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Secretary of State Colin Powell with President George Bush.

## 'US' AND 'THEM': COLIN POWELL AND AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, 1963-1993

by Major Douglas E. Delaney

**T**he notion of an adversarial civil-military relationship is at the very heart of the Powell Doctrine. More a set of criteria than a comprehensive strategy, it espouses that US military forces only be committed when vital national interests are at stake, when the strategic, operational, and tactical objectives are clear, when the use of force will be decisive, and when the support of the American people is assured. These are stringent, even restrictive, guidelines. But during Colin Powell's four years as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), US military forces did "operate in murky, unpredictable circumstances."<sup>1</sup> The Persian Gulf War (1991) and the humanitarian intervention in Somalia (1992-1993) both failed to meet the standards of Powell's criteria to the letter, yet the United States embarked on all of these missions, and Powell did not resign. This suggests that Powell's doctrine was less an end-state for policy than a start point — a first volley by the military aimed at tempering the sometimes capricious, sometimes myopic, strategic impulses that led to disaster in Vietnam. This article traces the roots of the Powell Doctrine, from its

inception to the end of Powell's chairmanship of the JCS, and assesses its impact on US policy.

More than anything, the Vietnam War shaped Colin Powell's views on statecraft and the use of military force. For Powell, as for most Americans, it was a watershed, a bad experience that scarred all sectors of society.<sup>2</sup> By any measure, the costs were enormous. Fifty-eight thousand American lives, 167 billion dollars, expanding government deficits and double-digit inflation: these were the more immediate and measurable consequences. Among the less measurable effects, it undermined Americans' confidence in the institutions that sent their sons abroad for reasons that were unclear and, to most, unimportant. Government, the military, the foreign policy process: all were scrutinized as Americans tried to redress the reasons they lost a war for the first time in their history. The War Powers Act of November 1973, for example, attempted to restrict the presidential prerogatives that led to the debacle in

Major Douglas E. Delaney is a PhD candidate at Royal Military College.



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General Colin Powell, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Vietnam and make the Executive Branch more accountable to the Congress.<sup>3</sup> As far as national decision-making was concerned, Vietnam ended the era of “President knows best.”<sup>4</sup>

Not least among those to think that way were the veterans who fought the war to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.<sup>5</sup> Like their fellow citizens, they harboured deep mistrust of the government and the institutions that sent them to Vietnam — only theirs ran deeper.<sup>6</sup> Especially to those who experienced ground combat, the government committed them to a war it appeared either unable or unwilling to win. Worse, all the pronouncements of the strategists, the experts and the analysts seemed to be at odds with their war at the cold-face of combat. The macabre measures of success — “the phony measure of body counts, the comforting illusion of secure hamlets, the inflated progress reports”<sup>7</sup> — belied what was plain to the average soldier by 1969: the United States was losing the war. Historian Walter A. McDougall was one such soldier who had an epiphany of sorts following an intense combat experience:

[T]he conclusion I drew was that something very serious was wrong with this war: that all the firepower in our arsenal could never extinguish a guerrilla force spread out over hundreds of square miles of jungle, a force expert in the digging of underground tunnels and bunkers, and always free to run to the neutral sanctuaries of Laos and Cambodia.<sup>8</sup>

The military means would not, perhaps could not, yield the desired political end. Even if body counts may have indicated some degree of tactical success, strategically they mattered little. Still, in spite of the apparent shortcomings of the war effort, US combat troops continued to operate in South Vietnam until 1973.

And Powell was one of them. Like McDougall, he had difficulty making sense of his experience. In 1963, as a military advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), he made his first acquaintance with the quantitative analysis of Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara’s Pentagon: “We rated a hamlet as ‘secure’ when it had a certain number of feet of wire around it, a militia to guard it, and a village chief who had not been killed in the last three weeks.” Whatever these ‘indicators’ indicated, winning was not it. Powell’s reaction to McNamara’s 1963 claim that ‘every quantitative measure’ showed that the US was winning the war was disbelief: “Beating them? Most of the time we could not even find them.”

