

Democratic Civilian Control of the Military

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The paper discusses civilian control of the military. The aims of such control include disabling competition between armed forces and democratically elected government. Civilian control of the military is characterised by a degree of disharmony and tension, in even the best of circumstances, in democratic nations. Democratic control of the armed forces provides legitimacy to the military, and when it works well, credibility. At the highest level of the democratic control of the armed forces should be parliaments with their oversight responsibility. Understanding of what it is that civilians are to control, what should the results of this control look like, who are these civilians, what are the different levels and groups involved in civilian control of the military and the details of the roles of the different civilians in the civil governmental and non-governmental institutions are the starting points in the process of establishing democratic control of the armed forces.

Keywords: civilian control of the military, democratic institutions, armed forces

1. Introduction

This brief essay offers some thoughts on civilian control of the military, what it is that we are interested in seeing civilians control, and how, and what we would expect some of the products of civilian control to be. There is much to be said about this important topic, but precious little time to say it, so I have selected what I consider to be some of the most important points. When I refer to CCM during my presentation, I mean democratic CCM, as opposed to the kinds of CCM we are aware of in communist and other authoritarian regimes. And because I feel that the term DCAF more accurately expresses what we're after, and does not carry the pejorative connotation of CCM, I will more often use it.

2. What to Control?

What is it in the military that we want civilians to control, or perhaps put a different way, what results are desired from CCM?

• Somewhere close to the top of the list, we do not want the armed forces to compete politically with

the democratically elected government, and we do not want them out war mongering. As we survey the Partner countries, however, there is little threat from these quarters; I hope you will agree.

• There is also a discussion about who does the strategic planning, though the more appropriate question, perhaps, is who approves it. Given the current security environment in Europe today, there is the question of what is involved in strategic planning for most European nations.

If we exclude those nations with major global strategic security interests, such as France, UK, Russia, the US, and excluding peacekeeping and peace support operations, what are the more "typical" objectives of a nation's strategic planning?

One is to protect the territory, independence and assets against external aggression. But in the absence of clearly defined aggressors, how controversial are these strategic aims, beyond having affordable and competent armed forces? And in most nations we find strategic objectives of providing surveillance of, and to control, guard, and defend national air space, or to fulfil obligations of international treaties and agreements. Lower down on the list, we are likely to find items such as the performance of civil defense tasks and assisting in disasters.

For most nations in transition, these are not particularly controversial objectives, thought in many na-

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tions the details have yet to be worked out and approved.

- Democratic nations want armed forces that are well led, well trained, adequately equipped, and which demonstrate an ability to accomplish assigned missions, and to achieve this state within reasonable economic constraints. The armed forces leadership agrees with their civilian counterparts on all of these, except perhaps the last one. The military will normally define "reasonable economic constraints" differently from their civilian leaders if there is a lack of effective civilian control.

- Additionally, practical civilian focus is on questions such as,

- Is the size and competence of the force adequate, and are reform and restructuring plans realistic and on track?

- Is the force capable of providing thorough and analytical information and data on its needs and requirements to the MOD and from the MOD to parliaments, and is it provided in a timely manner'?

- Is the defense establishment effectively managing the 1 or 2 % of the nation's GDP that is its budget?

- Are policies in accordance with the national security and defense interests and priorities, and are they being effectively implemented?

- And just as the civilians in the MODs are looking at the restructuring of the military education system, the parliaments need to be looking at what specific actions the civilian leadership in the MODs are taking to develop competence in professional MOD civilians. We speak of CCM, but it needs to be clear that control must also be exercised over the 'civilian leadership in MODs, that they are competent and effective managers of the armed forces. This is one of several reasons why I find the term DCAF more appropriate than CCM.

3. The Products of Effective DCAF

At the outset it is important to reaffirm what we all know, that CMR are characterized by a degree of disharmony and tension, in even the best of circumstances, in democratic nations. CCM is manifested in constitutions, and laws as well as regulations and policies that grant civilians the authority to create and enforce laws, provide democratic oversight of the defense establishment, and place civilians in MODs from staff officer level to senior decision makers. If most of the parts are working well, we will see armed forces that recognize and respect DCAF, and are able to work effectively, if not in complete harmony, with their civilian counterparts and leaders.

DCAF provides legitimacy to the military, and when it works well, credibility. DCAF provides for

armed forces that are accountable, and which conduct planning in accordance with national security interests and priorities, and in cooperation with other government agencies involved in national security. Perhaps more fundamentally, DCAF ensures that the military have a clearly defined role in the nation's political life as individuals, but not as an institution.

