the Secretary's decisions. In addition the reserve components and countless retired military "consultants" promote their respective points of view.[9]

After Secretary of Defense Cheney assumed his position at the Pentagon, he quickly served notice that he expected the service chiefs to sing in harmony with the DOD chorus. One of his first acts was to admonish the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Larry Welch, for overzealous "free-lancing" of Air Force programs on the Hill.[10] Later, when Mr. Cheney slashed from the 1990 budget the V-22 Osprey, a hybrid airplane-helicopter ordered for the Marine Corps, some politicians questioned whether or not the cut would hold in the face of powerful service and industry opposition. "Don't ever underestimate the persuasiveness of the United States Marines," quipped Senator Sam Nunn, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "It's amazing what 'a few good men' can do."[11]

Congressmen look at security issues from a far different perspective. They are painfully aware of the simple fact that voters elect representatives to look after their own interests, not someone else's. A legislator's report card often becomes a reflection of the number of federal projects he has funneled into the home district or state. The more aggressive he is, the better—at least in the eyes of his constituents. Senators and representatives even venture to the boundaries of ethical conduct in their zeal for pork barrel projects. Senator Alfonse D'Amato from New York, for example, recently came under scrutiny for allegedly improperly channeling Housing and Urban Development funds to his home state. Vigorously defending his right to go to "bat for every single thing that had merit," he promised to continue fighting for New York, insisting

"that my state elected me to go for it."[12] When the Republican National Committee attempted to capitalize on the ethical difficulties of several Democrats in 1989, their effort fell flat. "Republicans won't learn," claimed Democratic congressional campaign spokesman Howard Schloss, "that congressional elections are decided by local people on local issues."[13]

Obviously, not every national security issue before Congress has a local constituency. But even where hometown jobs are not affected, Political Action Committees or PACs exert a strong financial pull on congressmen, especially on those who hold seats on key committees such as Ways and Means. In 1988 over 3500 national organizations had registered as PACs. They contributed more than $148 million to candidates in the 1988 congressional elections, almost a third of the total of nearly $476 million raised by the candidates.[14] Washington observers point out that representatives who run for election every two years are more susceptible to fund-raising concerns than senators who campaign every six years. "A representative never stops running," says one veteran Hill staffer. "Every defense contractor or dedicated interest group within the representative's 500,000 voter constituency must be addressed." Senators, meanwhile, enjoy the advantage of more numerous interests spread over their entire state.

Interest groups need not be financially strong to make themselves heard. Civil rights groups, churches, and minority organizations command large blocs of voters among the typical congressman's constituency. When the Reagan Administration, for example, sought to sell the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) radar planes to Saudi Arabia in 1981, it was vigorously opposed by several American Jewish organizations. One of them was the American Jewish Committee, whose Washington representative, Hyman Bookbinder, explained his organization's strength in this manner: "What we have going for us, and that's really the essence of the Jewish lobby, is an organized, committed, concerned Jewish community in America."[15] Unlike the military, members of Congress answer to a diverse and often contradictory constituency.

Whence the Beef?

An excellent example of an issue with conflicting constituencies is the legislation mandating the sale of US meat in military commissaries in Europe. At first glance, the meat issue appears to be a straightforward case of pork barrel politics, no pun intended. From 1970 to 1987, per capita consumption of beef and pork in the United States declined by 12 percent and 4 percent respectively.[16] In an effort to boost sales, the House Armed Services Committee in 1986 directed the Department of Defense to conduct a test in its European commissaries to determine whether fresh US beef and pork could compete with its cheaper European-raised counterparts. The six-month test revealed that European meat outsold the US product by a five to one ratio.[17] An accompanying survey pointed out that the price differential was key. The American cuts of meat cost nearly

twice as much, prompting most customers to choose the European brands.[18] The study further indicated that it would cost the Defense Department $30 million to $35 million to handle, transport, and build facilities for the exclusive sale of US meat in its commissaries. After the conclusion of the test, Assistant Secretary of Defense Chapman Cox reported to the House Armed Services Committee that he did not believe "legislation which would limit competition of meat products to US products . . . would be in the best interests of the US service member or US taxpayer."[19]

With that reply the issue lay dormant until 1988 when the European Economic Community (EEC) dealt a significant blow to American ranchers. It claimed that hormone-treated beef, which characterized the vast majority of US products, constituted a health hazard. Consequently, on 1 January 1988 it banned the sale of hormone-treated beef within the 12-nation community. At the same time, the EEC continued to subsidize the sale of more than $60 million of its beef to US commissaries.[20] The subsidy allowed the American soldier in Europe to put a slightly less tender but much less costly slice of beef on the dinner table.