The growing list of American casualties only hardened Powell’s disdain for McNamara’s ‘slide-rule commandos.’<sup>9</sup> During his first tour, American involvement in Vietnam centred on the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), numbered no more than 16,600 troops, and resulted in relatively few casualties. By the time Powell returned to Vietnam in 1968-1969, the US commitment had reached its peak of 543,400 troops, and American soldiers were dying at a rate of five hundred per week — some of Powell’s closest friends among them.<sup>10</sup>

That affected him. He viewed — still does — the Army as ‘a family,’ one in which all the members depended on each other.<sup>11</sup> To a Black American coming of age in the 1960s, that was important. Quoting one of his late friends, Powell makes the point: “We’re all soldiers. The only color we know is khaki and green. The color of the mud and the color of the blood is all the same.”<sup>12</sup> In the Army, Powell excelled in a way that would have been difficult in life out of uniform: “The Army was living the democratic ideal ahead of the rest of America. Beginning in the fifties, less discrimination, a truer merit system, and more level playing fields existed inside the gates of our military posts than in any Southern city hall or Northern corporation.”<sup>13</sup>

The Army was not just a family; it was *his* family and he did not like seeing it bled for reasons that were never stated clearly, much less understood. His anguish is revealed in his recollection of one young infantryman, dying after having stepped on a mine:

He was just a kid, and I can never forget the expression on his face, a mixture of astonishment, fear, curiosity, and, most of all, incomprehension. He kept trying to speak but the words would not come out. His eyes seemed to be saying, “Why?” I did not have an answer, then or now. He died in my arms....<sup>14</sup>

Faces like this one have resonated long and loud in Powell’s memory.

There is a definite sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that permeates Powell’s views on statecraft and the use of military force. His ‘us’ is definitely his extended family — the armed forces of the United States. Powell’s ‘them’ are the civilian masters, including the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and their advisors, experts and academics.<sup>15</sup> As Powell sees it, one of the overarching problems with the American effort in Vietnam was that the senior military leadership — those charged with representing the ‘us’ point of view — went over to the other side. By doing that, they eliminated a necessary tension and left a huge imbalance in the civil-military relationship. It was too easy for ‘slide-rule commandos’ to pursue a campaign without clearly defined strategic aims, to reduce decision-making to a series of impersonal and rational calculations, to waste lives — nobody countered their arguments or influenced their decisions.

Our senior officers knew the war was going badly. Yet they bowed to groupthink pressure.... As a corporate entity, the military failed to talk straight to its political leaders or to itself. The top leadership never went to the Secretary of Defense or the President and said, “This war is unwinnable the way we are fighting it.”<sup>16</sup>

Like so many so American officers of his generation, ‘never again’ became Powell’s credo.<sup>17</sup>

He was not the only soldier to search for lessons since the fall of Saigon. In 1978, the former Commander in Chief Pacific, Admiral Grant Sharp offered the blunt explanation: “It [the Vietnam War] was lost in Washington D.C.” because an exaggerated fear of Chinese or Soviet intervention prevented US forces “mov[ing] decisively with our tremendous air and naval power.”<sup>18</sup> The inability to link the appropriate military force with political goals is also a central theme in the work of Colonel Harry S. Summers Jr.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Sharp, however, Summers does not lay sole blame for the disconnect on civilians. He saves that for the military leadership:

What was missing was the link that should have been provided by the military strategists — how to take the systems analyst’s *means* and use them to achieve the political scientist’s *ends*.... [I]nstead of providing professional military advice on how to fight the war, the military more and more joined with the systems analysts in determining the material means we were to use.<sup>20</sup>

Even, the Commander of US Forces in Vietnam (1964-1968), General William C. Westmoreland, came to similar conclusions: “I myself as the man perhaps most on the spot may have veered too far in the direction of supporting in public the government’s policy.”<sup>21</sup>

But it was not Westmoreland or any other field commander that became the largest objects of scorn — it was the JCS. In accusing the ‘five silent men’ of abrogating their responsibility to the American people, H.R.

McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty* captured the consensus of post-Vietnam military officers.<sup>22</sup> McMaster makes the case that, despite their conviction that it would take at least 123,000 troops to stabilize the situation in 1965, the JCS supported President Lyndon Johnson’s claim that it would be enough to win — the definition of winning having been modified to one of ‘stalemate’ or ‘to prove to the VC/DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] that they cannot win in South Vietnam.’<sup>23</sup> The reason for Johnson’s reluctance toward immediate and large-scale escalation was fear of undermining the domestic initiatives of his ‘Great Society’ program. Thus, in supporting the President’s obfuscations, McMaster believes the service chiefs allowed domestic agendas to dictate military strategy. The lesson that he and many post-Vietnam officers drew was this: if another debacle is to be avoided, senior military leadership must not merely *advise*, but *insist* on matters of strategy<sup>24</sup> — insist that the political aim is articulated, that the strategic goals in support of that aim are clear, and that the costs (human, material, economic, political) be made plain.