DCAF ensures that MODs employ effective management systems to do such things as:

- Determine the appropriate force structure to accomplish assigned missions, and provide the force with adequate resources to do this.

- Ensure that the training being conducted in the armed forces is adequate to produce forces ready and capable of accomplishing their missions.

- Establish and sustain the broad range of personnel actions from recruiting, fair pay, a merit based promotion system, health care, quality of life, to equitable retirement programs.

- Manage MOD and AFs intelligence activities; a critical area of concern, however, one that our primary topic precludes me from addressing today.

4. Levels of Civilian Control

The level where civilian and military staff work together on a daily basis, or should be working together, I refer to as the operational level of CMR. This is primarily in the MODs, but there are a number of civilians working within some of the General Staffs as well, and in both cases it should be a shared effort, not a situation where civilian staff officers feel they can dictate to the military, or where the military feels there is some benefit to not sharing information with civilian managers and staff officers.

Even at the operational level of CMR, the civilian staff brings a balance that should be supported by a separate career management track, controlled and managed by civilians, as part of a professional civil service. I say should be, because there is still a great deal of work to be done in establishing such career programs for civil servants in MODs and AFs.

At the senior levels of MODs the decision-making is more concentrated in the hands of civilians, ensuring that the business of the defense establishment is being conducted in accordance with national security and defense interests and priorities, and effectively managed. Both levels exercise degrees of civilian control, but in order for them to function adequately, civilian competence in defense affairs must be developed, and the military should be educated to understand and accept the role of civilians; and to be involved in defining that role.

Beyond the formal educational requirements for both military and civilians, the effectiveness of CCM, and CMR is hobbled until effective defense planning and budgeting systems are put into force. More ge-

nerically, we can refer to these as good defense management systems, such as formal systems of requirements determination, acquisition decision making, requirements based budget systems, as well as fair and effective personnel management, with merit based promotions, equitable pay and benefits, and down to effective staff operations where information is shared, authority and decision making is decentralized, and where the tradition of over classification of information, often to avoid accountability, is changed.

The development and implementation of such management systems, facilitates both CMR and CCM within the defense establishment.

5. Oversight: Parliaments, Ngos, and the Media

At the highest level of DCAF are the parliaments with their oversight responsibility. Oversight is performed by MPs and staffs that have developed competence in the business of defense and the armed forces, and using that competence, require the MOD to explain and justify requirements. The goal is democratic accountability. Developing experience and competence in democratic methods of oversight is a long-term process. Equally clear is the fact that without this competence, oversight remains sketchy, and accountability limited.

Parliaments are by nature, very hectic environments. In transition countries, the nature of politics makes it even more hectic, which both facilitates and circumscribes learning. The details of defense reform and budgeting and procurement, with complicated life cycle cost models, and so much other data, is very difficult to master. MPs cannot learn most of this from reading in their spare time. They must be exposed to the issues and the data, and experts need to be there to explain these. An adequately sized staff is essential, not only for individual MPs, but for the committees as well. The staffs need to become expert in security and defense issues, in order to provide useful information to the MPs and committees. Functional experts from MODs and GSs will need to come before the committees to discuss specific items and issues. When the relationship is starting to function well, prior to MOD officials coming before parliamentary committees, MOD or AFs staff members will have discussed the issues with the appropriate parliamentary committee staff, and sometimes with the staffs of the individual MPs from the committees as well.

It is understood that documents will be provided by the MODs to the committees. Has the list of documents required of the MODs been developed in order to satisfy the most important questions? Are the documents understandable, and do they provide all of the information needed, and is this information made

available with sufficient time to study it. A defense committee chairman once told me that the relationship between his committee and the MODIGS was excellent, that whenever they were asked to provide information, they sent it over. But it isn't as easy as that. Most democratic parliaments can and do look to expert sources, outside of government, for their input to security and defense issues. The outside sources help to formulate questions, as well as what adequate answers might look like.

Another aspect of parliamentary oversight, and one that is usually late to develop is recognition of the responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the armed forces. Are promotions based on merit? Is the pay system fair? Are there decent living conditions and health care for soldiers and their families? Is good order and discipline being maintained within the military, and has brutality been eliminated? Is training being conducted to established standards, and are units exercised adequately in their missions? Moreover, is there a system of professional development that produces both civilian and military leaders that understand, believe in, and support positive answers to questions like these?