In Washington the EEC's salvo against American meat products raised cries for retaliation. In January 1989, the House Armed Services Committee again asked the Defense Department to study the effects of limiting meat purchases to US sources. The services studied the issue and reported that if proposed legislation pertained only to beef rather than all meat products, and if only the commissaries north of the Alps were included, the Defense Department could comply. DOD, however, requested an additional authorization of $10 million for transportation costs.[21] One thorny question lingered. US beef would still cost military families 35 percent more (totaling about $12 million per year) than the European beef they were buying. Would American serviceman have to pay an extra $12 million to subsidize American ranchers in a trade war with the EEC?

An astute observer once described a statesman "as a politician who is held upright by equal pressure from all directions."[22] The beef war gave several politicians the opportunity to demonstrate their statesmanlike skills. Legislators showed their constituents as well as military families their ability to compromise and thereby to solve a complex issue. Professional staff members on the House Armed Services Committee got the process rolling by enlisting the support of the House Agriculture Committee. The latter agreed to provide $12 million to subsidize the retail price of US beef products on a sliding scale for the following three years.[23] Military families in Europe would gradually pay the same amount for American beef as their counterparts in the United States. The House Armed Services Committee further recommended the authorization of $10 million for increased transportation costs. This resolution of the beef issue sailed through the House with little debate.

The beef issue generated far more controversy in the Senate, where Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa introduced a more ambitious amendment. The Harkin Amendment required all meat and meat products for the entire European theater to be purchased from US producers.[24] A modified Harkin Amendment ended up in joint conference. The conferees compromised on this issue by restricting the ban to beef rather than all meat and by dropping the House language authorizing $10 million for transportation costs.[25] The outcome did not please everyone. On the one hand, cattle ranchers increased their sales and Congress fired another shot in the economic war with the EEC. On the other hand, the legislators forced DOD to pay for the new shipments out of its hide, but at least they allowed DOD the flexibility to control the funds for transportation. Meanwhile, the US taxpayer, who already heavily subsidized farm products, would contribute another $12 million to existing subsidies. The US soldier, who already found life overseas to be an expensive undertaking, would pay higher beef prices. Service members stationed in Europe would understandably bemoan the bill's passage. But tempering their disappointment would be the knowledge that congressmen annually appropriate millions of dollars to provide those overseas with a wide variety of US products at stateside prices. In the end, the trooper stationed in Fulda, Germany, would pay no more for his steak dinner than his counterpart at Ft. Bliss, Texas. Thus were the interests of a broad diversity of constituencies reconciled.

Structure and System

Although legislators and soldiers differ significantly in their respective constituencies, they carry out their responsibilities in much the same way. Military leaders are accustomed to giving and following orders. As officers advance in experience and maturity, however, their decisionmaking methods change as well. While orders are orders in any military organization, consensus-building becomes an increasingly important skill at higher levels of command. A wise commander knows that although he can change his unit's operating procedures, he will achieve far better results if he incorporates the recommendations of his subordinates and technicians. In the Pentagon, officers soon realize that if they approach strategic or budgetary issues from a nakedly parochial view, they will not please policymakers who attempt to find the best solution for the entire service. Ideally, as the various branches or components jostle for position and attempt to persuade their superiors on the merits of their views, the best solution emerges. Congress is no different except that there is no higher authority beyond the voting tally itself to decide the issue.

In Congress, 435 representatives and 100 senators answer only to their constituents. Consensus-building, compromise, log-rolling ("I'll vote for yours if you'll vote for mine"), and the allocation of influential positions

form the tools of the trade. The entire legislative system has become a lengthy, cumbersome, and often inefficient consensus-building process. Its principal product, the federal budget, emerges only after prodigious effort. The budget's painful birth results largely from the numerous committees and subcommittees that assist its lengthy labor.