Colin Powell, who had witnessed the trickle-down consequences of JCS failure in the eyes of a dying soldier, came to the same conclusions, and resolved to do something about it:

Many of my generation, the career captains, majors and lieutenant colonels seasoned in that war, vowed that when our time came to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in half-hearted warfare for half-baked reasons that the American people could not understand or support. If we could make good on that promise to ourselves, to the civilian leadership, and to the country, then the sacrifices of Vietnam would not have been in vain.<sup>25</sup>

How he would make ‘them’ listen was another question.

Before his time came to ‘call the shots,’ Powell became an adroit Washington operator, whose practical education in policy-making began in 1972-1973 as a White House Fellow in the Office of Management and Budget. There he first got a feel for the federal bureaucracy, and worked under the tutelage of such influential people as Caspar Weinberger and Frank Carlucci.<sup>26</sup> Between 1977 and 1981, he worked as a staff officer in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, an office to which he returned as Military Assistant to the Secretary in 1983. In 1986, he accepted the position of Deputy National Security Adviser under Frank Carlucci, and, a little over a year later, he succeeded Carlucci as National Security Adviser to President Ronald Reagan. It was as complete an education in policy-making as any soldier ever received.<sup>27</sup>

Comfortable as Powell may have been with the likes of Weinberger and Carlucci, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ of his Vietnam years never fully faded. But the estrangement was not all one-sided. Civilians of the so-called policy-making elite questioned both the usefulness and appropriateness of military input into foreign and defence policy.

The growing 'gap' between the US military, policy insiders and American society has been the subject of much scholarship.<sup>28</sup> In an extensive survey of three groups — military officers, the policy-making elite and the general public — Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn found that the greatest gap in attitudes was between the military and the policy-making elite.<sup>29</sup> Feaver and Kohn also found that a number of factors directly related to Vietnam have exacerbated the differences. First, the abolition of the draft made fewer citizens liable for military service.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the likelihood of elites putting either themselves or their children in harm's way is even less remote now than it was during the Vietnam War, when many took draft deferrals.<sup>31</sup> This makes their personal stake in military matters minimal, something that is a source of continuing resentment from the military.<sup>32</sup> Second, and related to the first point, senior military officers are more willing than ever to state their policy preferences.<sup>33</sup> There are historical

making of policy. Consider his ideas on how the National Security Council (NSC) should function. While the role of NSC is to provide the President with advice on national security matters, free of departmental bias, Powell believes that departmental bias exists and should be used. As National Security Adviser, he used departmental differences of opinion to clarify issues, develop options and, eventually, make recommendations. In a November 1999 interview, he ruminated on the role of the National Security Adviser as a 'conflict resolver':

It is the role of the national security adviser to get it all out — all the agendas, all the facts, all the opinion, all of the gray and white and black areas written down — and to use a highly qualified staff, the National Security Council Staff, to put all of these agreements and disagreements into a form that can be sent back to the two cabinet officers [Secretaries of Defense and State], or however many people are debating the issue and say: "this is the issue as we understand it. These are the points of agreement and disagreement.... So let's have a meeting. Let's fight about it." And at some point, it's up to the national security adviser to take all of those points, to do an integral calculus of the whole thing — the area under the curve — and say to the President: "Mr President, we have heard all these points of view.... This is what I think and this is my recommendation to you." You [as National Security Adviser] make that recommendation, with both the Secretaries of Defense and State knowing what you are going to recommend. And then the President decides.<sup>36</sup>

During Powell's tenure as National Security Adviser, the forum for competing interests actually took several forms. Organizationally, there was a Policy

Review Group. It consisted of 'subcabinet officials' from the State Department, the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a representative from the Vice President's staff.<sup>37</sup> Yet organizational structure was not Powell's be-all and end-all to policy-making: "the greatest designed NSC system or military system doesn't mean as much as the people who are involved."<sup>38</sup> On a more personal level, as National Security Adviser, Powell met with Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci for thirty minutes daily. In a typical meeting, "Frank would scream at George, George would scream at Frank.... So it was not just the Policy Review Group and not just the paper process, but three guys talking to each other every morning."<sup>39</sup> To Powell, the tension of the process during his years on the National Security Council not only yielded sound policy, it ensured adequate representation for his military family.

underpinnings to this development. Since 1816, there has been a direct correlation between the number of war veterans in the Congress and US affinity for foreign ventures: the greater the percentage of veterans, the less likely military actions abroad. And since the percentage of veterans among the policy-making elite continues to decline, senior military officers, particularly those who served in Vietnam, believe that 'knee-jerk' impulses toward military intervention need to be tempered, if not restrained.<sup>34</sup> On the other side, the idea that senior officers believe they should have input, not only on how to fight a war but also on whether it is worth fighting in the first place, does not sit well with many civilian decision-makers.