It is essential for MPs and their staff to understand the nature of the missions assigned to the armed forces by the national leadership, to be able to correlate these missions with the budget's required to be able to execute them. Assigning missions without allocating appropriate funding will result in degradation somewhere. Just as it is necessary for armed forces and MODs to present to parliaments thorough justification and analytical data for their requirements, it is no less necessary for parliaments to either provide adequate resources for assigned missions, or modify the missions.

It is also incumbent on parliaments to have some idea of CMR between and within MODs and armed forces. And when reform or other key decisions are stalled in MODs, it is appropriate for MPs to bring senior MOD and armed forces leadership before appropriate committees to determine what the problems are and what is being done to resolve them.

Regarding the involvement of civilian experts, from outside of government, in DCAF, there are 2 brief points I would like to make. The first and fairly obvious is that the necessary expertise must be developed. In most, if not all countries in SEE, this process is underway, to varying degrees. Second, parliaments need to look more closely at how to nurture these sources, and to involve them. Government commissions or committees, utilizing NGOs, academicians and others may be of considerable value, in developing competence in national security and defense issues, and in their contribution to public debate on such issues.

Concerning the role of the media, and the relationship between the media and MODs and AFs, in those countries where real success has been achieved we see at least 2 important reasons for this. First, MODs and AFs have developed a balanced attitude and approach to public affairs. They have focused on enhancing the professionalism of their PA departments and personnel, and these departments have taken steps to develop professional relationships with members of the media. Second, the media itself has taken a more disciplined approach to developing competent journalist with expertise in national security and defense issues. The combined results are that not only do the media and defense establishments benefit, particularly in terms of credibility, but the government and greater public does as well, in terms of being informed.

How can Western nations better assist? First it would be useful for countries providing assistance to research some of the details of the process of oversight of security and defense sectors, not from their own countries, but in the transition countries. A continuing problem with much assistance is a lack of knowledge of those providing it, on the current state of the area being assisted in the host country. Second, these details should be converted to specific questions as a basis for discussion. Does the parliament have multiple sources of reliable information? Are MPs and staffers aware of the key areas of their oversight responsibility, and are they addressing specific questions to the MODs in these areas? Are there any staffers in the parliaments, or at least some, to assist with the work we propose? Can both civilian and military officials from MODs and armed forces be called before parliamentary committees without major problems?

There are many parts to CCM, and most of them need to be in place and functioning to some degree of effectiveness to produce adequate DCAF. We should also continue to stress that where the military is a shambles, there is no effective DCAF.

6. Reform Priorities and Future Developments in See

I have been asked to briefly highlight some of the key reform priorities in the defense establishments of the countries participating in this program. It is always difficult to try to be specific, to say nothing of accurate, when discussing a group of countries, and as varied as those present today. However, in an effort to comply with the request of our hosts, I will offer what I see as 6 high priorities in the reform process, adding that the priorities are not prioritized.

1. Continued development of legal, regulatory, and procedural frameworks that specify roles and responsibilities, and both direct and guide MODs and AFs.
2. The process of reorganization and restructuring in MODs and AFs.

3. Force reductions and force modernization and readiness.
4. Developing and putting into place democratic systems (transparent and accountable) of defense management and planning.
5. Participating in PfP and joining NATO.
6. Developing and implementing civilian and military education systems and career programs consonant with democratic systems.

The real difficulty for practitioners is not so much in identifying the priorities, but in dealing with the myriad of challenges and obstacles faced in developing and implementing associated plans that would achieve the goals of these priorities.

What is accomplished in the future, like the past, depends on many factors, but key among them is the status of national economies. Reforms and restructuring are expensive, and move only as fast as budgets allow. There are no defense budget dividends for nations whose forces are restructuring.

Second, education for civilians and military is a major element in the foundation upon which change is accomplished. First, the teachers have to be taught. As staffs are educated, they gain the tools needed to develop planning and management systems common to democratic institutions. And there has to be a will to implement, and knowledge of how to effectively manage plans.

And there is an overarching requirement for broad based and competent oversight systems.

Closing

The process of establishing DCAF has to start with an understanding of what it is that civilians are to control, what should the results of this control look like, who are these civilians, what are the different levels and groups involved in CCM, the details of the roles of the different civilians in the MODs, AFs, parliaments, NGOs, and the media. What it is, specifically, that needs to be controlled, how is control exercised, and what "tools" are available or must be developed to affect this control. Simply put, what does oversight consist of, and realizing that there is nothing simple about it.

Finally, I would be remiss not to offer praise, encouragement, and support to our colleagues in this transition process, for the successes already achieved, and for their continuing efforts, for they are, as they say, "in the arena," day after day.