After the Secretary of Defense submits his portion of the budget to Congress in January, both the Senate and the House begin their scrutiny. The budget first travels to the Budget Committees. Established by the Budget Control Act of 1974, these committees attempt to solve one of Congress's chronic problems—overspending. The Budget Committees set ceilings and priorities for different categories of expenditures. After the respective Budget Committees complete their budget resolutions, they report them to the full House and full Senate. Following a floor debate on the resolutions, the bills move to the Authorization Committees for individual line-item analysis. In the case of the Department of Defense, its bill travels to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Here 54 representatives and 20 senators begin their simultaneous scrutiny. Assisted by a force of nearly 80 professional staff members, they attempt to mold defense expenditures within the limits and priorities established in the earlier budget resolution. In the past these committees kept "open authorizations" for most items, allowing the Appropriation Committees to specify the amount spent on each item. Now, however, the Armed Services Committees specify the amounts and, at times, limit the time period for the expenditure.[26] Although the Armed Services Committees cannot require funding, their power lies in the publicity generated by their hearings and by their agreement with the Appropriations Committee, under which the latter normally will not require the funding of an item not previously authorized.

The last committees to receive the bill are the Appropriations Committees. Traditionally, the Senate Appropriations Committee sits as an appeals board for federal agencies or special interest groups dissatisfied with the House's figures.[27] Inevitably, the Senate and House budgets differ, requiring a joint conference to resolve the differences before the budget travels to the Oval Office for the President's signature. The precarious journey requires consensus-building at each stage. It is important to remember that the ratio of Republicans to Democrats on the committees mirrors their relative ratios in the House and Senate. Along every step of the budget process, legislators work to garner the majorities needed to get authorizations or appropriations for their desired item or policy.

Rather than worrying about whether Congress slights the national interest in its zeal to promote hometown issues, military leaders might become more effective participants in the process of protecting the national interest by concentrating on how they manage issues before Congress. Let us consider the case of a brigade's deactivation.

Causing Sparks in Colorado

In April 1990, Secretary Cheney announced a series of measures to reduce the military budget. Included in his list of cuts were the F-14D fighter, the V-22 Osprey helicopter-airplane, and the 2d Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division (Mech), which was scheduled for deactivation. Justifying the decision before the House Armed Services Committee, the Secretary stated that the 4th Infantry Division, located at Ft. Carson, Colorado, was the only heavy division in the United States that still retained three active combat brigades. Other heavy divisions with a reinforcement mission to NATO consisted of two active and one reserve or forward-deployed brigade. Despite this rationale, the potential loss of 3300 soldiers generated tremendous concern in the division's hometown of Colorado Springs. Senators and representatives soon began to echo their constituents' displeasure at the expected loss of jobs in a community where the military generated $250 million in annual income.[28] At first, the Colorado legislators pushed for a delay of the deactivation, contending that the cuts had not been studied in sufficient detail and that the Defense Department should first cut forces in NATO. While giving due consideration to these arguments, the Army's leadership pressed on with the deactivation, which began in May and ended in December of 1989. Unable to sway the policymakers in the Pentagon, Colorado legislators inquired about the possibility of "backfilling" the brigade with the 10th Special Forces Group from Ft. Devens, Massachusetts. When the powerful Massachusetts delegation learned of this attempt, they in turn pressured the Army leadership to make no changes.[29] In early June, a Colorado Springs citizens group consisting of leading community members and a retired general officer visited Washington to meet with key members of Congress, the Department of the Army, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.[30]

These meetings allowed the constituents to express their feelings and gave the Colorado congressional delegation an opportunity to show their constituents that they were fighting on their behalf. Their combined efforts, however, proved fruitless, as the deactivation continued.