Some commentators worry about the growing 'gap' between the military and civilian elites.<sup>35</sup> Not Powell — to him, the tension of the civil-military relationship is an inevitable and necessary factor in the



Secretary of State Powell with President Bush.

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This was not the case during the Vietnam War. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson effectively shut the military out of strategic decision-making. They had their reasons. With some justification, Kennedy and his Defense Secretary, McNamara, were unimpressed with JCS advice during the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Especially after the latter, Kennedy came to prefer the forum of *ad hoc* committees and ‘dismantled’ the National Security Council apparatus. For his part, McNamara favoured the counsel of ‘whiz kids,’ whom he believed more capable of ‘thinking outside the box.’ Marginalized at the NSC and the Department of Defense, the military could only make token representation.<sup>40</sup> This was the apparatus Johnson inherited.

The service chiefs made a difficult situation worse through inter-service squabbling as the competition for funds and limited influence undercut the ‘us’ position. Even when they did present a united front, it was often a weak consensus that did nothing to balance the views of their civilian bosses. Studying the problem in hindsight, Powell concluded that the deck was stacked against the military: “In my opinion, this amorphous set-up explained in part why the Joint Chiefs had never spoken out with a clear voice to prevent the deepening morass in Vietnam.”<sup>41</sup>

The Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 changed the ‘amorphous set-up’ by increasing the power of the JCS Chairman. No longer constrained to presenting either watered-down opinion or conflicting service views, the Chairman now had the freedom to offer his own thoughts directly to his political masters. He alone was the primary military adviser to the President, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council. This arrangement suited Powell perfectly, and he used it to the fullest within weeks of becoming Chairman of the JCS in October 1989.

The issue was Panama. What had started as annoyance with a onetime anti-communist ally in Central America developed into a significant security issue: Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega was under indictment on US drug-trafficking charges; he had suspended elections he was sure to lose in May 1989; a US Marine had been killed by his Panamanian Defence Forces (PDF); an American sailor and his wife had been detained and abused; and Noriega was brazenly threatening US treaty rights in the Panama Canal zone. In short, Noriega was undermining US credibility, and the Bush administration decided that he had to go. And, as well as the Bush administration could gauge, it now believed it had sufficient justification for military action in support of the political goal of deposing Noriega and replacing him with a democratically elected president, one amicable to the United States. It also appeared that the American public was likely to support military intervention.

With a reasonably clear political objective, Powell sought to ‘link’ the military means to the goal. Both he and the Commander-in-Chief Southern Command, General Maxwell Thurman, believed that the key to eliminating Noriega, and ensuring that a ‘new strong-

man’ did not take his place, was the destruction of the foundation of his dictatorial power, the PDF. Accordingly, they developed a plan to do just that. The plan called for troops from all four services, including ten thousand soldiers from the XVIII Airborne Corps, the 7th Infantry Division, a battalion of US Army Rangers, and thirteen thousand US troops already in Panama. There would be no Vietnam-style graduated response for Operation “Just Cause”; overwhelming force would be used to achieve strategic objectives, decisively and quickly. Powell’s criteria — clear political goals in support of US national interest, achievable military objectives in support of those goals, decisive military force, reasonably assured support of the American people — were as close to being met as they would ever be, and he sold the plan to his Commander-in-Chief. Bush approved the military action, as conceived by Thurman and Powell, and US forces invaded Panama on 20 December.

“Just Cause” was a huge success — for the United States and for Powell. Within two weeks, US forces had achieved every one of their military objectives and captured Noriega, all at the relatively light cost of twenty-four American lives. For Powell personally, it was an unqualified victory. As Chairman of the JCS, he translated a political goal into concrete military objectives — he won the approval of the President and oversaw the first truly successful US military action since Vietnam. His currency with the administration, the Congress and the public soared.