Undaunted, the legislators turned their attention to the Authorization Committees. Representative Joel Hefley, a junior member of the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, introduced an amendment to prevent the Army from deactivating the brigade in fiscal year 1990. Representative Hefley was unable to generate much enthusiasm from fellow Colorado congressmen or from other legislators. The Readiness Subcommittee wrote two "senses of Congress" into the budget bill suggesting that reductions be taken from European-based units. A "sense of Congress" provision does not carry the force of law, but simply allows members to articulate their views officially for the public record. The two senses of Congress remained in the bill as it moved to the full committee session and onto the floor.[31]

On the Senate side, the Colorado delegation met with more success. Senator Tim Wirth, a liberal Democrat, took the lead by raising the Ft. Carson issue before the Senate Armed Services Committee. There he proposed an amendment that would prohibit the Army from deactivating the brigade until the completion of a Total Force Policy Study on 1 December 1990. With strong support from Senator Nunn, Senator Wirth won unanimous approval of his amendment. Inserted in the wording of the Senate version of the budget, the Nunn-Wirth Amendment met no opposition on the Senate floor.[32] Backed by his amendment, Senator Wirth called upon the Secretary of the Army to halt the ongoing stand-down of troops and tanks. Secretary Stone refused. Calling such efforts to save the 2d Brigade "parochial," he stressed that to halt the process would "cause turbulence and personal hardship for our soldiers and their families, and . . . ultimately undo what has been done."[33] In early October, the differences between the House and Senate budget bills ended up in joint conference for resolution. Since the House version contained only a sense of Congress on the deactivation, while the Senate version was actually written into the budget, the deactivation issue was thrown in the laps of the joint conferees. At this point the Army leadership used every opportunity to inform the conferees about the necessity to continue the deactivation.

Regulations allow the military services to provide Congress with information concerning the President's budget. This responsibility to provide information and answer questions gives military liaison officers and senior military leaders access to legislators. The line between providing information and lobbying is a fine one. Some professional staff members scoff at the idea that the services don't lobby, but they all highly value service representatives' opinions and proffered information. In the Ft. Carson case, the Army leadership from the top down hastened to clarify and amplify the rationale behind the ongoing deactivation to members of the joint conference. The Army also opened the door for support from legislators from Oregon and Idaho by announcing that the 4th Infantry's new reserve brigade would come from these states.[34] While the joint conferees debated the various issues on which the House and Senate differed, the brigade continued turning in its vehicles and reassigning its soldiers. By October the cost to reactivate the now largely defunct brigade approached the $400 million mark. In the end, the Nunn-Wirth Amendment disappeared in joint conference, and the bill that emerged made no mention of it.

A number of factors contributed to the amendment's demise. First, the Defense Department and the Army presented a strong rationale for the brigade's deactivation and vigorously defended their authority to deactivate. Second, the Colorado delegation, especially on the House side, failed to build a strong consensus for the amendment. Conspicuously absent from the debate on the issue was Colorado Representative Pat Schroeder, a Democrat and Chairwoman of the powerful Military Installations and Facilities Subcommittee of the House Armed

Services Committee. On the Senate side, Senator Wirth's strong stand to maintain conventional forces undoubtedly drew a skeptical response from fellow lawmakers who were aware of his lukewarm voting record on defense issues.[35] Third, despite the Nunn-Wirth Amendment, the Secretary of Defense continued the deactivation so that by the time the issue reached the joint conference the deactivation was a virtual fait accompli.

As the nation approaches a period of severe defense cutbacks, the pressure to eliminate pork barrel projects is rising dramatically. During the 1990 budget hearings, Representative Les Aspin, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, took great pride in excluding most of his fellow representatives' pet projects, which totaled $6.8 billion! "There's no room for even the deserving add-ons," he stated, "let alone the ones that go 'oink.'"[36] The responsibility to trim the fat and not the muscle of national defense rests with the Congress. If the military professional presents a strong rationale for his view, fits it into a strategic framework, and supports it with a realistic threat assessment, he has satisfied his professional obligation and can take pride in that fact, regardless of how Congress ultimately reacts to his proposal.