How willing he was to spend that new capital was evident during the Persian Gulf Crisis in 1990. US national interests were clear enough. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Saddam Hussein was sitting on twenty percent of the world’s oil reserves, and there was the potential for his gaining another twenty percent if he crossed the Saudi border.<sup>42</sup> After conferring with his ‘Gang of Eight’ key players, the President drew a ‘line in the sand’ and committed the US to the defence of Saudi Arabia.<sup>43</sup> Powell was sure that goal could be achieved with the plan prepared by the Commander-in-Chief Central Command, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. It called for the deployment of approximately 250,000 troops, as well as significant air and naval forces to the region. That would keep Saddam out of Saudi Arabia and give sanctions a chance to work. However, if the political objective expanded to liberating Kuwait, Powell wanted to know. That kind of goal would require an even larger build-up of forces, one that would take weeks, even months. He pressed the administration on political goals: was it “worth going to war to liberate Kuwait?”<sup>44</sup> He was spending his currency within the administration and he knew it. Cheney later rebuked him for ‘overstepping’ his authority and not ‘stick[ing] to military matters,’ but Powell ‘was not sorry.’

He was keeping the promise he made to himself twenty years earlier:

I had been appalled at the docility of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fighting the war in Vietnam without ever *pressing* their political leaders to

lay out clear objectives for them. Before we start talking about how many divisions, carriers, and fighter wings we need...we have to ask, to what end?... What I had said about giving the military clear objectives had to be said.<sup>45</sup>

Concerned that political goals might outstrip the military means, Powell told Bush that Schwarzkopf would require double the current force strength to evict the Iraqi army from Kuwait. With the costs made plain, the President, after several months, finally clarified what he meant by “this [Iraqi annexation of Kuwait] will not stand”: if the Iraqis would not withdraw from Kuwait, the United States and its coalition partners would force them out. On 8 November, the President announced the dispatch of an additional 200,000 US troops to give coalition forces an ‘offensive capability.’

It took several months to complete the necessary build-up of forces, but the campaign to drive Saddam Hussein from Kuwait was a spectacular success. It began on 17 January with a thirty-nine day air offensive to smash Iraqi air defences, destroy communication networks, and weaken the Iraqi army. The ensuing ground offensive took only four days to complete — again, no

graduate school deferral to avoid military service during the Vietnam War, and was now promising to trim the US federal deficit through cuts in military spending. And Clinton surrounded himself with people that reminded Powell of McNamara’s ‘whiz kids.’<sup>46</sup> As the last member of the outgoing regime, Powell grasped that he was not likely to carry the same clout in councils of a new administration.

So he used the only thing he thought would make ‘them’ listen: political pressure. His first volley was a *New York Times* interview in which he criticized the idea of limited intervention in Bosnia, without clear political objectives: “As soon as they tell me it’s limited, it means they do not care whether you achieve a result or not. As soon as they tell me its ‘surgical,’ I head for the bunker.”<sup>47</sup> The second volley was a rebuttal to a 4 October *New York Times* editorial that criticized his apparent inertia over intervention, despite televised evidence of mass murder and torture. In his 8 October Op-Ed piece, Powell defended his advocacy of establishing clear political objectives prior to military intervention. At that stage, the Bosnian problem had no political solution that limited intervention would support. Powell argued that Bosnian issue was ‘especially complex,’ one that had ‘deep ethnic and religious roots’ and defied simple solutions.<sup>48</sup> And in an area of limited US interest, that made the spending of American lives even more difficult to justify: “We owe it to the men and women who go in harm’s way to make sure that their lives are not squandered for unclear purposes.” He also ridiculed any would-be ‘whiz kids’: “[Y]ou bet I get nervous when so-called experts suggest that all we need is a little surgical bombing or a limited attack. When the desired result isn’t obtained, a new set of experts then comes forward with talk of a little escalation. History has not been kind to this approach.”

Even after the new administration took office, Powell continued to make the case that limited air strikes would not likely force the Serbs to yield. That could only be done with the deployment of a massive ground force contingent, and in Powell’s estimation, the American public would not accept that kind of sacrifice. Clinton was politically astute, and he realized the political weight that Powell carried. On this particular issue, he avoided challenging his senior military advisor.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it was only after securing the tenuous political solution of the Dayton Peace Accords in November 1995 that the United States deployed 20,000 troops to the region. And that was two years after Powell had retired as Chairman of the JCS.

Powell was bold, but he never challenged Clinton’s authority as Commander-in-Chief on Bosnia. What he did was establish his position in a public forum, creating for Clinton political risks that would not have been there had Powell merely stated the military case behind closed doors. Clinton still



US Army photo by Spec. David Marck Jr.

A soldier of the US 101st Airborne Division in action in Afghanistan, March 2002.

graduated responses, no escalation, just overwhelming force. Powell’s popularity rose even higher.

During the debate over potential US intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Powell again demonstrated another way of using his celebrity. In the autumn of 1992, Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton criticized the Bush administration for not doing more to halt the Serbian ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims. It was an ill-defined call to ‘do something,’ and it worried Powell because it reminded him of the muddled strategies of Vietnam. That might not have been worrisome if the Bush campaign had not been faltering so badly. By October 1992, it looked like Clinton was going to win. More to the point, a Clinton administration was not likely to be populated with ‘us’ type people, starting with the candidate. Clinton had used a

could have fired Powell at any time, but not without political consequences.

If anything can be said to have hardened Powell's views, it was the humanitarian intervention in Somalia. Although his autobiography offers little to clarify his position prior to the December 1992 deployment, it is clear that Powell regrets the whole exercise.<sup>50</sup> Initially conceived as a limited operation to deliver humanitarian aid, Operation "Restore Hope" called for a United Nations force to take over from the US-led coalition once the food was flowing freely. It started well, but the situation deteriorated after March 1993. Coalition forces became embroiled in conflict as they attempted to disarm Somali factions as part of a broadened United Nations mandate for 'nation-building.' And because the United Nations force was incapable of enforcing the mandate without American assistance, US forces (although greatly reduced in number) remained in Somalia and sunk deeper into the internal conflict. In October 1993, a manhunt for the warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid led to a failed special operations raid, eighteen American deaths, and televised images of American bodies being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. That was enough: the political goal of 'nation-building' proved as impossible as disarmament.<sup>51</sup> Americans had no interest in Somalia beyond acute famine relief; and none of it justified more American casualties. Clinton announced his intention to withdraw all US forces within days of the incident.

Unlike the invasion of Panama or even the Persian Gulf War, with Somalia, Powell was *not* successful in asserting the criteria of his doctrine. The political aims were not clear (in fact they expanded from providing humanitarian aid to 'nation-building'), the use of military force was not decisive, the exit strategy failed, and American public support declined steadily. As Powell notes: "Why, since we had gone to Somalia to feed its starving people, were our troops being shot at? This was the quicksand that UN 'nation-building' sucked us into."<sup>52</sup> It was a difficult situation. At one point, Powell found himself torn between supporting the escalation of forces his field commanders requested and avoiding any action that would jeopardize an early American withdrawal. Although Powell's actions and recommendations still remain unclear, the lessons he drew from the event are not. It left him more convinced than ever of the necessity of addressing and continually reassessing his criteria when committing US forces abroad.

The 'us' and 'them' of Powell's views on statecraft and the application of military force have emotional as well as rational foundations, most of which are connected to Vietnam. In his heart, Powell regards the armed forces of the United States — the Army in particular — as his extended family. No soldier can have served as long as Powell and not feel some sense of attachment to the institution and its people. The experience of combat was also significant. Seeing soldiers die for what he considered 'unclear' reasons affected Powell profoundly. It galled him to think that policy makers and their 'so-called experts' treated his family members as mere things — the inanimate chess pieces of unsound strategies — when they bore little personal risk themselves. Powell became convinced that the military leadership had an obligation to make civilian decision-makers aware that every soldier was someone's son, and that the consequences of committing the nation's forces to combat could not be taken lightly. His promise to speak up when his 'time came to call the shots' was not just soapbox oratory. It was genuine, and borne out by his actions in relation to Panama, the Gulf War and the Bosnian crisis.

Powell's pushing of the military point also has its rational component; he believes it makes better policy. More often than not, the civil-military relationship is an adversarial one, and the premise of Powell's doctrine is that this should be acknowledged and used. Like so many soldiers, and even some scholars, Powell is convinced that it was the absence of a strong and credible military argument that led to defeat in Vietnam. The JCS failed to temper the initiatives of the civilian leadership and their non-military experts. He did not do the same. As the National Security Adviser, Powell played the Departments of Defense and State against one another. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he pressed, with vigour, military preferences for clear political objectives and decisive force. When his political masters were willing to listen, he made his arguments in their confidence. When they were not, he used his currency with the American electorate and Congress to pry his point into the decision-making. It is not that Powell challenged civilian control of the military. He accepted it as a legal principle, but not as a sedative.



## NOTES

1. Colin L. Powell, "Why Generals Get Nervous," *New York Times*, October 8, 1992. Powell was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from October 1989 to September 1993.

2. Marilyn B. Young describes the divisiveness of the Vietnam War and its impact on the collective memory of the United States as "an American civil war." Marilyn B. Young, "The Vietnam War in American Memory," *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*. Eds. Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 248-257.