Life Along the Potomac

Even if officers understand the legislative process, they often feel uneasy working in a political environment. General Dwight D. Eisenhower's attitude about politics reflects those of many senior leaders today. In 1943 he confided to a friend his feelings regarding the political maneuvers of allied leaders. "In fact" he wrote, "once this war is over, I hope never again to hear the word 'politics.'"[37] These ironic words flowed from the pen of the man whom the American people would elect to the presidency nine years later. Another war hero, General Douglas MacArthur, spoke in a similar vein to the cadets assembled at West Point in 1962. "Let civilian voices argue the merits or demerits of our process of government," he intoned, listing the ills of deficit financing, federal paternalism, power groups, politics, crime, and morals. "These great national problems are not for your professional participation or military solution."[38] These words came from the officer who had addressed all these problems when he directed the political, economic, and social reconstruction of Japan after World War II.

Today the defense portion of the budget consumes 25 percent of the nation's tax dollar, and the defense establishment employs 61 percent of all federal employees and 5.3 percent of the national labor force.[39] The Defense Department's policies and budgets affect the national deficit, inflation, and unemployment. Decisions on base closures, weapon purchases, and enlistment policies directly affect millions of Americans. If voters are disadvantaged by policies from Washington, they will appeal to their elected representatives. Legislators dislike defending unpalatable acts of government before their

constituents, especially if it was a "bureaucrat" who performed the act. Thus, in fighting the closure of Chanute Air Force Base, Senator Alan Dixon from Illinois predictably assailed this favorite congressional whipping boy: "It would be an outrage," he exclaimed, "if a fine community of 20,000 people in my state were torn asunder because of mistakes made by the government—by faceless, nameless people who have nothing to answer to."[40] Representative Les Au Coin from Oregon took a similar tack in describing Secretary Cheney's chances for success on the Hill: "He'll have a lot more credibility than some intellectual yahoo who's never been elected to anything."[41] By training, military officers believe that politics is something to avoid, while many legislators ridicule the federal employee who never faces the rigors of an election. Both prejudices inhibit the orderly functioning of government.

Military officers must appreciate the diverse pressures brought to bear on legislators and remember that their own responsibility lies simply in offering the best military advice possible. Congressional rejection of that advice may be based on economic, social, or political reasons. Unless the issue raises ethical implications, however, the military officer must accept the decision or resign. Most issues facing the nation's lawmakers are not moral ones. Today military and civilian leaders are grappling with the enormous federal deficit, dwindling sources of energy, and a rapidly changing national security environment. The resolution of these complex problems lies in intelligent and practical recommendations rather than in a scramble to seize the moral high ground. Just as a congressman must be cognizant of the impact of political decisions on the military's ability to defend the nation, so too must the military leader understand the wide-ranging political and economic consequences of his advice.

Senior military leaders who deal with the Hill are often surprised to find legislators and staff members who are very knowledgeable about military hardware and policies. Senators and representatives frequently hold strong ideas about the nation's defense needs, and their views are informed by the experience of wrestling with the same issues year after year. Representative Marvin Leath from Texas, a 12-year veteran of Congress who served in the Army from 1954 to 1956, rejects the idea that the House Armed Services Committee should rubber-stamp the Pentagon's requests. "Some of us have been in the defense business longer than [Cheney] has," he points out.[42] Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, with 19 years' experience on defense issues, is even more outspoken:

> I view the Department of Defense as management of a portion of a large corporation, and I serve on the board of directors. . . . I feel that I and other members here who have a long continuum with dealing with some of these problems have a little bit more understanding of the process than the people who are just passing through desks in the Pentagon.[43]

Backing up these veterans of the budget wars is a well-paid and highly educated professional committee staff. Committee staffers, in contrast to a legislator's personal staff, are older (average age 40) and more often possess advanced degrees (63 percent), particularly in the law.[44] Many have previous government experience in the Congressional Budget Office or in the executive branch. Their numbers in recent years have soared. In 1960 the House Armed Services Committee employed 15 staff members; in 1990 it had 74 on its payroll. In the Senate Armed Services Committee, meanwhile, professional staff members grew from 23 to 49.[45] Lawmakers are also supported by legislative assistants. Each of these assistants orients his efforts toward a committee on which the legislator sits. As a result of these staff increases, legislators may deploy considerable expertise on major defense issues and procurements. As the congressional staff grows in number, experience, and expertise, military leaders can only benefit from establishing closer working relationships with its members. Congressmen face historic foreign policy challenges, sizable defense problems, and rising domestic needs. When clashes among these three imperatives occur, lawmakers will need from the military accurate information and a clear vision of future military requirements.

Senior military leaders should also realize that the service secretaries play a key role in dealing with Congress. As representatives of the Administration, service secretaries are responsible to the Secretary of Defense and act as a buffer between the military priorities of the men and women in uniform and the political priorities of members of Congress. The service secretaries, along with the Secretary of Defense, constantly interact with Congress and bear much of the burden of sweetening the bitter news of base closures and production cutbacks. Their insight and political savvy allow military leaders to concentrate on recommending the most appropriate military course of action while the secretaries, who are political appointees, weigh the political considerations.

Complex issues are never black and white. The stationing of newly formed divisions or the homeporting of naval vessels carries significant economic benefits to a region. Typically any number of locations could be acceptable from a military perspective. But demographic, economic, or political factors will favor one region over another. The balancing act of competing priorities lies within the secretaries' responsibilities.

Negotiating the Political Minefield

No one in Washington or among the American public wants officers to become political animals. Nothing could be more disastrous for the nation than for uniformed military leaders to make recommendations based on political expediency. But a willingness to appreciate conflicting interests, to compromise, and to understand the legislative process will allow the senior officer to help shape national policy more effectively. Further, uniformed leaders must resist

the temptation to make a moral issue of what may simply be a complex problem. Whether an officer is assigned to the nation's capital or to a less visible post, he or she will eventually come in contact with members of Congress and their staffs. As senior officers develop their ability to participate in national policymaking, the following deceptively basic concepts may be useful.

• *Keep the military-political relationship in perspective.* Legislators may make statements for the benefit of their constituents regardless of their personal beliefs. Public servants, such as we in the military, periodically become convenient whipping boys for national problems. After all is said and done, however, today's armed forces are better equipped, manned, and supported than at any other time in US history; and we must remember that it was Congress that appropriated the money. One Hill staffer with 12 years in the land systems procurement business put it this way: "Over the past several years, the Army has received 98 percent of everything it asked for." A quick check of the major defense programs in the 1990 budget reveals that the services indeed got pretty much what they wanted. Out of 35 major programs, the Defense Department received at least 90 percent of funds requested for 24 programs. An additional four projects received appropriated monies that were not requested.[46]

• *Be open and professional in personal dealings with legislators.* While the task of daily contact with the Hill staff and elected officials rests with each service's legislative liaison division, institutional attitudes make a big difference in lawmakers' perceptions of the military. Representative Dave McCurdy from Oklahoma, in a recent compliment to Secretary Cheney, described the qualities that lawmakers look for in the defense community. "In politics," McCurdy asserted, "perception is 99 percent of reality and Dick is the ultimate perception of reasonableness: controlled, paced, rational."[47] Uniformed leaders might well emulate that ideal. Military commanders must realize that military authorizations and appropriations are no longer controlled by a handful of senior conservative legislators. Defense issues interest all elected officials. Whether officers are dealing with the chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee or a junior representative's staff member, he should give them the courteous, frank, and strictly professional advice they deserve.

• *Understand the legislative process.* Other than the knowledge gained from civics classes and a course in American history, many officers remain blissfully unaware of the military's role in the legislative process. Regardless of where they serve, it is imperative that they understand the constitutional responsibilities of the Congress. Senior service schools should stress the constitutional fundamentals of civil-military relations. Senior leaders should also encourage their subordinates to learn about the government, and to write or visit their representatives about service issues that affect them. Numerous improvements in the quality of life for service members, such as day-care construction and

variable housing allowances, have resulted from the personal involvement of soldiers and their families with legislators.