3. By the terms of the War Powers Act of 1973, the President is obligated to inform the Congress within forty-eight hours of deploying US forces abroad. Further, if Congress does not explicitly endorse that action, the forces must be withdrawn within sixty days.

4. Daniel Yankelovich, "Farewell to President Knows Best," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 57, No. 3 (1979), pp. 670-693. See also Norman Graebner, "American Foreign Policy After Vietnam," *Parameters*. Volume XV, Number 3 (Autumn 1985), pp. 46-57; Walter A. McDougall, "The

Vietnamization of America," *Orbis* (Fall 1995), pp. 485-489; and George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. Third Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), pp. 285-321.

5. Ellen Frey-Wouters and Robert S. Laufer, *Legacy of a War: The American Soldier in Vietnam* (Armonk, New York: Me Sharpe, 1986), pp. 104-105. Frey-Wouters and Laufer's findings are based on interviews of 1,159 Vietnam-generation men, more than half of who were veterans.

6. Robert Jay Lifton, *Home From the War:*

- Vietnam Veterans, Neither Victims Nor Executioners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), pp. 35-36. Lifton is a psychiatrist whose findings are based largely on his interviews with members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. See also Frey-Wouters and Laufer, p. 72.
7. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 149.
  8. McDougall, "Vietnamization of America," p. 484.
  9. This same sentiment is expressed in General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), pp. 179-183.
  10. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 133.
  11. Powell's affection for his "military family" is evident in the article honouring the American G.I. as one of *Time Magazine's* one hundred most important people of the twentieth century. "We must never see them as mere hirelings, off in a corner of our society. They are our best, and we owe them our full support and our sincerest thanks." Colin Powell, "The American G.I." *Time* (June 19 1999), pp. 32-35. See also *My American Journey*, p. 611.
  12. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 125.
  13. *Ibid*, p. 62. Powell's faith in the military method as a key to societal reform is discussed in Kenneth T. Walsh, "Next Powell Doctrine." *US News and World Report* (April 14 1997), p. 9.
  14. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 147.
  15. Eliot Cohen sees the dichotomy of Powell's concept of statecraft as one between "thinkers" and "doers" – "between theorists, politicians and thinkers on the one hand and men of affairs such as himself, who deal with things in practice, on the other." Cohen, "Playing Powell Politics," p. 105.
  16. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 149.
  17. Gerald Parshall, "Makers of the Twentieth Century: Powell and Schwarzkopf: the Diplomats." *US News and World Report* (March 16 1998), pp. 76, 78-79.
  18. Admiral US Grant Sharp. *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 271. Sharpe was Commander in Chief Pacific from June 1964 to July 1968.
  19. On the disconnect between strategic goals and the means to achieve them, see Michael A. Hennessy, *Strategy in Vietnam: The Marines and Revolutionary Warfare in I Corps, 1965-1972* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), pp. 39-64, 181-188; Joseph R. Cerami, "Presidential Decision-making and Vietnam: Lessons for Strategists." *Parameters*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (Winter 1996-1997) pp. 66-80.
  20. Harry G. Summers Jr. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), p. 2.
  21. General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 417.
  22. H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 300-334.
  23. *Ibid*, p. 305. Westmoreland stated as much to McNamara during a visit of the Secretary of Defense to Saigon in June 1965.
  24. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn. "The Gap: Soldiers, Civilians and their Mutual Misunderstanding." *The National Interest*, No. 61 (Fall 2000), p. 34.
  25. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 149.
  26. *Ibid*, 164-178. Caspar Weinberger was Secretary of Defense from 1982-1989. Frank Carlucci was Deputy Secretary of Defense (1981-1986), National Security Advisor (1986 to 1987) and Secretary of Defense from (1987-1989).
  27. Cohen highlights Powell's "zest" and mastery of Washington's bureaucratic machinations as a key ingredient to his success. Cohen, "Playing Powell Politics," p. 106.
  28. The so-called "gap" is examined through an analysis of mostly anecdotal evidence in Thomas E. Ricks, "The Widening Gap Between the Military and Society." *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1997), pp. 66-78. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn use the results of an extensive survey to highlight realities and misconceptions about the "gap" in "The Gap: Soldiers, Civilians and their Mutual Misunderstanding." *The National Interest*, No. 61 (Fall 2000), pp. 29-37. The dangers of a growing gap are discussed in Eliot A. Cohen, "Why the Gap Matters." *The National Interest*, No. 61 (Fall 2000), pp. 38-48; Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz and the Question of Civilian Control." *Armed Forces and Society*. Volume 23, Number 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 148-178; and Russell Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell." *The Journal of Military History*, Volume 57 (October 1993), pp. 27-58.