• *Maintain a complementary relationship between Congress and the Defense Department.* The task of consensus-building is not limited to the halls of Congress. The wheels of government turn more smoothly when each part of the machine moves in concert with the others. There are good reasons why Presidents often choose prominent legislators to assume key posts in the Defense Department. One is that these lawmakers normally bring their personal staff members across the Potomac with them. Retired military officers, meanwhile, have found employment on the Hill either as legislative assistants or professional staff members. In either case, public servants who have worked both sides of an issue can more easily appreciate all its ramifications and, one hopes, cooperate to achieve the best results. An obstacle to this practice is legislation that prohibits regular officers from drawing full retirement pay if they work for Congress. While we should be taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of retired officers, our "double-dipper" laws often drive them into the private sector or early retirement.

Few decades in American history will match the challenges of the 1990s. A diminishing threat from the Soviet Union, emerging democracies in eastern Europe, and instability in other parts of the world will combine with pressing domestic needs to alter the profile of America's fighting forces. As military officers rise in rank and assume greater responsibility for the national defense, they cannot allow cynicism, ignorance, or naïveté to hinder their cooperation with the nation's legislators. The two groups share a common and sacred mission.

NOTES

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7. Cheney, p. 18.
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9. These and similar observations are based on interviews with professional staff members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees and military legislative assistants of ranking senators and representatives conducted by the author from 16 to 19 January 1990.
10. Pat Towell, "Cheney Gets Praise on Hill, but Easy Part is Over," *Congressional Quarterly*, 11 November 1989, p. 3074.
11. Pat Towell, "Senate Committee Affirms Cheney's Weapons Cuts," *Congressional Quarterly*, 15 July 1989, p. 1809.
12. Phil Kuntz, "D'Amato: Proud, not Repentant," *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 November 1989, p. 2947.
13. Donovan, p. 1812.

14. Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, *The Almanac of American Politics, 1990* (New York: National Journal, 1989), p. 1362.

15. Colleen McGuiness, ed., *The Washington Lobby* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1987), p. 80.

16. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1989* (Washington: GPO, 1989), p. 120.

17. US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *MWR and Commissary Issues*, Hearings, 100th Cong., 2d sess., 1988, Report 201-42, p. 222: "Report on Test Plan to Stock U.S. Produced Beef and Pork in Selected Commissaries in Europe." Hereafter referred to as *MWR and Commissary Issues*.

18. Ibid.

19. Cox to Aspin, 6 October 1986, in *MWR and Commissary Issues*, p. 209.

20. US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *National Defense Authorization Act for FY90-FY91*, Report to Accompany HR 2461, 101st Cong., 2d sess., 1989, H. Report 101-121, pp. 183-84.

21. Interview with Karl Schneider, Office, Chief of Legislative Liaison, Department of the Army, 17 January 1990.

22. *Roget's International Thesaurus* (4th ed.; New York: Thomas Crowell, 1977), entry 746.2, p. 594.

23. Schneider interview.

24. Meat products are defined as items with more than two percent meat.

25. US Congress, House Conference Report, *Making Appropriations for Department of Defense for FY Ending September 30, 1990, and for other Purposes*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989, Report 101-345, p. 26.

26. Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution limits appropriation of monies to two years. Authorization committees may limit appropriations in certain cases to one year.

27. Arthur Maas, *Congress and the Common Good* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 133.

28. Senator Tim Wirth, "A Special Report from Senator Tim Wirth," August 1989. Distributed in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In possession of the author.

29. Army leaders assured all legislators that the proposed move was only under study and that no decision was anticipated in the near future. Interview with legislative liaison officers, Department of the Army, 18 January 1990.

30. Natalie Phillips, "Carson Cuts All But Done, Official Says," *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, 22 September 1989, p. 81.

31. *Congressional Record*, 101st Cong., 2d sess., Vol. 135, No. 161, 25 July 1989, p. H4163.

32. *Congressional Record*, 101st Cong., 2d sess., Vol. 135, No. 110, 15 August 1989, p. S10452. Also, Wirth report.

33. Letter from Stone to Nunn, quoted in Phillips.

34. Interview with legislative liaison officers, Department of the Army, 19 January 1990.

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36. Pat Towell, "Party Battle Lines are Fuzzy in House Defense Debate," *Congressional Quarterly*, 17 June 1989, p. 1486.

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47. Towell, "Cheney Gets Praise on Hill, But Easy Part is Over," p. 3075.