  29. Feaver and Kohn have noted, however, that although a definite "gap" exists, it is not as prominent as might have been believed. Feaver and Kohn, "The Gap," pp. 31-32. For an insider's view of the civil-military tensions in the policy-making bureaucracy, see Richard Holbrooke, "Presidents, Bureaucrats and Something in Between" in *The Vietnam Legacy: The War, American Society and the Future of American Foreign Policy*. Ed. Anthony Lake (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp. 142-165; and Adam Yarmolinsky, "The War and the American Military" in *The Vietnam Legacy*, pp. 216-241.
  30. On the impact of the cancellation of the draft, see James Burk, "The Military Obligations of Citizens Since Vietnam." *Parameters* (Summer 2001), pp. 48-60; Eliot A. Cohen, "Twilight of the Citizen Soldier." *Parameters* (Summer 2001), pp. 23-28.
  31. Interestingly, Powell's civilian boss (while he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, twice received deferments of military service during the Vietnam War — once for college and a second time as a parent — something Powell saw fit to note in his autobiography. See Powell, *My American Journey*, pp. 405-406.
  32. Powell expresses his disgust with the "anti-democratic" nature of the draft that allowed "the sons of the powerful and well-placed" to avoid active service while the "less privileged" were treated as "economic cannon fodder." Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 148.
  33. Cohen, "Why the Gap Matters," p. 45.
  34. A typical example of the military opinion on conditions for armed intervention is John M. Collins, "Military Intervention: A Checklist of Key Considerations," *Parameters* (Winter 1995), pp. 53-58.
  35. Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control," pp. 27-58; Cohen, "Why the Gap Matters," pp. 38-46.
  36. "Interview with General Colin L. Powell (23 November, 1999)," by Ivo H. Daalder, *The National Security Council Project, Oral History Roundtables: The Role of the National Security Adviser*. Moderators Ivo H. Daalder and I.M. Destler (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1999), p. 51. Hereafter Daalder-Powell Interview.
  37. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 337; Daalder-Powell Interview, p. 53.
  38. Daalder-Powell Interview, p. 56.
  39. *Ibid*, p. 54.
  40. H.R. McMaster makes this argument in *Dereliction of Duty*, pp. 4-6.
  41. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 411.
  42. This information is based on an August 1990 CIA Report. See Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 463.
  43. Bush's "Gang of Eight" key players included Dan Quale (Vice President), Baker (Secretary of State), Scowcroft (National Security Adviser), Robert Gates (Director of the Central Intelligence Agency), Cheney (Secretary of Defense), Powell (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), John Sununu (Presidential Chief of Staff) and the President himself.
  44. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 464. Journalist Bob Woodward (without indicating his sources) paints a much more "reluctant warrior" picture of Powell. He asserts that Powell strongly favoured sanctions and would have preferred to avoid war. Bob Woodward. *The Commanders* (New York: Pocket Star Books, 1999), pp. 283-286. Cohen also hints that Powell may have leaked to Woodward his opposition to the war in the Persian Gulf. However, like Woodward, he provides no evidence or discussion of the allegation. Cohen, "Playing Power Politics," p. 107.
  45. Powell, *My American Journey*, pp. 464-466.
  46. Powell's attitude toward the new administration can be found "between the lines" of his autobiography. For example, he states that Clinton "was surrounded by young civilians without a shred of military experience or understanding." He also relates, with much scorn, how a young "White House staffer" arrogantly spurned Lieutenant-General Barry McCaffrey with the remark: "We don't talk to soldiers around here." And with barely-veiled derision, he describes White House spokesman, George Stephanopoulos as a "high school valedictorian with a good tailor." See Powell, *My American Journey*, pp. 561, 581.
  47. Michael R. Gordon, "Powell Delivers a Resounding 'No' on Using Limited Force in Bosnia." *New York Times* (28 September 1992).
  48. Colin L. Powell, "Why Generals Get Nervous." *New York Times* (8 October 1992).
  49. Clinton did, however, lift the ban on gays serving in the military, contrary to Powell's advice.
  50. Powell does note that both he and Cheney advised President Bush that the mission could not be completed before the 20 January inauguration of Bill Clinton. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 565.
  51. For contrasting views on the failure of "nation-building" and disarmament see John R. Bolton, "Wrong Turn in Somalia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (January-February 1994), pp. 56-66; and Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, "Somalia and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (March-April 1996), pp. 70-85.
  52. Powell, *My American Journey*, p. 586.